



# Safeguarding and child protection policy for adoptive parents

**Issued February 2022**

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***“Child” is referred to throughout this document as children & young people up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday***

## 1. Policy Statement

While a large part of what we do at Adoption Matters, surrounds recruiting, assessing and supporting adoptive parents, we very much believe that children are at the heart of our work. Our aim is for children to grow up in secure and loving families who will best meet their long-term needs and who can help them to reach their potential.

Like all agencies that come into contact with children and young people, we have a responsibility to do everything possible to ensure their safety and welfare. We are required by law to work with our partner agencies – Local Authorities' Children's Services, health services and providers, education professionals and the Police and Children's Safeguarding Partnerships (previously LSCB's). To adhere to this, statutory guidance has been laid out by the Government (Working Together 2018).

At Adoption Matters, we understand that while parenting children and helping to shape the next generation can be hugely rewarding, it can also be really difficult; particularly with regards to adopted children who have nearly always experienced early life trauma, abuse and/or neglect. As such, we want to do everything possible to provide you with the advice, support and guidance needed to meet the needs of these very vulnerable children.

### **Aims**

The aim of this policy and procedures is to help you understand what is meant by child protection and safeguarding, what you need to do as adoptive parents to keep your children safe, what do if you have any concerns about child protection and safeguarding and also what we and other agencies will do in response.

As well as this document, we have detailed child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures aimed at our staff members. If you would like to see these policies and procedures, please just ask. We also seek to support you to safeguard your children during your home study assessment by giving all our adopters copies of the Fostering Network – Safer Caring Book and our No-Smacking Guidance – which can be found at the end of this document. We would ask that you sign the form that accompanies this policy to confirm that you have received and read it. If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to ask your social worker.

Adoption Matters not only covers the North West of England but also the North Midlands, the North East and parts of Wales. As such, the children we place and where our adoptive families live, crosses lots of different Local Authorities and even though there is national legislation and guidance about child protection, the detailed practice and procedures can vary. While it is useful for us to use Cheshire West and Chester's Safeguarding Partnership as a base line (because this is where our Head Office is) it is a good idea for you to familiarise yourself with the safeguarding procedure and how to contact the relevant Children's Services Team in the area where you live.

Please note for the purpose of this policy “child” refers to anyone under the age of 18 years. Please also note that while this policy and procedures focuses on situations where suspected abuse happens either in the adoptive home and family, the birth family or other people known to the child or family, it also relates to suspected abuse by professionals such as foster carers, social workers, therapists and teachers. Any suspected abuse by strangers should be referred to the police.

## **2. What is Safeguarding, Child Protection and Abuse?**

**Safeguarding** refers to the policies and practices that are used by agencies and professionals to keep children safe and promote their well-being. **Child Protection** is a term used to describe the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

Abuse is described as

**‘a form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.’** (Working Together 2018).

The signs of child abuse are not always obvious, a child might not tell anyone what’s happening to them. Children might be scared that the abuser might find out, and worried that the abuse might get worse. Or they think there is no one they can tell or they won’t be believed. Sometimes, children don’t even realise what is happening is abuse. The effects of abuse might be short term or may last a long time – sometimes into adulthood. Adults who were abused as children may need advice and support.

Adoption Matters recognizes that young, pre-verbal children and those with disabilities have an increased risk of suffering abuse, due to their additional needs and that they may not be able to inform others of the abuse they are experiencing.

Adoption Matters will ensure that the preparation and assessment for adoption includes information about safeguarding children and that prospective adoptive parents are helped to develop parenting skills and strategies which enable them to create safe families and develop each child’s self-esteem and sense of worth. Adoption Matters is mindful that children and young adults may be susceptible to the more recently recognized forms of abuse as they are growing up, and it is therefore important to prepare parents for these as far as is reasonably possible. Adoption Matters recognizes that in some circumstances adopters do deliberately harm their children and therefore our child centered approach is to focus on the needs of the child, at all times, and when required, necessary action will be taken.

Adoption Matters is aware that many families may end up in a safeguarding situation due to the pressures and difficulties experienced by parenting children who have been highly traumatized in their early life and are finding life difficult to cope with. Parents managing complex behavior over time can become exhausted, entrenched

and unable to think clearly and may resort to behavior management strategies that are unacceptable. We aim to provide ongoing support to families through our Centre for Adoption Support (CfAS), as a means of safeguarding children who may currently be difficult to parent.

