



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol  
**MERTHYR TUDFUL**  
**MERTHYR TYDFIL**  
County Borough Council

## **FOSTERING SERVICE GUIDANCE ON PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING**

**Policy on the prevention of bullying and  
procedures for dealing with an allegation of  
bullying (Regulation 24).**

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## Table of Contents

| Contents  | Page |
|---|------|
| Aim   | 4    |
| Legislation   | 4    |
| Objectives  | 4    |
| Definition of bullying  | 5    |
| Responsibilities of parents and carers                                | 7    |
| On-line/Cyber bullying  | 8    |
| Prevention of bullying  | 10   |
| Procedure for foster carers   | 10   |
| Procedure for the child's social worker                               | 11   |
| More information and help for foster carers and children looked after | 13   |
| Flowchart – Responding to bullying                                    | 15   |

## **Aim:**

This guidance has been produced by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to provide guidelines for foster carers on how to deal appropriately with bullying of children placed in their care. This document includes the procedure on who needs to be informed of such incidents and how to record appropriately any allegations made or evidence available.

This guidance is expected to be used by foster carers, children's social workers and supervising social workers within the Fostering Team in their supervision and support of foster placements.

## **Legislation:**

***The Children Act 1989*** places a clear responsibility on local authorities to protect children from all forms of abuse.

Under the 5 outcomes of ***Every Child Matters: Change for Children (Department of Health and Social Care, 2003)***, a subheading of the Stay Safe outcome is "safe from bullying and discrimination". This means that local authorities should do everything that they are able to protect children from bullying.

***The Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2019***, which came into force on 29 April 2019, states that the Local Authority as a fostering service provider must have in place a policy on the prevention of bullying and procedures for dealing with an allegation of bullying (Regulation 24).

Through regular training and experience of placements, foster carers are increasingly aware of the particular vulnerability of children looked after and their susceptibility to bullying. This policy has the purpose to help foster carers to recognise, record and address any incidents or allegations of bullying and cope with the traumatic effect it may have on any child placed with them.

## **Objectives:**

- To give clear guidance to foster carers, supervising social workers and managers on the recognition of and actions to be taken to address bullying;
- To minimise the incidence of bullying, both as a victim and as a perpetrator, among children looked after

Children Looked After are particularly vulnerable to being bullied. Bullies will target victims by focusing on something about the victim that is different in order to try and justify their behaviour. By definition, children looked after are different as they do not live at home with their parents. They may also have additional characteristics that increase their potential for being bullied which include:

- Young People with a disability;
- Young People who are seen to be lesbian, gay or bisexual;
- Young People from a particular race, religion or culture;
- Young people who may have experienced prior abuse and lack in self-confidence and communication skills;
- Young people who have been isolated from their family, peers and other support systems, such as change of school.

It needs to be recognised that the reasons for some children becoming victims of bullying are also reasons for others becoming bullies. This has potential implications for foster carers that look after more than one child and needs to be considered if it is suspected that a foster child is being bullied.

Everyone involved in parenting the children in the care of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council shares a responsibility to identify bullying and for creating a culture that positively encourages acceptable behaviour and reduces or prevents the likelihood of bullying.

As a part of this responsibility, everyone must understand what bullying means and what measures should be taken by foster carers and professionals to counter it.

### **Definition of bullying:**

Bullying is defined as deliberately hurtful behaviour, **repeated over a period of time**, where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves.

It can take many forms, but the four main types are:

- *physical* (e.g. hitting, kicking, theft),
- *verbal* (e.g. name calling, racist remarks),

- *indirect/emotional* (e.g. spreading rumours, excluding someone from social groups)
- *cyberbullying* (misuse of technology, games, social networks and mobile phones to bully others).

Whilst bullying can take many forms, it is also important to note that bullying can happen anywhere, at home, outside the home, in school and online.

Single incidents of a verbal or physical attack and behaviour which is hurtful, but not intentional, must also be taken seriously and dealt with according to the principles outlined in this policy.

These are some of the ways children and young people have described bullying:

- being called names
- being persistently teased or ridiculed
- being pushed or pulled about
- being hit or attacked
- being intimidated by being sworn at, shouted at, treated aggressively in a number of ways including threatening looks over a period of time
- having possessions taken and thrown about
- having rumours spread about you
- being ignored and left out
- being forced to hand over money or possessions
- being attacked because of your religion, race or colour, disability, gender or sexuality.
- being sent threatening notes, e-mails or text messages
- gang pressure
- being taken advantage of; e.g. my sweets for your watch

Children's Services Department aims to treat everyone with dignity, respect and consideration and to value any elements of diversity within Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. Bullying will often include elements of discrimination and/or oppression and this must be challenged and responded to appropriately.

