



# Anti-Bullying Procedure

## *All Services*

Polaris provides high quality foster care, including specialist placements, throughout the UK, alongside supported and semi-independent accommodation for care leavers, family support, adoption, edge-of-care services and overseas Statutory Social Work services, as well as related services throughout the continuum of care.

All staff (including casual, agency and independent), foster parents, adopters and prospective adopters have a duty and a responsibility to promote and safeguard the welfare of children. This applies to children who are being supported by any company within the Polaris community and to other children. We care about all children and must take appropriate action if we become concerned that a child may be bullied or is bullying other children.

The term 'child' or 'children' is used to refer to all children under the age of 18 years (where the context specifically relates only to older children, the term 'young person' is used).

This procedure sets out the responsibilities of all staff, and also offers guidance to assist staff, foster parents and adopters to identify when to be concerned.

This procedure forms part of the Polaris Quality Management system ISO 9001.

Procedure Owner:	Quality Assurance & Safeguarding Team
Approved by:	Operations Board
Date approved:	30/06/2020
Next review date:	October 2026 (Reviewed Oct 23 no changes)
Version No:	02
Associated Policy and supporting documents:	Safeguarding Children Procedure
	Safeguarding Policy
	E Safety Procedure
	Child Sexual Exploitation Procedure

	Self-Harm Procedure
	Extremism and Radicalisation Procedure

All Polaris companies are detailed in the current legal structure

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## Purpose

This procedure sets out the responsibilities of all Polaris staff, including those who provide work and services on behalf of any company within the Polaris community, foster parents and adopters to safeguard children who may be subject to bullying, or who may be bullying other children. It provides guidance about how anyone providing work and services for Polaris can support foster parents, adopters and families in keeping children safe from being bullied and the harmful effects of bullying. It provides information about indicators of concern, and how to respond to concerns.

This procedure forms part of the wider suite of safeguarding procedures, which include procedures about how to respond to the risk of child sexual exploitation and what to do if you suspect a child is being harmed, amongst other available procedures.

Polaris Safeguarding Managers are available to offer advice about any safeguarding issues, including issues about bullying. Each region or company also has a lead person responsible for safeguarding, usually the Registered Manager, Line Manager or equivalent. Any concerns or queries about bullying should be escalated to a Line Manager, Registered Manager, Safeguarding Manager or equivalent.

All companies within the Polaris community are committed to providing a caring, friendly and safe environment for children and to support children who are being bullied, or who are at risk of being bullied. Bullying is not acceptable.

- Polaris recognises the particular vulnerability of looked after children, including those who may be bullied on account of their racial or cultural background, sexual orientation or because they have a disability.
- Polaris also recognises the vulnerability of groups of children and young people as defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, and the need to be particularly alert for a child who:
  - Is disabled and has specific additional needs
  - Has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory Education, Health, Care Plan)
  - Is a young carer
  - Is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behavior, including gang involvement and association with organized groups
  - Is frequently missing/goes missing from care or from home
  - Is at risk of modern slavery, trafficking or exploitation
  - Is at risk of being radicalized or exploited
  - Is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as drug and alcohol misuse, adult mental health issues and domestic abuse
  - Is misusing drugs or alcohol themselves
  - Has returned home to their family from care
  - Is a privately fostered child

- Any incidents or disclosures of bullying will be taken seriously and allegations investigated. Information will be shared with responsible authorities and the professional network around the child and others as required.
- Action will be taken to prevent further incidents and support given to the children involved in bullying.
- Children who are found to be bullying others will be supported and guided to change their behaviour, to protect other children from harm.