The type of abuse is often broken down into the following categories:

**Physical Abuse:** A form of abuse that may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a form of physical abuse. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child (also known as Fabricated Induced Illness (FI)).

**Emotional Abuse:** The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the children opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment, though it may occur alone.

**Neglect:** The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- a) provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- b) protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- c) ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- d) ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

**Sexual abuse:** Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in

preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

**Domestic abuse:** Impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another. Most children are aware of the abuse of their parent in the same or adjoining rooms during an incident of domestic violence. At its worst, this includes children witnessing their parent being sexually assaulted or murdered. There may be post separation violence during child contact visits.

### **Additional Safeguarding Areas**

As our society changes and technology develops, there are a number of additional forms of abuse as outlined below. All of these will include one or more of the main categories of abuse (see above), however there are additional elements to be recognised and considered, often around the organised nature of abuse.

#### **Online Abuse:**

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the Internet. It can happen across any device that's connected to the web, like computers, tablets and mobile phones. The abuse can occur anywhere online, including social media, text messages/apps, emails online chats, online gaming, live streaming sites. Children can be at risk of online abuse from people they know or from strangers. It might be part of other abuse which is taking place offline, like bullying or grooming. Or the abuse might only be cyber-bullying.

**Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE):** Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

#### **Child Criminal Exploitation: county lines**

Criminal exploitation of children is geographically widespread form of harm that is a typical feature of county lines criminal activity, drug networks or gangs to groom and exploit children and young people to carry drugs and money from urban areas to suburban or rural areas, market or seaside towns. Like other forms of abuse and exploitation county lines is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those penetrating the exploitation. Whilst age might be the most obvious, the power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, cognitive ability, physical strength, status and access to economic or other resources.

#### **Radicalisation and Extremism:**

Radicalisation and extremism includes people who target vulnerable children – by seeking to sow division between communities on the basis of race, faith or denomination; justify discrimination towards women and girls; persuade others that minorities are inferior; or argue against the primacy of democracy and the rule of law in our society.

**Peer on peer abuse:**

Children can abuse other children (often referred to as peer on peer abuse). This is most likely to include but not limited to bullying, physical abuse, sexual violence, abuse and harassment, upskirting, sexting, initiation rituals, domestic abuse relates to young people aged 16 and 17 who experience emotional, physical, sexual, or coercive control.

**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):**

FGM comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs. It is illegal in the UK and is form of child abuse with long-lasting harmful consequences.

**So called “honour-based” violence including FGM and Forced Marriage:**

So called “honour-based” violence (HBV) includes an incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion or abuse (including psychological, emotional, physical, financial or sexual abuse, which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community’s code of behaviour.

**Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children:**

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex. It can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or a group of children. Sexual violence and sexual harassment exist on a continuum and may overlap; they can occur online and offline (both physically and verbally) and are never acceptable.

The above list of additional safeguarding issues is not exhaustive. Below is a list of safeguarding issues to be mindful of:

- children who self-harm or who are at risk of self-harm
- children affected by gang activity including the potential risks of knife crime
- children at risk of child trafficking

A list of the common signs and indicators of abuse can be found at the end of this document.

### **3. What to do if you are worried about abuse?**

#### **Expectations of Adoptive Parents**

From the time your child or children are placed until a final adoption order is made, adopters share parental responsibility with the placing Local Authority and while your plan is to be the child/ren's legal parent, for safeguarding and child protection purposes, you are viewed as a professional carer.

#### **Accidental Injuries**

Nearly all of the children placed for adoption will have suffered early life trauma and/or abuse. We understand that when the children are first placed with you, they are in essence strangers to you and you to them, there are lots of social worker visits and new people visiting and anxieties are high. While you may want to (and it may be very tempting) it's just not possible to "wrap them up in cotton wool". Children need to explore their environment, learn and socialise, all of which involve some element of risk. Thus, what we want to reassure is that some level of bruises, bumps, scrapes and falls are inevitable, so please don't think that every time your child/ren bump or fall that social workers will feel you are terrible parents. All you can do is take all reasonable precautions to ensure that your home and situations are safe for the child/ren.