The effect of bullying behaviour can also be made worse by the contribution of bystander/collusive behaviour. This can happen by:

- choosing to ignore or deny that a bullying incident has occurred
- witnessing an incident but supporting the bully or refusing to report it
- being informed that an incident has occurred but does nothing about it
- failing to report that a colleague or young person has committed or has been accused of, or is implicated in an incident

Bullying usually involves an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim which makes it difficult for victims of bullying to defend themselves and/or talk about it. Bullying does not just happen between children and can involve adults being the perpetrator of bullying to children and other adults as well as being the victim.

### **The responsibilities of parents and carers**

Parents, carers and families have an important role to play in helping schools and other services to deal with bullying. They should:

- a) Be able to recognise and deal with any indication or incidents of bullying.
- b) Discourage children from using bullying behaviour at school, at home or elsewhere.
- c) Take an active interest in their children's school, and out of school activities, discuss friendships, how free time is spent and the journey to and from school.
- d) Watch out for signs that their children are being bullied, including, if the child:
  - Is frightened of walking to or from school
  - Doesn't want to go on the school/public bus
  - Insisting to be driven to school
  - Is unwilling to go to school (school phobic)
  - Begins Truanting
  - Begins to do poorly in school work
  - Comes home with clothes torn or books damaged
  - Often 'loses' dinner or other monies
  - Comes home starving (money/lunch has been stolen)
  - Changes his/her usual routine

- Becomes withdrawn, anxious or lacking in confidence
- Starts stammering
- Attempts or threatens suicide or starts to run away
- Cries him/herself to sleep or has nightmares
- Feels ill in the morning
- Has possessions 'go missing'
- Asks for or starts stealing money (to pay the bully)
- Has unexplained cuts or bruises
- Becomes aggressive, disruptive or unreasonable
- Is bullying other children or siblings
- Stops eating
- Is frightened to say what is wrong
- Gives improbable excuses for any of the above

e) Develop positive strategies to support children and young people if they are bullied

These signs and behaviours could indicate other problems, but bullying should be considered a possibility and should be investigated. Please note this is not an exhaustive list of the possible signs of bullying as bullying can affect individuals differently. Also, signs of bullying are not always visible.

Parents and foster carers should also:

a) contact the school, or other services such as their supervising social worker and children's social worker at the first sign if they are worried that their children are being bullied or are bullying others

b) be made aware of any others they should contact if they have concerns about bullying

### **On-line/Cyber bullying**

Online/Cyber bullying includes:

- sending threatening or abusive text messages
- creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos
- 'trolling' - the sending of menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games



- excluding children from online games, activities or friendship groups
- setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child
- encouraging young people to self-harm
- voting for or against someone in an abusive poll
- creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name
- sending explicit messages, also known as sexting
- pressuring children into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual conversations.

With the growth of technology children have changed the way they communicate. Children and young people speak to each other via text, social media and e-mail very regularly.

They are usually more up to date with current technology than their carers are. As important as it is to identify bullying in the real world it is also important to be aware that cyber bullying is a growing problem for children and young people. It is important to keep communication open with the child so that if they are bullied on-line, they are able to tell somebody about it. In some recent surveys, up to a third of young people have been subjected to hurtful messages from other young people and large numbers have not told an adult about them.

It is important to be involved in the children's on-line lives. Foster carers will be expected to talk to the children about what they are doing, to be inquisitive and interested in any new technological developments.

However, the foster carers have to ensure they put boundaries around internet use. They can make sure the computer is in a public place and keep an eye on what the children are accessing. The foster carers should always consider using parental controls and should contact the service provider to find out how to do this. Also, the carers should remind the young person that not everyone on-line is who they say and explain in an age appropriate the concept of on-line grooming. This will be a regular discussion point in supervision and also through learning and development sessions to ensure foster carers are continually developing their own skills in an ever changing technological landscape.

CEOP (Child Exploitation and On-line Protection Centre) is a law enforcement agency that works nationally and internationally with a clear focus on pursuing offenders and protecting children from sexual abuse. CEOP works closely with child protection professionals to ensure that vulnerable children and those at risk of sexual abuse are given the support and protection required to safeguard them from harm. Specialist social workers from the UK's NSPCC are embedded within teams at CEOP to ensure that the wellbeing of the child/ victim is at the forefront of all investigations. Further information can be accessed on their website [www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)

For more information on online bullying and interactive games for supporting children's understanding of E-safety visit: <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

## **Prevention**

Foster carers should create an atmosphere where bullying is known to be unacceptable. All young people should feel safe where they live and foster carers have a responsibility to create an ethos where bullying is not tolerated and where everyone:

- Feels valued for herself/ himself
- Is treated with kindness and respect
- Learns respect for others
- Is able to feel safe from intimidation, threat or harm

Bullying should be discussed regularly to encourage openness. Young people may need help to understand that it is okay to tell someone and that they will receive help and support if they do.