## What do we know about Bullying? What is Bullying?

The Government defines bullying as: “Behaviour by an individual or group, (usually) repeated over time that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally.” The Anti-Bullying Alliance defines bullying as: “The repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It can happen face-to-face or through cyberspace.” Being ‘Looked after’ can be one of the main reasons that children in care are bullied. It can happen face-to-face or through online communication and comes in many different forms:

- **Verbal:** Name calling, persistent teasing, mocking, taunting and threats.
- **Physical:** Any form of physical violence, intimidating behaviour, theft or the intentional damage of possessions. This includes hitting, kicking and pushing.
- **Emotional:** Excluding, tormenting, ridiculing, humiliation, setting people up and spreading rumours.
- **Cyber Bullying (Online Bullying):** is the misuse of digital technologies or communications to bully a person or a group, typically through messages or actions that are threatening and/or intended to cause offence, anxiety or humiliation.

Examples of online bullying include:

- Abusive comments, rumours, gossip and threats made using digital communications and/or technologies - this includes internet ‘trolling’.
- Sharing pictures, videos or personal information without the consent of the owner and with the intent to cause harm or humiliation.
- Hacking into someone's email, phone or online profiles to extract and share personal information, or to send hurtful content while posing as that person.
- Creating dedicated websites that intend to harm, make fun of someone or spread malicious rumours.
- Pressurising someone to do something they do not want to.

## Who gets bullied?

Children can be targeted for any reason, but bullying can often be:

- **Racist:** Bullying based on ethnicity, skin colour, language, religious or cultural practices.
- **Homophobic:** Discrimination based on sexuality and/or gender identity.

- **Sexual:** Unwelcome sexual advances or remarks that are intended to cause offence, humiliation or intimidation. This could include pressure to send images of a sexual nature.
- **Disabilist:** The bullying of children who have special educational needs and disabilities.
- **Based on 'difference':** Bullying based on any real or perceived difference. This can include, but is not limited to factors surrounding the way someone looks or dresses, hobbies and interests, family set up (including being in foster care) or social behaviour.

Staff, foster parents, adopters and parents need to be alert to bullying and that this may move into something else e.g. hate crime. The police and the CPS have an agreed definition of hate crime as: any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person's race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; disability or perceived disability and any crime motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender.

### Where does it take place?

Bullying can take place anywhere e.g. on the street, in parks and playgrounds, clubs, at out of school activities and at home. Bullying can also take place in the home involving foster, adoptive and birth children.

According to the NSPCC, online bullying is quickly becoming the main type of bullying that children and young people contact ChildLine about, and the 24/7 nature of social media only exacerbates the issue.

Bullying is commonly associated with school, and all schools are required by government bodies to implement anti-bullying policies and procedures. Foster parents, adopters and parent/carers should always obtain a copy of the anti-bullying policy from the school attended by a child, and discuss this with the child.

### How can you spot the signs a child is being bullied?

There are several signs that may indicate a child is being bullied. All staff who work with children should be aware of the signs that a child is being bullied. Foster parents, adopters and parent/carers should be alert to any changes in behaviour of a child. If applicable, they should know to immediately raise their concerns with their Social Worker and the child's Social Worker. The Social Worker or staff member must always note and record these on the child's record. Signs that could suggest a child is being bullied include:

- Is frightened of walking to school or doesn't want to go on the bus.
- Begs to be driven to school.
- Changes their usual routine (such as wanting to go to school much earlier or returning later than usual).

- Is unwilling to go to school (school phobic) and may begin truanting.
- Feels ill in the morning, and has unexplained tummy upsets or headaches.
- Becomes withdrawn or anxious, or lacking confidence, or 'plays up'.
- Begins to do poorly in schoolwork.
- Comes home unusually hungry or with clothes torn or books damaged and has possessions/money go "missing".
- Asks for money or starts stealing money (to pay bully).
- Starts stammering.
- Harms self or attempts suicide (see suicide and self-harm procedure and guidance).
- Runs away.
- Cries themselves to sleep at night or has nightmares.
- Has unexplained cuts or bruises.
- Loss of appetite.
- Seems upset after using their phone, tablets, computers etc.
- Is frightened to say what's wrong.
- Gives improbable excuses for any of the above.

All of these could also be indications that something other than bullying is worrying the child, but the response may well be similar. A thorough re-assessment of the child's current situation and behaviour should take place with the foster parent, adopter, any other relevant adult and staff contributing fully to this process in consultation with the responsible authority/trust.