That said, until a child is legally adopted, we would ask that if they have an accidental injury that you make a note of it and let the Child's Social Worker and your Adoption Matters' Social Worker know as soon as it's practicable by phone or email. Of course, if needed you should seek medical treatment for the child as well.

#### **If a child goes missing from home**

If your child goes missing from home you will need to notify the police, the placing authority and your Adoption Matters' Social Worker as soon as you become concerned. The point at which you become concerned and level of concern will depend on the child's age and vulnerability, often a two hour period may be deemed significant. The Police and relevant social workers should be contacted as soon as the child returns.

#### **Ensure the Child/ren's Immediate Safety**

If you are concerned about your child/ren, the first thing you must do is to make sure that they are safe:

- If they have been injured or is at immediate risk of further abuse, take emergency measures to protect them and contact the police, ambulance etc. as appropriate.

#### **If a child/ren discloses abuse**

Children may disclose information about incidents that have happened in the past e.g. whilst living with their birth family or in a foster home, or it may be something that has happened recently.

Reassure the child that they are believed and what they have said or are saying has been taken seriously.



- Try to keep calm and not overreact emotionally
- Reassure the child that what happened wasn't their fault and they were right to tell someone.
- Reassure the child that they will be protected
- Don't make promises that may not be possible to keep. For example, the child may ask to keep the information secret. This mustn't happen as other people will need to be told and consequently you need to be open with the child that you can't keep it a secret.
- Try to remember exactly what is said.
- Make detailed notes as soon as possible including the child's exact words even if these are graphic.

### **Who and When to Inform**

- As soon as possible notify the child's social worker/manager or the out of hours team for the agency that placed the child
- As soon as you can, notify your Adoption Matters' social worker or their line manager. If your social worker or their manager is not available, prospective adopters should call our Chester office on 01244 390938.
- Adoption Matters and Local Authority social workers will guide and support you through the process. It will be the responsibility of the local authority in the area where the incident happened to investigate.

#### **4. If an allegation is made about you or a member of your family have harmed the child or there are concerns about the care you provide**

- As a registered charity that provides services to children and families, we are required to act on all concerns regarding children's safety and share information appropriately with the statutory agencies i.e. Police and children's social care who have a responsibility to investigate child protection concerns.
- We have a legal duty to report actions that harm, or may harm, a child, pose a risk to a child's safety, or where a criminal offence has been committed.
- We will tell children's social care any explanation you have given and whether we think any children in the family are at risk.
- We will, wherever possible, tell you in advance of allegations against you and of us making a referral to children's social care and/or the police and seek your agreement. We will not do this if we think doing so may place the child at further risk or jeopardise police enquiries.
- We will support you through any investigation.
- We will also, as appropriate, make independent support available to you.

#### **5. Allegations against professionals and professional carers**

As explained, if you have not legally adopted your child/ren and/or you are employed to work with children and/or vulnerable adults for any child protection investigation you will be treated as a professional carer.

Allegations that a professional or a professional carer has:-

- Behaved in a way that has, or may have harmed a child
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- Behaved in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with children

Will be investigated within a multi-agency approach. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will be informed and they will consult with the Police and Children's Social Care colleagues as appropriate. In serious cases, consideration will need to be given if any immediate measures are needed to safeguard your child/ren as well as limit contact with children/vulnerable adults in your employment/volunteering role.

If a formal child protection investigation is undertaken – the outcome will need to be shared with our Adoption Panel and your status as approved adopters reviewed. In serious situations, Ofsted will need to be informed and consideration may need to be given to informing any relevant professional registration body, the health authority and the Secretary of State. A professional may be suspended from their job and prevented from practising their profession.

### **Historical Abuse**

If an adult discloses to you that they were abused by a professional or professional carer as a child, you should respond to this in the same way as contemporary disclosure. As far as possible, the wishes and feelings of the person making the disclosure about further action will be taken into account but this will be balanced against the need to protect other children so the information will be shared even if the alleged victim chooses not to press charges.

The professionals carrying out the investigation will need to find out if the person accused still has contact with children.

### **What to do if you are worried that a professional from another agency or a professional carer, or member of their household including their birth children has harmed a child.**

- Report this as soon as practicable to your Adoption Matters social worker or their Line manager, or if you are unable to contact them, the Agency Safeguarding Lead named in this leaflet.
- Report this to the Local Authority Social worker who has responsibility for the child, or if the allegation is about them to their line manager.