## **Procedure for foster carers**

It is important that carers treat all instances of bullying seriously and take the following action:

- Listen to the child or young person and allow her/him to tell the problem in her/his own words;
- Treat all allegations seriously, no matter how trivial the incident may seem;
- Record accurately in the foster carers' recording logs;
- Where suspicion of bullying exists but the child will not make an allegation, the carer could consider asking the young person to talk to another adult, e.g. the

social worker, teacher or any other relevant professional that the child has a positive relationship with.

- For each allegation of bullying, foster carers and social workers will need to exercise their judgement as to the most appropriate way of dealing with that situation. They will be expected to utilise their knowledge of individual children in assessing how best to approach an incident. Consultation between the child's social worker, foster carer, supervising social worker and, in some cases, team manager will help with this decision.
- Involve the child in the action that is going to be taken.
- Make an appointment to speak to the teacher and the social worker.
- Encourage the child to keep communicating with you as the carer.
- Make the child feel listened to and cared for.

### **Procedure for child's social worker**

The child's social worker should take the following action where they believe or are informed that a child looked after is the victim of bullying:

- Take all notifications of bullying seriously.
- Incidents of bullying will be addressed immediately or as soon after the incident as possible.
- Speak directly with the child or young person to offer support.
- Where allegations are made about a foster carer bullying a child, this will be dealt with as part of the safeguarding procedures.
- Offer to provide support and encouragement to the foster carer as soon as is practicable.
- Update any risk assessments as appropriate and share with relevant agencies.
- Include any work completed to address bullying in the child's Care and Support Plan.
- Consider involving the police, the school, or other relevant agencies, depending on the circumstances.
- If the bullying is taking place in school, the carers and child's social worker will work closely with the school staff to identify the most appropriate way to address the situation.

- All incidents of bullying must be recorded, identifying any known triggers, the details of the incident and the outcome on both the child and foster carers file. An action plan will be required to address the individual circumstances of the bullying and any additional work with the perpetrator.
- Children will be reminded and made aware of the advocacy and independent visitor service available. Children have the right to involve the police and make a complaint through Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's Complaints Procedure.
- The child's social worker must ensure that the child is aware of the above services and understands how they can report any incident of bullying. It is the responsibility of both the social worker and foster carer to regularly remind children that any form of bullying will not be tolerated. Sometimes they may find it difficult or embarrassing to report that they are being bullied, particularly when it is related to their identity. Children will need ongoing encouragement to talk about their feelings and worries and consider adults around them who they can talk to.
- Where the situation appears more serious, consideration should be given to whether the child is suffering from or likely to suffer significant harm. In these cases safeguarding procedures will need to be followed and possibly a strategy meeting/discussion convened. The child's social worker and team manager will need to consider whether it is safe for the fostering 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.
- It is important to let the child know what the outcome is of his/her/their statements about being bullied. It may be done by the foster carer, child's social worker or in some cases, by an independent person. This should be properly coordinated, and it should be noted within the action plan who has responsibility for sharing this outcome.

## **More information and help regarding bullying for foster carers and children looked after**

Young people should be advised that they may contact any of the following agencies:

**National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)** by telephoning the Helpline number:

0808 808 1001 - <https://youngpeople.nyas.net/>

**Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)** - Advice for parents on all matters concerning schools. If you would like to speak to an ACE adviser, use the telephone number

0300 0115 142 - <http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/advice/tackling-bullying/>

### **Bullying online**

Gives advice for parents and children, part of Family lives - use Helpline number

0808 800 2222 - <http://www.bullying.co.uk>

### **Children's Legal Centre**

Publications and free advice on legal issues

<https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com>

### **Childline UK**

Childline is the UK's free, 24-hour helpline for children in trouble or danger. If you want to talk to someone call Childline free on

0800 1111 - <http://www.childline.org.uk>

### **Kidscape**

Parent Advice Line Call 020 7823 5430 Mon-Weds, 9:30am-2:30pm Useful links available on

[www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

### **Mobile and Text Message Bullying**

If you or someone you know is receiving text or calls that upset or offend, your network should have a number that you can call to bar or report calls.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection have a website with advice about on-line bullying [www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk) 11

## Flowchart - Responding to bullying



## Feedback Form

Name of Policy:

Please insert identifying details from 'Document History' from the front cover

Version Number:

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(draft/final)

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consultation

The **Policy Development Group** would value your suggestions and comments for consideration for the next **Review**. We would really like your feedback on this document and would welcome your views on what should be added, taken away, or changed. We would also like to be advised of:

- Related evidence based practice or training issues
- Any areas of practice which would benefit service user care by being added to the document, or any other aspects of practice which should be included here
- Any factual errors or inaccuracies in the document
- Other related issues which would help inform the Policy.

Please use the space below and overleaf for your comments.

It would be helpful if you could date your comments.

Please feel free to add or withhold your own identifying details as you see fit.

Please return your views to

If you would like this information in another language or format, please contact the Fostering Team Manager.