



TIME OUT
fostering

valuing individual needs

SECTION FOURTEEN

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

REVIEWED APRIL 2007

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Child Protection Procedures And Dealing With Allegations

Introduction

Time Out Fostering staffs are trained to be able to discuss child protection concerns and offer advice. All Time Out employees and foster carers receive ongoing child protection training.

It is very important to Time Out Fostering that foster carers feel able to contact us should they have any concerns.

This section of your handbook will help you to know what we require you to do in the event of actual or suspected abuse and/or if a child makes an allegation against you or a member of your family. Following any allegations Time Out Fostering staff will aim to support you through what can be a very difficult time.

Time Out Fostering have an in depth Child Protection Policy that is at the end of this section. This should be read in conjunction with policies and procedures on Safe Caring and Health and Safety .The following pages outline the most relevant information for you.

How we work with the local authorities

Where abuse is evident or suspected we work closely with the relevant Local Authority. This is the authority responsible for the area that the foster family and child are living in. Each authority may have slightly different procedures and we will be guided by them as to how they wish us to proceed. Copies of the local authority Child Protection Procedures will be made available to our foster carers. If an investigation takes place it will be undertaken by the local authority, who will also work with the Authority who placed the child in care.

Principles

Time Out Fostering believes that the welfare of all young people and children placed with us is of the utmost importance. We also recognise the rights of parents, carers and others who may be involved.

We offer high quality; appropriate support services for all who have suffered abuse or are working with those who have been abused.

Foster carers must take seriously and immediately report allegations or suspicions of abuse concerning children placed to Time Out Fostering.

Time Out Fostering works closely with local authorities and other agencies to enable children, foster carers, and all of our employees to understand what abuse is, their right to be protected from harm and how we can jointly do this.

Time out Fostering has a child friendly complaints procedure for children and young people placed with us. It is our duty to help them with this process if the need occurs. (See separate complaints procedure)

Time Out foster carers must respect and work to positively promote individuals cultural background, ethnic origins, religion, health, gender sexuality and special needs.

Procedure

Time Out Fostering carers and staff must immediately inform Directors or senior social workers of any form of actual or suspected abuse involving a young person or child in our care. Time Out Fostering will contact the child's Local Authority Social Worker and the local Child Protection team to inform them of our concerns. If the child was placed by a different social service the two organisations will liaise with each other. What happens next will be decided by them, we will be kept informed and we will pass on all relevant information where it is appropriate to do so. We will keep a written record of actions taken.

ONLY THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AND STATUTORY AGENCIES CAN INVESTIGATE AN ALLEGATION OF ABUSE.

The local authority decides whether to investigate or not, usually after a 'strategy' meeting.

If an allegation against a foster carer is made we must inform the local authority as it is a duty to investigate this. Allegations must be reported immediately to the Directors, so that we can take the appropriate action to support the carer and the child. Referrals of possible child abuse made by Time Out Fostering staff to Local Authorities must always be confirmed in writing within 24 hours.

What To Do If A Child Discloses Abuse or Makes Allegations Against A Carer Or Another Young Person.

You must listen to what the young person/child has to say.

It is very important that you do not question them. This must only be done by an appropriate member of the social services.

You can reassure the child that you are listening to them and understand what they say.

You cannot promise to keep secrets. It is our legal duty to inform the social services.

Explain to the child that you need to let a social worker from Time Out Fostering know what has happened and that they will talk to their local authority social worker.

Write down in detail exactly what the child said and record the time and date when you were told. You should do this as soon after the conversation as you can. This helps to avoid forgetting anything, or the confusion that some times occurs in retelling a conversation from memory sometime after an event.

Contact your Time Out Fostering supervising social worker or one of the Directors. Please record the date and time and content of your telephone conversations, in your carer's diary. If you are unable to make contact with Time Out Fostering staff and a serious incident or allegation of abuse has occurred then you must contact the local authority child's social worker or a duty social worker.

No matter how insignificant the incident or situation may appear to be, it is very important that you contact us at Time out Fostering. Copies of all relevant correspondence and information must be kept in your foster child's file.

Time Out Fostering Child Protection and Allegation against staff or foster carers Policies and Procedures

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Policy forms part of the Terms and Conditions of service, and applies to all activities of Time Out Fostering where children and young people under 18 years of age are present, and to all working in such activities, whether as an employee, foster carer, volunteer, management representative or otherwise.