If you have concerns about confidentiality, talk to your Adoption Matters social worker about this.

### **Allegations regarding professionals employed by or working on behalf of Adoption Matters**

At Adoption Matters we take our duties to safeguard and protect children seriously and our priority to put children first does not change even if the allegation is about a professional employed or working on the behalf of Adoption Matters.

If you have any concerns, you should report these as soon as possible to any of the following:-

- The Police
- Children's social care, ideally the LADO.
- A senior manager within Adoption Matters, the Chief Executive or, if the allegation is about them, to the Trustee identified in the agencies Public Interest Disclosure Policy (i.e. "Whistleblowing Policy"), whose contact details are at the end of this leaflet.

## **6. Child Protection Investigations**

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to investigate where it is believed a child may be suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm. Adoption Matters will assist and co-operate with this process.

Any action should be planned and coordinated between agencies. Children should not be subject to multiple interviews and medical examinations. Carers should be kept informed and consulted, where possible, unless to do so would jeopardise an investigation or put a child at further risk.

Where there is a likelihood of serious injury, Social Services, the Police, or NSPCC may decide to remove a child immediately, either voluntarily or by obtaining an Emergency Protection Order or Police Protection Order, or an alleged abuser may be asked to leave the home. The safety of other children in the family would also be considered.

The outcome of an initial investigation may be that a family is in need of greater support and we would work with our multi-agency partners and our Centre for Adoption Support to ensure that you get this support.

The Local Authority may decide to conduct a full child protection investigation. The statutory agencies; Children's Social Care, Police, Health, Education, NSPCC; will have an strategy discussion to;

- Establish the facts
- Decide if there are grounds for concern, who from and the level of risk
- Decide what protective or other action should be taken regarding this and any other children.

If the investigation establishes that a child has experienced harm or is at risk of harm a Child Protection Conference may be held. This is a multi-agency meeting that brings together family members and child care professionals from agencies likely to be known to the child. Before the conference, parents/carers will be told what the professionals are concerned about, what their legal rights are and their views about the concerns will be sought.

During the conference, information from the investigation is shared and a decision made about action to be taken including whether a child should be subject to a child protection plan.

A small core group of professionals then meet regularly with the parents / carers for the child and the plan is reviewed at Child Protection Review Conferences until it is considered that the child/ren are no longer at risk of harm.

## **7. Managing and Sharing Your Information**

Adoption Matters will hold records of any child protection allegations and their outcomes on your adoption file, our central safeguarding record.

Where there are child protection and safeguarding concerns, there is a duty on all agencies to share information. We will:

- Be open and honest with adults and children about the need to share, why, what, how and with whom information will or could be shared.
- Seek the individual's informed consent, explain why it is important and respect the wishes of those who do not consent wherever possible.
- Share information without consent if we believe not to do so would place a child or any other person at risk of significant harm or would affect the prevention, detection or prosecution of serious crime.
- The Data Protection Act 2018, Human Rights Law and GDPR provide a framework to ensure that personal information is held and shared appropriately.

## **8. Additional Safeguarding Considerations**

### **Photography and Risks of Social Networking**

*"Photography"* is used to refer to images in any format; moving, still, recorded or held on any equipment. This includes cameras, DVD/Video, mobile phones and computers e.g. via email webcam or database. The majority of occasions when children are photographed are not a cause of concern and important part of and record of childhood. However, there may be occasions when there are associated risks.

- The collection and passing on of images which can be misused.
- The identification of individual children to facilitate abuse
- The identification of children in vulnerable circumstances.

We advise our adopters to avoid posting photographs on Social Networking sites e.g. Facebook, to look carefully at their security settings and to discuss the potential risks of putting photographs of their adopted children with their friends and family. We advise adopters to talk to their children about the risks of sharing photographs on social networking sites as it could place children and young people at risk of exploitation i.e. sexting, abuse, or revealing their whereabouts.

For further information, you may find it useful to see publications such as “Facing up to Facebook; A survival Guide for Adopted families” – **Eileen Fursland. CoramBaaf (2013)**

Schools must obtain consent from the person and/or agency with parental responsibility before taking photographs. School photographs e.g. to represent the school or out of school activity, may result in the image being circulated more widely e.g. in publications available to the wider community, which could pose a risk to a child.