### What to do if a child is being bullied (for Fostering, Adoption and Children's services)

Polaris staff must ensure that foster parents, adopters and parents/carers know to inform their own Social Workers and the child's Social Worker (if allocated) or relevant person immediately if they are concerned that a child may be being bullied.

If any foster parent, adopter or parent/carer expresses concern that a child may be being bullied, the staff member should offer the following immediate advice:

- Reassure the foster parent, adopter or parent/carer and ensure they do not panic or respond in a reactive way. Their key role is to listen, calm the child and provide reassurance that the situation can get better when action is taken.
- Ensure that the child's Social Worker (if allocated) is informed immediately, as they will wish to decide what action should happen next. The child and the foster parent, adopter or parent/carer should be involved in those decisions as far as possible.
- Ensure the foster parent, adopter or parent/carer listens to the child and reassures them that telling somebody what was happening was the right thing to do.
- Ask the foster parent, adopter or parent/carer to establish the facts. It can be helpful for them and the child to keep a diary of events to share with the school or college, if that is where the bullying is taking place.

- Ensure the foster parent, adopter or parent/carer reassures the child that the bullying is not their fault and that they have people that will support them. They also need to reassure the child that they will not take any action without discussing it with them first.
- Ensure the foster parent, adopter or parent/carer never encourages retaliation to bullying - such as violent actions. A child responding to a bully in a violent or aggressive way can have negative and unpredictable results. The child may be hurt further or may be labelled as the problem. The foster parent, adopter or parent/carer should tell the child to walk away and seek help.

For **Fostering** services, all incidents should be reported to the Registered Manager by the agency Social Worker, or the Out of Hours Social Worker. They must always be recorded and reflected in Safer Caring documents (household and child specific) and if necessary in the household health and safety assessment. This should be recorded as a **monitoring event** (please refer to the Monitoring and Notifiable Events Procedure). In addition, if there is police involvement it becomes a **notifiable event**.

For **Adoption** services, all incidents should be reported to a Manager by the Social Worker or Support Worker, his/her line manager or the Out of Hours Social Worker. These are recorded on the relevant incident forms which enables a decision to be made on whether the incident needs to be escalated.

For **Children's Services**, any information on a child or young person being bullied should be recorded in the relevant case notes and reported to a Manager.

If the bullying involves something happening at school, contact should be made with the school to decide the appropriate course of action. This should be decided with the child's Social Worker/Lead Professional. It may be appropriate for the matter to be investigated under the school's bullying procedures. If the bullying involves something happening in a foster or adopter home, an agency Social Worker should carry out an investigation into the bullying with agreement from the child's Social Worker. This would involve talking to all concerned and making an assessment of what is happening and what can be done to stop the bullying. A strategy for protecting the child from bullying, wherever it is occurring, should be drawn up in consultation with the child. This strategy must involve the child's Social Worker, and any other professionals as appropriate; for example, staff at the child's school.

#### **Fostering services only:**

The child specific Safer Care Plan and, if appropriate to the circumstances, the household Safer Caring Plan should be updated to include any agreed actions to minimise risk and harm.



## What to do if a young person is being bullied (for Supported Accommodation services)

If any young person expresses concern that they are being bullied, the staff member/Support Worker should:

- Reassure the young person and ensure they do not panic or respond in a reactive way. The staff member's/Support Worker's role is to listen, calm the young person and provide reassurance that the situation can get better when action is taken.
- Ensure that the young person's Social Worker (if allocated) is informed immediately, as they will wish to decide what action should happen next. The young person should be involved in those decisions as far as possible.
- Listen to the young person and reassure them that telling somebody what was happening was the right thing to do.
- Advise the young person that it can be helpful for them to keep a diary of events to share with the education establishment or work setting, if that is where the bullying is taking place.
- Reassures the young person that the bullying is not their fault and that they have people that will support them. Staff members/Support Workers also need to reassure the young person that they will not take any action without discussing it with them first.
- Ensure the young person does not retaliate to the bullying - such as violent actions. Responding to a bully in a violent or aggressive way can have negative and unpredictable results. The young may be hurt further or may be labelled as the problem. Advise the young person to walk away and seek help.