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 An abused child is of either gender, less than 18 years of age, who has suffered from, or is believed to be at risk of significant risk of physical injury, neglect, emotional or sexual abuse.

2.2 NB a child may feel psychologically attached to their abuser and may therefore be reluctant to disclose this abuse.

We will protect children from significant harm caused by:

Physical abuse

Actual or likely physical injury, or failure to prevent physical injury or suffering. This includes deliberate poisoning.

Concerns alerted by;

Bruising or burns that appear to be unlikely to be accidental.

Comments by child, parents and friends

Observations of child's behaviour

Family under stress

Fractures

Bite marks

Sexual abuse

Actual or likely exploitation of a child or young person.

Concerns alerted by;

Sexually transmitted disease

Specific

Damage to genital/anal area e.g. tearing, enlargement

Pregnancy where identity of father not disclosed

Semen on clothing, vagina, anus

Non specific

Vaginal bleeding/irritation, soreness

Pain on passing urine, recurrent urinary tract infections

Abdominal pain

Soiling

Behaviour indicators

More knowledge of sexual matter than children of a comparable age
Inappropriate sexual behaviour with other children
Sexually provocative with adults

Non specific

Hints at sexual behaviour through play, drawing or and words
Excessive preoccupation with sexual matters
Excessive masturbation
Occasional requests for information on contraception, this can often be a cry for help
Fear of or lack of trust in familiar adults
Psychological problems, such as bed wetting, changes in eating or sleeping habits, withdrawal
Role reversal in the home, daughter taking on mothers role
Inappropriate displays of physical contact between parents and children
Learning difficulties, poor concentration
Poor peer group relations and an inability to make friends
Early arrival and are reluctant to leave and perform well
Reluctance to participate in PE or get changed
Truancy or running away from home
Self harm, self mutilation and suicidal attempts
Drug and alcohol dependency
Promiscuity and involvement in prostitution

Neglect and non-organic failure to thrive

Persistent or severe neglect or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, for example cold or starvation. Extreme failure to carry out aspects of care which could result in significant harm to a child including failure to thrive.

Examples;

Persistent failure to meet the child physical and /or psychological needs which may result in severe impairment of child's development
Failure to provide adequate food, shelter or clothing
Failure to protect a child from physical harm
Failure to provide adequate medical treatment
Failure to adequately meet the emotional needs of the child

Concerns alerted by;

Neglected appearance
Often left unattended
Unattended medical appointments
Failure to thrive or gain weight
Poor hygiene

Behaviour indicators;

Delayed development
Tired, falls asleep
Late or absent for school
Self destructive
Hopelessness
Steals food.
Desperate attention seeker

Emotional abuse

Actual or likely severe adverse effect on the emotional or behavioural development of a child caused by persistent or severe emotional ill treatment or rejection. All types of abuse involve some element of emotional abuse. This type is only cited when the others are not present.

Persistent emotional ill treatment of a child, which can cause severe emotional developmental problems

Concerns alerted by

Neglected appearance
Often left unattended
Unattended medical appointments
Failure to thrive or gain weight
Poor hygiene

Behaviour indicators;

Delayed development
Tired, falls asleep
Late or absent for school
Self destructive
Hopelessness
Steals food.
Desperate attention seeker

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1 This Child Protection Policy will contribute to the personal safety of all children placed in foster care through Time Out Fostering, through actively promoting awareness, good practice and sound procedures.

3.2 Time Out Fostering will recognise and give high priority to children who have been the subject of abuse or/and neglect and then effectively protect them

3.3 Time Out Fostering will work collaboratively with other agencies to promote the welfare and protection of children.

3.4 All staff and foster carers will be required to comply with this procedure

4. IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Time Out Fostering has a designated Responsible Officer (RO) for all aspects of child protection awareness and implementation of this policy.