Anyone wishing to take photographs (including by a mobile phone) at any Adoption Matters events, should seek permission from all other parents in the group and check with a senior staff member first.

## **9. Internet Safety**

If you use blogs and chat forums you need to bear in mind that snippets of information can be pieced together to form a picture and lead to a child's whereabouts being identified.

Likewise, when emailing confidential information about your child/ren, we would suggest that parents either password protect the document, sending the password in a separate email or use Egress Switch which is a secure means of sending emails and attachments.

As children grow older and have access to mobile devices it is important to talk to them about the dangers of this including accessing inappropriate materials, grooming and sexting – further advice and information on this can be accessed via [UK Safer Internet Centre](#)

## **10. Health and Safety Policy for Adoptive Parents**

The National Minimum Standards for Adoption requires adoptive parents to promote a suitable physical environment for the child and for Adoption Matters to a written policy concerning safety in the home and in vehicles used to transport children.

### **Safety in the home**

Prospective adopters are given safeguarding and child protection information on approval, including this policy, our non-smacking policy and the Fostering Network book “Safe Caring”.

As part of your assessment to be approved to adopt, you will have been given our health and safety guidelines, the health and safety check list, information on poisonous plants, fire safety and your social worker/social work assistant will have completed at least one observation on your home to ensure that it is suitability furnished, decorated and maintained, warm, clean and hygienic and that outdoor areas are safe, secure and maintained. Any actions needed to make your

home safe and secure will be agreed and a fire safety plan should be completed.

If you have pets, you will have been asked to complete a pet questionnaire relating to the behaviour of any animals in the household and arrangements for their feeding, sleeping and care. It is important that adopters take on-board any advice given. We would stress that even where a dog is assessed to be low risk, this does not negate your responsibility as a parent to ensure that your child is appropriately supervised with any pets.

Throughout the assessment process it will have been explained how, many of the children placed for adoption behave in a way that is much younger than their chronological age. Thus it is important, that you do not make any assumptions surrounding the child/ren's abilities, awareness of danger based on their age. As parents it is extremely important that you supervise your child/ren appropriately.

### **Car Safety**

Car safety is taken seriously, your social worker will, as part of any assessment of prospective adopters, check original vehicle documents – insurance, tax and MOT.

We will recheck these on matching with a child/ren (unless known to be current) and annual intervals thereafter until an Adoption Order is granted.

As parents you have a responsibility to ensure that all seat belts, harnesses and child seats are compliant with current safety standards.

We expect that Adopters will transport children in smoke free cars.

*For further information about safety in the home and elsewhere please see [www.rospea.com](http://www.rospea.com)*

## **11. Contacting Professionals About Safeguarding and Child Protection Matters**

Any Adoption Matters staff, Adoption Matters prospective or approved adopter, or children in their care can contact the following regarding any concern they have of a Child Protection nature:

### **Local Authority Social Services Department where you live**

Prospective adopters and children will be provided with this number by their Link Social Worker.

Insert the number you have been given here:

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Insert the out of hours emergency number you have been given here :

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### **The Placing Local Authority Social Services Department**

The placing Local Authority, at the Adoption Placement Planning Meeting, should provide prospective adopters with details of their Child Protection Procedures and contact numbers.

Insert the number you have been given here:

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Insert the out of hours emergency number you have been given here:

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### **Ofsted**

North Regional office:

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

Tel: 03001 231 231

Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) Web: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

### **Welsh National Assembly Office**

CSSIW National Office

Welsh Government Office

Rhdycar Business Park

Merthyr Tydfil

CF48 1UZ

Tel: 0300 7900 126

Email: [cssiw@wales.gsi.gov](mailto:cssiw@wales.gsi.gov) Web: [www.cssiw.org.uk](http://www.cssiw.org.uk)

## **Advocacy Service for the Child**

Each Local Authority with responsibility for a Looked After Child should provide the child, age appropriately, with details of an independent advocacy service that the child can access. This should be provided to you at the Adoption Placement Planning Meeting.

Insert the number you have been given here:

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In addition, any child placed with you will be given Adoption Matters' leaflet 'A Children's Guide to Adoption Support' which contains other useful advocacy contact details.

