



Countering Bullying

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1. Introduction and Legal framework

Children experience bullying in many ways and children who are looked after may be particularly vulnerable. We know from speaking to the Children in Care Council that bullying is an issue that regularly comes up when they talk to children and young people or undertake surveys with Looked After Children. Worcestershire Children First Fostering (WCFF) is committed to protecting and safeguarding all children and young people it looks after and this includes protecting them from bullying.

Children who are looked after may have already experienced abuse in their birth families. The additional abuse of being bullied can be especially traumatic and difficult for them to deal with. It is essential that carers understand that bullying can be potentially very harmful to a child, both those who are bullied and those who bully, and that they in their role as carers, are ready and able to deal with the issue.

The **Fostering Guidance** 2011 states:

The culture of the service should reinforce a clear expectation that any form of bullying is totally unacceptable. Foster carers and staff should be able to recognise and deal with any indications or incidents of bullying, act proactively and intervene positively, engaging with those bullying as well as those being bullied. Children who are bullied should be supported and those who bully given help and guidance to prevent them continuing to do so.

The **National Minimum Standards** for Fostering Services (2011) standard 3.6 states:

Foster carers should have positive strategies for effectively supporting children where they encounter discrimination or bullying whenever this occurs.

The aim of this policy is to

- Enable foster carers to recognise bullying
- Enable foster carers to know what to do if they believe a child or young person is being bullied.

2. What is bullying?

The NSPCC defines bullying as

“Bullying is behaviour that hurts someone else. It includes name calling, hitting, pushing, spreading rumours, threatening or undermining someone. It can happen anywhere – at school, at home or online. It’s usually repeated over a long period of time and can hurt a child both physically and emotionally.”

Bullying can take different forms. It can include:

- physical bullying, such as hitting, slapping or pushing someone or any use of violence
- sexual bullying, including unwanted physical contact or sexual comments
- verbal bullying, such as teasing, name calling, gossiping or sarcasm
- non-verbal abuse, such as getting / sending upsetting text and email messages, hand gestures
- emotional abuse, such as threatening, intimidating or humiliating someone
- exclusion, such as ignoring or isolating someone
- undermining, by constant criticism or spreading rumours
- controlling or manipulating someone
- making silent, hoax or abusive calls
- racial, sexual or homophobic bullying
- bullying someone because they have a disability
- intimidation, such as threats of violence or aggression
- making false accusations
- cyber bullying that takes place online and can follow the child or young person wherever they go, via social networks, gaming and mobile phone. More information on cyber bullying can be found at: [Bullying and cyberbullying | NSPCC](#)

3. Signs of Bullying

No single sign will indicate for certain that your child is being bullied, but foster carers should watch out for the child:

- becoming withdrawn, being nervous, losing confidence, or becoming distressed for no obvious reason
- displaying more challenging behaviour
- not doing well at school
- being afraid to go to school, being mysteriously 'ill' each morning, or skipping school
- belongings getting 'lost' or damaged
- physical injuries, such as unexplained bruises
- asking for, or stealing money (to give to whoever's bullying them)
- problems with eating or sleeping
- they stop meeting up with friends or talking about them
- bullying others.

4. What to do if you think your child or young person is being bullied?

A child or young person who is being bullied may not always want to tell anyone about it. because they feel ashamed, fear they will not be believed, fear the bully will "get them back" for telling, and believe that no one can stop it. Such a child may even feel so worthless, that he/she thinks they deserved it.

Foster carers need to create an atmosphere in their home where children feel protected and safe from harm. When talking to children about being safe in your home you should also talk about bullying and intimidation or other sorts of harm that may happen outside your home. Assure the child or young person that if he/she has a problem you will always be ready to listen.

If a child reports to you that s/he is being bullied, you should take the following action:

Talk to the child

- Stay calm and re-assure the child
- Find out (if you can), who was involved, how often the bullying has happened, what happened and where it happened.
- Try not to put ideas into the child's head, but rather let them tell their own story.
- Explain that you will need to let the child's social worker know about this.
- Tell the child that telling you was the right thing to do and that you are taking the matter seriously.
- Ask the child what would make things better for them.

Recording and reporting

- Record the whole matter, as soon as you can.
- Report the incident to the child's social worker and your supervising social worker

Further action

- If the bullying incident has taken place between your foster child and your own child or between fostered children, then you should consult with the social worker of all the children involved on deciding what action needs to be taken.
- If the incident is school related, explain to the child that every school, by law, has to have an anti-bullying policy and that you or the child's social worker will be talking to the school about how to address the matter. Avoid promising the child that the school will take specific action. Schools vary in their policies and strategies to tackle bullying.
- Do not take action yourself without consulting the child's social worker, unless you have to intervene to stop an incident of bullying. If you do have to step in to stop bullying, remove your child from the situation. If possible, try not to deal with the other children at that time, leave it to appropriate others (their parents or the school etc). The main concern is to ensure that your foster child is safe, feels safe, and knows that the matter will be dealt with carefully, so that they remain safe.
- Discuss with the child's social worker, your supervising social worker and the child and his or her parents if appropriate, what action will be taken to deal with the issue, and who will take it.