If the bullying involves something happening at an education establishment or work setting, contact should be made with them to decide the appropriate course of action. This should be decided with the young person by ascertaining their views and their Social Worker/Lead Professional. It may be appropriate for the matter to be investigated under the education establishments bullying procedures or the work setting's HR guidance.

If the bullying involves something happening with other young people in group accommodation a staff member/Support Worker should carry out an investigation into the bullying. This would involve talking to all concerned and making an assessment of what is happening and what can be done to stop the bullying. A strategy for protecting the young person from bullying, wherever it is occurring, should be drawn up in consultation with the young person. This strategy must involve the young person's Social Worker, and any other professionals as appropriate; for example, staff at the young person's education establishment or work setting.

Any information on a young person being bullied should be recorded in the relevant case notes.

## Significant Harm and Bullying

Where the situation appears more serious, consideration should be given to whether the child is suffering or likely to suffer 'significant harm'. In these cases the agency 'Safeguarding Procedure' and the Local Safeguarding Procedures will need to be followed and a possible Strategy Meeting convened. The child's social worker and team manager (or equivalent), in consultation with relevant people, including the foster parents or adopters and their social worker will need to consider whether it is safe for the placement to continue as it is and whether immediate changes are required to safeguard the welfare of the child and any other children who may be at risk.

No matter how bad bullying can seem, many incidents of bullying are not actually crimes. The Police may be involved in strategy meetings however, if bullying is deemed to meet the significant harm criteria, as above. There are also types of bullying that are illegal and should therefore be reported to the Police as such. This includes bullying that involves:

- Violence or assault.
- Theft.
- Harassment and intimidation over a period of time including calling someone names or threatening them, making abusive phone calls, and sending abusive emails or text messages (one incident is not normally enough to get a conviction).
- Anything involving hate crimes.

All relevant professionals should be consulted in making a decision about whether bullying constitutes 'significant harm' or whether it is a crime. This includes the child's Social Worker and school staff, amongst others.

All instances of bullying of a child in **foster** care should be recorded by the foster parent, and by the agency Social Worker on the child's electronic file. For fostering this should be recorded as a **monitoring event** (please refer to the Monitoring and Notifiable Events Procedure). In addition, if there is police involvement it becomes a **notifiable event**.

For **Adoption** services, all incidents should be reported to a Manager by the Social Worker, his/her line manager or the Out of Hours Social Worker. These are recorded on the relevant forms and if the incident is serious this is reported as a critical incident.

For **Children's Services** and **Supported Accommodation** any information on a child or young person being bullied should be recorded in the relevant case notes and reported to a Manager.

## Responding to Cyber-Bullying (Online Bullying)

The process about how to respond to cyberbullying is the same as for other forms of bullying, but additional advice includes:

- Ensure foster parents, adopters or parent/carers talk with children about online risks. Staff should know the risks so they can discuss them with foster parents, adopters or parent/carers.

- Suggest that foster parents, adopters or parent/carers make agreements with children about their internet usage, including how, when and where they use it and what they use it for.
- Foster parents, adopters or parent/carers should use parental controls and suitable virus protection on any electronic equipment. However, although these are good for younger children, older children are likely to know how to work around these controls. In addition therefore, they should ensure that older children know how to keep themselves safe and manage the risks they will face online.
- Children should be given advice on how to block anyone who is bullying them online. Some phones permit the blocking of numbers, and most apps have a blocking facility. There are parent guides online that give information and advice about the majority of popular apps available on the NSPCC Net Aware website.
- Any harmful content should be immediately reported to the platform (e.g. Instagram) for removal. If the platform is not responsive then the Internet Watch Foundation can <https://reportharmfulcontent.com/>. This is particularly important if the bullying involves images.
- Advise children to keep evidence of the bullying (e.g. by screenshot) in order to report to adults. This will be particularly important if the bullying constitutes a criminal offence and the police become involved.
- If the bullying is of a sexual nature then this can be reported directly to CEOP via the Click CEOP button.

