

Adoption

# Safeguarding Information for Adopters



**The London Borough of Tower Hamlets is committed to safeguarding children, young people, their families, and our staff and carers. Everything we do promotes the safety and wellbeing of the children and young people we work with as well as that of children and young people in general.**

‘Through our practice we help children, young people and their families to have safer and better lives.’

To create a safe environment both prospective and approved adopters are required to:

- Read and understand the safeguarding guidelines and what it means for them;
- Respond to the concerns of children and young people;
- Act in a way that promotes safeguarding everywhere;
- Question and, where necessary, challenge accepted relationships and behaviour;
- Think about how their routines and habits may affect the children and young people placed in their care;
- Explore new ideas that promote the safety and well-being of children and young people;
- Endeavour to create an environment where they can share mistakes, make suggestions and celebrate success;
- Make sure that children and young people know what services are on offer and how to raise any concerns;

- Have an environment of openness and trust and feel confident to express any views, feelings and concerns and know that what is shared will be treated with respect and will receive an appropriate response.

Safeguarding is everyone’s concern and below we have set out some key terms and guidance.

## WHAT IS CHILD PROTECTION?

The local authority has a duty to carry out an investigation under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, where they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child, (including children who are fostered or adopted), is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm. The Local Authority must make enquiries and decide whether any action (including removal of the child) or provision of services is required to safeguard and promote the child’s welfare.

Like all members of the community, foster carers and adopters have a duty to report any behaviour by a parent, foster carer, adopter or any other person, which they believe has caused harm to a child.

### Child Protection Conferences

The first stage of this process is to organise a child protection conference. The meeting will be chaired by a child protection co-ordinator, who is independent from direct involvement with the case. It is attended by professionals working with the child, including social workers and managers, carers, teachers, health visitor and doctors. In addition, it will be attended by the police (in most circumstances) and the parents. The parents may only

attend part of the conference, in which case the chair will inform them of the discussion and decisions reached.

The purpose of the conferences is to share and assess information about the child and family and decide what action, if any, needs to be taken to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. If it is considered that the child is at risk, a Child Protection Plan will be put in place. The purpose of the Plan is to ensure that action is taken to keep the child safe from harm. Some children remain with their family, while others may be placed with foster carers. Every child on a Child Protection Plan has a social worker who is responsible for co-ordinating the work with the child and family. Monthly Core Group meetings are held, which include all the professionals involved and the parents, to focus on what support needs to be provided or what needs to be changed to ensure the child is kept safe. The plan is reviewed at regular intervals, initially after three months and then at least every six months until all participants agree the reviews are no longer required.

Conferences will also be held when Child Protection Plans need to be amended or ceased or where there is a proposal that a child should return home, if they are placed with foster carers or other placement away from their birth family.

Carers can request a copy of the local authority's Child Protection procedures.

## WHAT IS A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN?

A Child Protection Plan is drawn up at a Child Protection Conference, where professionals are agreed that a child is suffering and is likely to continue to suffer significant harm. The Plan is a written record for parents and professionals, setting out what work needs to be undertaken to reduce child protection concerns and meet the child's needs. It also sets timescales and who is responsible for undertaking specific pieces of work. The Plan ensures that professionals from different agencies work closely together in protecting the welfare and safety of the child.

The Child Protection Plan is regularly reviewed and remains in force until it is believed that the child is safe from further harm. For instance, if the child is placed with foster carers, it may be decided to remove the child from the Plan as he/she is now in a place of safety.

Each local authority maintains a list of children resident in the borough (including foster children placed by other authorities) who are subject to a Child Protection Plan. The purpose of this is to provide an accessible source of information to professionals who have concerns about a child, for instance medical staff in Accident and Emergency departments, who may be treating a child for what, they suspect, may be non-accidental injuries.

The Plan also allows the monitoring of incidents in relation to each child; where one incident might not be significant on its own, a pattern of similar incidents might be a serious cause for concern. In addition, information can be passed on if the child moves out of the area.

## WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY ALLEGATIONS AND COMPLAINTS?

It is an unfortunate fact that occasionally adopters or members of their family may at some stage have an allegation or complaint made against them. This can come from parents, the child, school, social worker, other professional, member of the public or it can be received anonymously.

This can be prevented, carers can do much to protect themselves through the practice of safer care which will be discussed with you throughout the assessment process.

### What are complaints and allegations?

Complaints and allegations are treated differently but both need to be investigated, however minor. In addition to some accusations the local authority needs to inform OFSTED about allegations and serious complaints against carers.

**A complaint** can be anything from a small criticism to a serious concern about the standard of care a child is receiving while being looked after or once adopted. However, if it is deemed that the child has not, or is not at risk of suffering significant harm (see Children Act 1989) as a result of the alleged concern, then an investigation is not carried out under the Child Protection procedures.

**An allegation** is an accusation of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or serious neglect, which if true may have caused the child to suffer significant harm. An allegation is investigated under the Child Protection procedures.

### How are complaints investigated?

Complaints will usually be investigated by the social worker or team manager. Adopters will be informed about the complaint and asked to give their comments. Sometimes there is a logical explanation based on a misunderstanding; at other times the discussion might highlight that the carer needs additional training or support. Adopters should be open and honest, rather than concealing problems, as this will mean that they can learn from the incident and consequently avoid similar situations in the future.

