

Countering Bullying

Document last updated: November 2019

Document review date: November 2022



About This Document

Title	Countering Bullying
Purpose	To provide guidance to foster carers and the fostering service regarding managing situations of bullying.
Updated by	Rosemarie Cronin, Training, Development and Compliance Advisor (Fostering)
Approved by	Children in Care Workstream Meeting
Date	November 2019
Version	6.0
Status	Approved
Review Frequency	Three-yearly
Next Review Date	November 2022

Version Control

Date Issued	Version	Summary of Changes	Created by
March 2016	5.0	Review of information and update of contact numbers and websites	Rosemarie Cronin
August 2019	6.0	Review of information and update websites	Rosemarie Cronin
September 2019	6.0	Update contact details for anti-bullying service in Essex	Rosemarie Cronin

Table of Contents

About This Document	i
Version Control	ii
Table of Contents	iii
1. Introduction and Legal Framework	1
2. What is Bullying?	1
3. Signs of Bullying.....	2
4. Why People Bully.....	3
5. Essex Corporate Parenting Pledge.....	3
6. Essex Fostering Service Policy	4
7. Reporting Bullying	5
8. Strategy Discussion.....	6
9. Contacts and Useful Information	7

1. Introduction and Legal Framework

1.1 As a Corporate Parent, Essex County Council aims to protect and safeguard all children who are looked after in its care. Children experience bullying in many ways and any allegations of incidents of bullying should always be taken seriously and dealt with in an appropriate way. Children who are looked after may be particularly vulnerable to bullying and could be a targeted individual or a perpetrator, or both. It is important the foster carers are aware of the signs of bullying and know how to deal with this appropriately whether the child or young person is a bully or is being bullied.

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

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

1.3 The **Fostering Guidance** (2011) standard 3.95 states:

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

2. What is Bullying?

2.1 Bullying is any behaviour which is perceived by the targeted individual or any other person, as intending to hurt, intimidate, frighten, harm or exclude. It is usually persistent and an abuse of power, leaving the targeted individual feeling defenceless.

2.2 Bullying can be:

- **Emotional:** being unfriendly, excluding, tormenting (e.g. hiding books, threatening gestures).
- **Physical:** pushing, kicking, hitting, punching or any use of violence.
- **Racist:** racial taunts, graffiti, gestures.
- **Sexual:** unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments.
- **Homophobic:** because of, or, focussing on the issue of sexuality.
- **Verbal:** name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing.

- **Cyber:** All areas of internet, such as email and internet chat room misuse, mobile threats by text messaging and calls, misuse of associated technology, i.e. camera and video facilities.

This has been sourced from [Kidscape](#).

2.3 More Examples of bullying can be:

- Being ignored or made to feel not good enough.
- Removal of belongings - bags, clothing, personal items, money, sweets, food, homework etc.
- Inappropriate Teasing or Ridicule - people laughing at your hair or your clothes or the way you look.
- Use of physical size to intimidate.
- Gang pressure - chicken run, car crime, drugs, smoking, shop lifting.
- Discrimination - race, culture, disability, gender, sexuality, age, appearance etc.
- Subtle - a look, expression, usually intended to intimidate or frighten.
- Taking advantage - “My sweets for your watch”.
- Using technology to bully, e.g. Facebook, the internet, mobile phones and text messages etc.
- Sexual abuse or prostitution or pimping.

3. Signs of Bullying

3.1 A child or young person might not tell anybody that they are being bullied. Foster carers need to be aware of this and look out for signs that may indicate bullying although they may also indicate that the child or young person is unhappy for other reasons:

- They become withdrawn or their behaviour at home becomes more challenging.
- They seem unhappy and not keen to go to school.
- They are less confident and sometimes tearful.
- They argue more with their siblings.
- Reports from the teacher may indicate they are concentrating less in class.
- They are not invited to any birthday parties or social gatherings.
- They have stopped talking about school and their friends.
- They keep losing things or come home with torn clothing and unexplained injuries.

4. Why People Bully

4.1 There may be many reasons why people are bullied and there are some groups of children or young people who may be at a higher risk of being bullied than others e.g. those with special educational needs and disabilities, young carers, black and minority ethnic groups, those who are or are thought to be lesbian, gay or bisexual and children who are looked after.

4.2 People bully for lots of different reasons. Some of these may be:

- They may be scared.
- There are family problems.
- They have seen others bully.
- They are being bullied themselves.
- They feel out of control.
- They are being abused.
- It is seen as a way of surviving.
- They feel insecure and unimportant.
- To gain acceptance.
- Issues related to racism.
- Not liking themselves very much/wanting others to feel as bad as them.
- To belong to a particular gang or group.
- They are taking out their own anger on others.
- They don't understand how bad the targeted individuals feel.
- They have no friends and feel lonely.
- They are selfish and always want to get their own way.
- A cry for help or attention.
- Not being listened to.
- To fund a habit, addiction.

5. Essex Corporate Parenting Pledge

5.1 The Essex Pledge to children and young people in our care was written and agreed alongside the children and young people we look after.

5.2 Children and young people said they wanted foster families to be supported to look after them. Essex Corporate Parenting Pledge states that they will do their very best to support foster families so they can provide children and young people with a safe and settled place to live. If a child or young person in our care is a victim of bullying or if they are bullying other people, we support our foster carers to support the young person as well as working alongside other professionals to ensure that children and young people feel safe within their environment.