### How can you spot the signs a child is bullying other children?

It can be difficult to accept that a child may be bullying others, but dismissing concerns is harmful to all the children involved. As children get older, they start to develop a private life, and rarely behave the same with their friends as they do with their parents but there are some things foster parents, adopters or parent/carers can look out for. Children who are most likely to bully other children may:

- Often feel the need to be in charge.
- Find it difficult to cooperate with adults or other children;
- Be insulting about other people's appearances and backgrounds;
- Use discriminatory words around racism, homophobia or sexism in a casual manner;
- Be amused by other people's distress;
- Not accept responsibly for their actions;
- Be a good manipulator;
- Have friends who are known to bully others;
- Have a tendency to be display behaviour that seeks attention.
- May be being bullied themselves.

## What to do if a child in foster/adoptive care is thought to be bullying others or if a foster carer's/adopter's birth child is bullying the foster/adopted child

Social Workers must ensure that foster parents and adopters know to inform their own Social Workers and the child's Social Worker immediately if they are concerned that a child may be bullying other children.

If a foster parent or adopter expresses concern that a child may be bullying other children, the Social Worker should offer the following advice:

- Reassure the foster parent or adopter and ensure they do not panic or respond in a reactive or angry way. Their response should be to stay calm, and to help the child to recognise the harm they have caused and encourage them to change their behaviour in the future. All parents should speak to children about what bullying is - and how it makes people feel.
- A strategy to address the child's behaviour should be drawn up in consultation with the child. This strategy must involve the child's Social Worker, and any other professionals as appropriate; for example, staff at the child's school. The child specific safer caring plan (fostering services only) and, if appropriate to the circumstances, the household safer caring plan (fostering services only), should be updated to include any agreed actions to minimise risk and harm from the child's behaviour.
- A key part of the strategy must be about trying to understand the cause of the child's bullying behaviour, and it must be agreed how this will be done and what the foster parents or adopter's role will be in this.
- The foster parent or adopter may need help to prepare for conversations with the child and this should be offered by the most appropriate person. The foster parent or adopter, in conjunction with the child's Social Worker, should ensure that the child knows what bullying behaviour is and why it is wrong. The child may need help to realise that no one has the right to pressure them into something they don't want to do if this is why it is happening - this includes bullying others.
- The foster parent or adopter should talk to the child about information that is shared through social networking sites and let them know that they shouldn't upload comments or images that could hurt someone else - or pass on content that is designed to hurt someone else. The child should know that most social networking sites have report buttons if they have seen bullying behaviour and they want to stop it. They should also be told that there would be serious consequences for them if they were reported to have bullied somebody.

Everybody who has contact with the child must make it clear that they do not tolerate the use of disrespectful and hurtful language and behaviour. Social Workers must ensure that foster parents and adopters model this behaviour for children. Whilst these issues are apparent, any future placements and matching must be very carefully considered, to ensure other children are not put at risk of being bullied.

## Further information

**The Anti-bullying Alliance** is a coalition of organisations and individuals working together to stop bullying and create safe environments in which children can live, grow, play and learn. The Anti-Bullying Alliance was established by the NSPCC and NCB in 2002 and is hosted by leading children's charity, the National Children's Bureau. [Anti Bullying Alliance](#)

**Kidscape** is a charity that works to promote anti-bullying messages. As well as working directly with children aged 9-16, parents, carers and those in professional contact with children, their website has lots of advice and guidance. [Kidscape - Preventing bullying, protecting children.](#)

**The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)** Provides help and advice on cyberbullying, and the Centre maintains [a website](#) for children, and parents and carers about staying safe online. [The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre](#)

**ChildLine** is a private and confidential service for children up to the age of 19, provided by the NSPCC. Contactable on 0800 11 11 or at [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk).

**Bullying UK** (part of Family Lives), provides advice for young people, parents and schools about bullying. [www.bullying.co.uk](http://www.bullying.co.uk)