### How are allegations investigated?

Regulations require that allegations are investigated quickly and fairly; most should be resolved within one month, but may take longer where they are particularly complex. Carers will not usually be told initially that an allegation has been made against them. As this is a potentially serious situation, it is important that carers are not given time to concoct explanations or put pressure on a child to change their story. Once they have been told about the allegation, a senior manager will ensure that the carers are kept informed about the progress of the investigation.

When an allegation is received, consideration is given to whether the child and other children in the home are safe to remain with the carers or whether they should be moved. This is a difficult decision due to the need to balance the safety of the child with the disruption of a placement, where a child may have lived for some time.

If a concern is raised about the care you provide or your suitability to be an adoptive parent it will be investigated fairly and confidentially and The London Child Protection procedures will be followed. The adoption manager will discuss the concern with the Local

Authority Designated Officer, or LADO who will decide whether this is a Standard of Care matter or an allegation of abuse or neglect. The LADO may advise the adoption manager that this is a standard of care matter which will need to be considered by the adoption service, or whether this will be considered as a child protection enquiry

If the LADO thinks that this matter needs a fuller enquiry, a strategy meeting will be called within 2 working days of the allegation.

The next step is to hold a strategy meeting within two working days; if the carer lives outside of the borough for whom they adopted, the LADO of the local authority in which they reside will be responsible for conducting the investigation. The strategy meeting plans the forthcoming investigation and who should be involved.

It will consider information about the allegation, whether the carers have had any previous allegations and their strengths and weaknesses; it will also consider the child and family's history. The meeting may decide there are no grounds for an investigation or that it should be dealt with outside the child protection procedures.

If the decision is that the investigation proceeds, it is agreed who will carry it out; if it is of sufficient seriousness the police will be involved. Consideration will again be given to whether the child should be moved.

Following the meeting, interviews will be carried out with the carers, child and other relevant people. The child may have a medical, depending on the nature of the allegation. A second meeting will be held to look at the information obtained; at this stage the process may end or further tasks will be identified. At the end of the process, an Outcomes Meeting will be held which decides that the allegation is:

- Unsubstantiated - evidence suggests that it did not occur
- Inconclusive – it is not clear whether or not it occurred
- Substantiated – it is judged that it did occur

These judgements are not made on the balance of probabilities and are designed to err on the side of caution in the interests of the looked after child. Foster carers and adopters should receive a summary of the investigation and the outcome.

In very serious cases there may be a criminal prosecution, although this is not common.

The outcome of the investigation may identify training or support needs. If an allegation or complaint is made directly to you about another person's behaviour towards a child, or you are concerned about the suitability of a person working with or caring for children, you should inform the local authority in which the child resides as soon as possible.

### What are the reasons for complaints and allegations?

It is the case that sometimes adoptive parents do abuse children. A few people set out to become adopters to give them access to vulnerable children; hopefully the vast majority of these people are screened out during the assessment process.

In other cases, carers may harm a child without meaning to; due to their troubled past some children are extremely challenging to care for. Adoptive parents can become frustrated and exhausted and act in a way they would not normally do, for example they may hit or push the child in anger.

The majority of complaints and allegations when investigated are judged to be unfounded. Some of the reasons that they are made are:

- Traumatized children can sometimes be confused about where abuse happened; something in the foster home may trigger a memory of past abuse.
- Children and parents sense that carers are fearful of allegations and may complain because it is one way of regaining some power and control.
- Some parents and children believe that making an allegation will result in the child returning home.
- Children can misinterpret innocent actions, such as receiving a present or playing a particular game, which may have a link with previous abuse.

### Why does Children's Social Care take allegations and complaints seriously?

- As has been stated, a few carers do abuse children.
- Children's Social Care has a duty to investigate complaints and allegations in relation to children who have been removed from their homes into what is a supposedly a safer environment and CSC must ensure that this is so.
- In the past children have not been believed when they have disclosed abuse; therefore it is essential that children are listened to and any concerns investigated.

### Support

Having a complaint or allegation made against you is a distressing experience for anyone. There is support available:

- The social worker will give you as much support as possible; however, they are also responsible for the welfare of the child.
- An independent advocate can be made available to carers and

their families to provide information and advice about the process, emotional support and mediation between the carer and the adoption service, if necessary.

- Members of Adoption UK will be willing to give support and advice if approached.

## WHAT IS THE LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD (LSCB)?

LSCBs were introduced by the Children Act 2004. Cases, such as the death of Victoria Climbié, highlighted the failure of different agencies to work together effectively to protect children. The aim of LSCBs is to improve the way professionals in different settings, including social care, health, education and voluntary agencies, co-operate to safeguard children and promote their welfare.

Membership of the LSCB is made up of senior managers from different services and agencies in a local area, including the independent and voluntary sector. In addition, the board receives input from experts and has an independent chair.

You can find further information about all issues relating to safeguarding and child protection on the LSCB – Tower Hamlets website:  
<http://www.childrenandfamiliestrust.co.uk/the-lscb/>

If you have any further questions about safeguarding children please do not hesitate to contact us or discuss it with your allocated social worker.