## **Person Identified in Public Interest Disclosure Procedure**

Adoption Matters has appropriate whistle-blowing procedures (Public Interest Disclosure Procedure) as detailed in the employee's handbook. You can disclose information orally or in writing to Joe McCardle 10 Church Drive, Port Sunlight, Wirral, CH62 5EE, Tel: 0151 644 7935 Mobile: 07834 769240 Email: [joseph@the-mcardles.com](mailto:joseph@the-mcardles.com)

### **Adoption Matters**

#### **Registered Head Office:**

14 Liverpool Road, Chester, CH2 1AE

Tel: 01244 390938 Email: [info@adoptionmatters.org](mailto:info@adoptionmatters.org) Website:

[www.adoptionmatters.org](http://www.adoptionmatters.org)

All phone numbers are routed to this number

#### **Blackburn Office:**

10 Cathedral Close, Blackburn, BB1 5AA.

#### **Hale Office:**

St Peter's House, 233 Ashley Road, Hale, WA15 9SS.

#### **Warrington Office:**

Aiken Hall, Room WAH108 Padgate Campus, Crab Lane, Warrington, WA2 0DB.

#### **Salford Office**

Innovation Forum, Room 218 51 Frederick Road, Salford, Manchester M6 6FP.

#### **Stoke Office**

Unit 28, The Dudson Centre, Hope Street, Hanley, Stoke on Trent, ST1 5DD

#### **Leeds Office:**

Unit 19, Armley Park Court, Stanningley Road, Leeds, LS12 2AE

#### **Durham Office:**

Agriculture House, Stonebridge, Durham, DH1 2RY



## 12 Signs of Abuse

### Physical Abuse:

**Bruises:** most bruises are accidental and very common in children. However, bruising is rare in children who are not mobile and there are a number of places where it is rare for bruising to be accidental. These are:

- Back
- Buttocks (except the bony part of the spine)
- Cheeks
- Stomach
- Under the arms
- Back of the legs
- Mouth (especially in babies)
- Behind the ears
- Chest
- Genital area

Some shapes of bruise are obvious, particularly those resembling hand or finger marks often caused by slapping or shaking or a line of bruises, possibly on the buttocks or the back, often caused by slapping with an object such as a belt or stick. Bruising of this nature is a cause for concern.

Black eyes are less common than people think. Most accidents will only cause one black eye and this is normally caused by bruising around the nose and forehead. A black eye without such marking could be a cause for concern.

**Bites:** if a bite mark is more than 3cm across it will have been caused by an older child or an adult.

**Burns and scalds:** the shape of the mark is important. An accidental scald is likely to cause splash marks. Any burn or scald with a clear regular outline may have been caused deliberately. Cigarette burns are small and round in shape and may be found on any part of the body. A number of similar scars of different ages should be concerning.

**Fractures:** many children break bones accidentally. It is rare for children who are not mobile to do so and broken ribs or shoulders and dislocated hips are uncommon at any age.

### Neglect:

Some children are naturally small and some are livelier than others. However, children do suffer from being inadequately fed, from not being kept warm, or from not having enough attention. Such children may suffer from diarrhoea or may eat greedily. Others may exhibit very withdrawn or disturbed behaviour when away from home.

### Sexual Abuse:

Children who have been sexually abused will behave in different ways, depending on their personality and extent of abuse experienced. Some will act in sexual ways,

some will become aggressive and some will become even more withdrawn. However, there are certain behaviour patterns that might indicate sexual abuse as a possible cause. These patterns may arise from other causes but should give cause for concern. Again, the following list is not exhaustive, but might be helpful:

- Actual signs of physical assault in the genital areas e.g. bruising, bite marks, itching, pain when passing urine, sore vagina or anus.
- Infections e.g. sore throat (infection from penis to mouth) venereal disease, recurring urino-genitary infections.
- Chronic recurring ailments such as headaches or stomach aches.
- Difficulty in walking or sitting, or what appears to be a period starting that does not recur – this may indicate some damage to the vagina or anus.
- Indications that the child has blocked him/herself off from body sensations and feelings e.g. a tendency to curl up in a foetal position, wetting or soiling, or deliberately holding back when there is a desire or need to go to the toilet.
- Pregnancy, particularly when there is no obvious boyfriend.
- Overdose or drug dependency.
- Sleeping difficulties – children are often abused at night and therefore may be afraid to sleep. They may have nightmares, wear a lot of clothes in bed or want to lock themselves in their bedroom.
- Sexually acting out or unusual sexualised behaviour including mock intercourse, excessive masturbation in inappropriate places, an awareness of sexual activities unusual for their age or provocative or promiscuous behaviour.
- Lack of trust in adults.
- Children may become isolated from their peers, either because of their experiences or because they were kept inside as much as possible.
- Changes in behaviour, often noticed at school. There may be a pattern that indicates that the child does not want to go home, or a sudden behaviour change after the abuse begins or after it stops, such as if the child is accommodated.
- Children who are abused are often depressed or aggressive and may run away from home
- Eating problems – the child may over eat or become anorexic. The child may have difficulty in eating certain foods, e.g. vanilla ice-cream as it may remind them of semen, resulting in gagging or vomiting.
- The child may not like normal physical affection as in the past it has led to sexual contact
- Strange reactions to presents, because in the past they have been from abusing adults.
- Strange reactions to the taking of photographs or use of video cameras.

### **Children at risk of Bullying and Cyberbullying.**

#### **Signs a child is being bullied may include:**

- Physical injuries such as unexplained bruises
- Belongings getting “lost” or damaged
- Fearful of going to school, being “ill” each morning, or truanting
- Not doing as well at school
- Asking for, or stealing money (to give to a bully)
- Change in behaviour

- Loss of confidence, withdrawn, nervous or clingy
- Problems with eating or sleeping including bedwetting and nightmares
- Self-harm, suicidal thoughts, aggressive behaviour or bullying others

### **Signs of child trafficking**

Knowing the signs of trafficking can help give a voice to children. Sometimes children won't understand that what's happening to them is wrong. Or they might be scared to speak out.

It may not be obvious that a child has been trafficked but you might notice unusual or unexpected things. They might:

- spend a lot of time doing household chores
- rarely leave their house or have no time for playing
- be orphaned or living apart from their family
- live in low-standard accommodation
- be unsure which country, city or town they're in
- can't or are reluctant to share personal information or where they live
- not be registered with a school or a GP practice
- have no access to their parents or guardians
- be seen in inappropriate places like brothels or factories
- have money or things you wouldn't expect them to
- have injuries from workplace accidents
- give a prepared story which is very similar to stories given by other children.

### **Children at risk of Radicalisation or Violent Extremism**

a) The following factors may make people vulnerable to exploitation by radicalisers:

- Identity crisis
- Personal crisis
- Personal circumstances
- Unemployment or under-employment
- Criminality

b) The following behavioural signs may indicate radicalisation:

- Use of inappropriate language
- Possession of violent extremist literature
- Behavioural changes
- Expression of extremist views
- Advocating violent actions and means
- Association with known extremists

### **Children at risk of self-harm**

Potential signs of self harm that parents should keep alert to include:-

- unexplained cuts, burns, bite-marks, bruises or bald patches
- keeping themselves covered; avoiding swimming or changing clothes around others
- bloody tissues in waste bins
- being withdrawn or isolated from friends and family
- low mood, lack of interest in life, depression or outbursts of anger
- blaming themselves for problems or expressing feelings of failure, uselessness, or hopelessness

Feelings or experiences that might be connected to self-harm include anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poor body image, gender identity, sexuality, abuse, school problems, bullying, social media pressure, family or friendship troubles and bereavement.

## **FGM**

Signs that FGM may be about to happen

- A relative or someone known as a 'cutter' visiting from abroad.
- A special occasion or ceremony takes place where a girl 'becomes a woman' or is 'prepared for marriage'.
- A female relative, like a mother, sister or aunt has undergone FGM.
- A family arranges a long holiday overseas or visits a family abroad during the summer holidays.
- A girl has an unexpected or long absence from school.
- A girl struggles to keep up in school.
- A girl runs away – or plans to run away - from home.

Signs that FGM may have occurred

- Having difficulty walking, standing or sitting.
- Spending longer in the bathroom or toilet.
- Appearing quiet, anxious or depressed.
- Acting differently after an absence from school or college.
- Reluctance to go to the doctors or have routine medical examinations.
- Asking for help – though they might not be explicit about the problem because they're scared or embarrassed.