6. Essex Fostering Service Policy

- 6.1** As a Corporate Parent, the Local Authority aims to protect and safeguard all children in its care. Any allegations of incidents of bullying will be taken seriously.
- 6.2** All staff working in the Local Authority's Fostering service, and all foster carers, must be aware of the potential that exists for bullying to occur to children for whom they are responsible, or in their care.
- 6.3** Supervising social workers should also ensure that foster carers have a copy of the Children's Guide. There is information for children included within both versions of the guide (for older and younger children and young people).
- 6.4** Foster carers receive training to identify and deal with bullying of the children, it is also included as part of the Training, Support and Development (TSD) Induction Standards for foster care.
- 6.5** Foster carers should always report any incidents of bullying to the child or young person's social worker and to the supervising social worker.
- 6.6** Foster carers are expected to work alongside the child or young person's social worker and their school where necessary to ensure that the child they are looking after is safe.
- 6.7** Carers will be expected to provide an environment where bullying is positively discouraged and where an incidence of bullying has been alleged to actively safeguard the well-being of the child or young person who is the targeted. Individual foster carers should identify any situations that potentially increases the risk of bullying and act to minimise risks.
- 6.8** For each allegation of bullying, the foster carer, supervising social worker and the social worker of any children involved, should work together and will need to exercise their professional judgement as to the most appropriate way of dealing with that situation. If the bullying is between children within the foster home the social workers of all the children placed should be involved when considering the best way of managing the situation.
- 6.9** All cases of bullying will be taken seriously by Essex County Council. If the bullying is severe enough for it to be considered to be causing significant harm to a child or young person, the SET Child Protection Procedures should be implemented.
- 6.10** Children and young people should have access to befrienders or independent visitors as well as information about the Advocacy Service,

Children's Rights Service, and confidential telephone help-lines such as Childline. Foster carers and social workers should ensure that children and young people know how to access any of these services. Children also have the right to involve the Police and to make an official complaint through the County Council's Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedures (Customer Care Team).

6.11 The child or young person's social worker should ensure there is a way that the child or young person can report bullying and that they are aware of how they can do this (see below for reporting processes). Additional information is available for children in care on the following websites:

- [Essex Children's Safeguarding Board](#)
- [Essex County Council](#)
- [Become](#), the charity for children in care and young care leavers (formally the Who Cares Trust).

6.12 Foster carers should encourage open discussion about bullying. It is important that children and young people know that bullying is wrong and should not be tolerated. However, it is also important that if a child or young person is the bully that they feel able to talk about what they are doing and get the help that they need. A child or young person who bullies may not know why they are doing this and a child or young person who is bullied may not identify their experiences as bullying or wrong. This can be difficult to foster carers to manage they should be encouraged to talk to their supervising social worker in supervision about how they are managing this within their home. This should also be included within their family safe care policy.

7. Reporting Bullying

7.1 If the bullying is taking place in school the carers and the child or young person's social worker must work closely with the school and where appropriate liaise with the anti-bullying strategic lead for Essex. Currently this is Paul Dale, available on telephone on 03330 136327 or [email](#).

7.2 If bullying takes place within the fostering household (e.g. another child who is in the same placement or a child of the foster carer), the carers should discuss this with the supervising social worker and with the social worker of any of the children or young people involved.

7.3 The foster carer must record any disclosure of being bullied or being a bully in their foster carers log and inform their supervising social worker and the child or young person's social worker immediately. Serious incidents also need to be recorded as an incident.

- 7.4** For minor incidents it may be appropriate for the child's social worker to speak with the child and then identify who is the most appropriate person to speak to the perpetrator with a view to preventing re-occurrence. Within the placement, this may well be the foster carer.
- 7.5** 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 the Local Safeguarding Children Board Safeguarding Procedures must be followed and if necessary a strategy meeting should be considered (see below).
- 7.6** For each incident of bullying an action plan must be implemented, which addresses the individual circumstances of the bullying, any additional support required for the target and any additional work for the perpetrator.
- 7.7** In cases of serious incidents the child's social worker, the supervising social worker and their team managers should decide if 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.

8. Strategy Discussion

- 8.1** Following a serious allegation of bullying made to a social worker, the social worker must immediately bring it to the attention of their team manager who will decide whether a strategy discussion should be undertaken.
- 8.2** Where a child is being bullied and a notification is made that the child is or is likely to suffer significant harm a strategy discussion must always be held (preferably with the police where there may be imminent danger). An example therefore of the types of allegation that would warrant a strategy discussion may include:
- Allegations of bullying which are racially motivated.
 - Allegations of bullying where the child fears for his or her immediate safety.
 - Allegations of physical violence towards a child.
 - Allegations which are accompanied by signs of emotional harm being suffered by the child, e.g. significant weight loss, loss of sleep, recurrent nightmares, self-harm, withdrawn, talk of suicide, fear of going to the place where the bullying has taken place.
 - Allegations of bullying by an adult such as the birth parent during contact or the foster carer.

- 8.3** The strategy discussion will determine whether a multi-agency strategy meeting is needed and whether urgent action is needed to safeguard the child. The strategy meeting will agree what action is needed to address the bullying and to update the Care Plan to reflect any actions or interventions that may be required to keep the child safe.
- 8.4** If a child is the subject of bullying by a parent during the course of contact and there is a plan to consider the child's return to that parent's care, consideration should also be given as to whether the threshold for a child protection conference has been met.
- 8.5** Where the allegation of bullying relates to the actions of a foster carer or a member of their family, this would be dealt with as part of the SET Child Protection Procedures'.

9. Contacts and Useful Information

9.1 Childline

Phone: 08001111

[More information can also be found on their website](#)

9.2 Kidscape

Kidscape includes information and advice for parents, carers and young people and includes a support line for families facing a bullying situation. [More information can be found on their website.](#)