Any action taken should be in the best interests of the child and aimed at improving the situation for him/her.

5. Preventing Bullying

- Ask the child's school for a copy of their anti-bullying policy and ensure each child in your care has easy access to this. Schools vary a lot in how they deal with bullying; some are brilliant and will have strategies to prevent bullying, as well as to deal with it. Others are less good and may even deny that they have a problem. It is a good idea to know what sort of school you are dealing with.
- Create an atmosphere in your home where the children can tell you about issues that are troubling them, whether this is about bullying or about other aspects of their lives.
- If the children are able to participate and understand, hold a family meeting to discuss bullying and its effects on children, and how it can be tackled. This may be a useful tool if you have experienced bullying between the children who live with you.
- Make safer caring and personal safety an open topic of conversation and explain why these are important for each individual.

5.1 The School's Role

Most incidents of bullying are school related, either in school or on the way to or from school. By law, each individual school must have a policy to prevent and deal with bullying. The first step in approaching the school would be to see the class teacher, head teacher, or designated teacher. You will need to decide with the child and his/her social worker and where possible, birth parents, which of you is to make this initial approach and what is to be said. If the initial approach does not resolve the matter, there are appropriate steps to take the matter further, first to the Head Teacher .and then to the School Governors.

Ask the school attended for a copy of their anti-bullying policy and keep it available for the child.

Schools should be able to deal competently with bullying. Many schools have adopted excellent policies and practices and have reduced bullying. You need to be confident and give the child confidence, that their school can do the same.

5.2 Role of the Birth Parents

Birth parents should be informed wherever possible once the bullying has been reported. This will be particularly important where a return home is planned, and the parents are then likely to be directly involved in discussions with the school, or any other measures that are proposed to stop bullying incidents happening. You should discuss with your social worker and the child's social worker who will talk to parents.

In cases where the birth parents are not directly involved in day-to day issues, they would normally be told of the incident(s) and the child's Care Plan would inform and guide regarding any other involvement they may have.

6. The Child who bullies

Children (and adults) bully for a variety of reasons; this may include:

- They have family problems
- They are victims of abuse or bullying themselves
- They feel unimportant
- To gain the acceptance of others/belong to a gang
- They don't know it is wrong
- They are copying behaviour of siblings or others in their family
- They haven't learned any other ways to make friends
- Their friends/ family members encourage them
- They are acting out aggressive feelings

If your foster child is a bully, you will need to consider how you can deal with this.

All forms of bullying should be challenged.

Discuss with your child's social worker and your supervising social worker how the situation can best be dealt with. Options would include:

- Talking to the child to help them understand that what they're doing is unacceptable. Children and young people don't always realise what they are doing is bullying or understand how much their actions have hurt someone.
- The child should be encouraged to apologise to the victim, and you need to discuss with him/her how to build better relationships.
- You or the social worker for the child will need to discuss with the child why he/she is behaving in this way. If you know the cause of the behaviour, then plans can be made to address this.
- If your child is bullying others in school, discuss the problems with the Head, or appropriate teacher (decide with the child's social worker who should do this).
- If the parents of other children confront you, you will have to deal with this, and try to reach an agreement with them. If possible, agree with them to delay any action until you have had the chance to seek advice from the social workers and the school, if the bullying is school related.
- Discuss with the child's social worker and your social worker what additional support is available for the child for example an anger management course
- Consider how you can build your child's sense of worth as this may decrease the need for them to bully.

As with the child who is being bullied, information should be shared with birth parents whenever possible.

7. Significant harm

Where a child is being bullied and there is concern made that the child is or is likely to suffer significant harm this should be discussed with the child's social worker who may need to take advice on whether it should be dealt under the local Safeguarding Children Procedures. Examples would be:

- Allegations of bullying which are racially motivated
- Allegations of bullying where the child fears for his or her immediate safety
- Allegations of physical violence towards a child
- Allegations which are accompanied by signs of emotional harm being suffered by the child, e.g. significant weight loss, loss of sleep, recurrent nightmares, self-harm, withdrawn, talk of suicide, fear of going to the place where the bullying has taken place
- Allegations of bullying by an adult such as the birth parent during contact or the foster carer

For further information please refer to WCFE **Safeguarding Policy** for Staff and Foster Carers.

8. Recording

As discussed above there is no one sign that will tell you that child is being bullied. It is important that you keep your foster carer record up to date. It may help to alert you to changes in behaviour or a pattern of incidents that prompts you to have the discussion with your child.

Make a record of what the child tells you, who you talk to and what actions are agreed.

The Registered Manager monitors all incidents of bullying and your supervising social worker will ask you to complete a WCFE notification form or complete this on your behalf.

9. Sources of Help and Information

NSPCC website [Bullying and cyberbullying | NSPCC](#)

Childline

telephone phone: 0800 1111 or

www.childline.org.uk

Bullying Online - advice and information for parents' children and schools. Interactive pages - e-mail helpline. www.bullying.co.uk

Stopbullying.gov [What Is Bullying | StopBullying.gov](#)