4.2 The RO will be responsible for:

- a. Implementing this policy throughout Time Out Fostering's activities;
- b. ensuring all necessary child protection-related enquiries, procedures and investigations are carried out;
- c. reporting results of screening enquiries and for preserving a "need to know" level of confidentiality and access to secure records;
- d. Overseeing that thorough training is given to all staff, foster carers and anyone else who it is deemed requires it, before they have access to children
- e. Giving all foster carers and other relevant household members a copy of Time Out Fostering's Child Protection Policy and supporting them to understand it if necessary
- d. ensuring secure and confidential records relating to child protection matters;
- e. effective communication with the foster carers and staff team to ensure implementation of the policy by all carers, staffs and volunteers;
- f. Constructive communication and full co-operation with social services at a formal and informal level on child protection matters, likewise with the police;
- g. the reporting to all meetings of the Directors on the implementation of this policy;
- h. the reporting of allegations and suspicion of abuse to the appropriate authorities;
- i. ensuring there is adequate induction and training relating to child protection matters;
- j. overseeing that each placement and support package carried out by Time Out Fostering is sound in terms of child protection as regards foster carers, personnel, practices and premises;
- k. checking all incident reports made by staff and volunteers, countersigning them, and making such reference to authority as is appropriate, after consultation with the senior staff member;

- l. co-operating and communicating with any requests by social services for information regarding child protection issues and ensuring that other staff do likewise;
- m. carry out the implementation of the procedures in an anti-discriminatory framework, respecting culture, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, disability, class or age;

4.3 The Senior Staff Member (SSM) shall ensure active compliance with this policy by everyone working for Time Out Fostering, and shall work closely with the RO to ensure this, affording the RO every assistance to this end. All other officers, staff, foster carers and voluntary workers of the Project will actively endeavour to implement this policy.

5 GENERAL ENQUIRY INFORMATION

Points 5.1 – 5.7 apply to foster carers;

- 5 Time Out Fostering aims to ensure that foster carers who seek to work with children and young people through the organisation, and who gain substantial access to them (whether within fostering placements and/or beyond) are as safe to do so in child protection terms as possible.
- 5.2 The forms and formats to be used for enquiries shall be in the general form as attached, and the written consent of the applicant must be obtained to enable such enquiries to be made. No application may proceed unless the applicant gives such consent.
- 5.3 At the interview / assessment stage, the RO shall give to the applicant, and get the applicant to give written confirmation of receipt a letter/notice stating the checks are required as a condition of working for Time Out Fostering with children and young people.
- 5.4 The RO shall be responsible for sending the enquiries to their destinations, under a strictly confidential heading in all cases.
- 5.5 Time Out Fostering's policy is to recheck all foster carers, staff and volunteers after three years service, in terms of police and social services. This will be undertaken by the RO in consultation with the SSM.
- 5.6 At all times the onus is on the applicant/employee/volunteer to reveal any conviction, caution, bind-over, probation order, or pending prosecution, whether imposed prior to or within the period the applicant works on Time Out Fostering activities.
- 5.7 The applicant shall produce proof of identity, preferably passport, photographic driving licence and proof of residence, which checks the RO shall note as having been undertaken in the applicant's records.

5a. Foster Carer Enquiries

5.8 The RO will ensure that the necessary following statutory checks are carried out on all prospective foster carers:

- a. Proof of identity, preferably passport or photographic, driving licence and proof of residence.
- b. Criminal Records Bureau enhanced check including the checking of the POCA (protection of children act) list to identify any recurring concerns that did not lead to conviction and will inform POCA of any concerns regarding a member of staff that, though not leading to a conviction, that continue to cause serious concern
- c. Probation
- d. Registration and inspection units
- e. Previous applications to foster
- f. Local Authorities resided in over the last seven years

In addition the following medical checks and references will be carried out under the supervision of the RO:

- c. General Practitioner of the applicant;
- d. 2 x personal referee nominated by the applicant - a person who is not related to the applicant and who knows of the applicant's character, trustworthiness, any previous experience of working with/looking after children and young people. Assessors will visit referee's
- e. Employers references
- f. Health visitors
- g. Schools

5.13 The enquiry forms and authorities will be completed at an interview with the foster care applicant, under the supervision of the RO.

5.14 No applicant may start fostering without the above enquiries being completed.

6. GENERAL REPORTING OF ENQUIRY RESULTS

The following points apply to personnel and foster carers;

6.1 The RO will indicate to the SSM whether an applicant is suitable to work with Time Out Fostering, as revealed by the results of the checks at 5.2 a-g above.

6.2 Where a Schedule One offence is indicated by the above process, the RO must rule an applicant unsuitable, and that person must not undertake any form of work or involvement with Time Out Fostering. If such an attempt is made by a convicted Schedule One Offender or by any person prohibited under legislation from working with children and young people or from being in proximity to places where they may gather etc, the RO shall immediately inform Social Services and the Police.

6.3 The RO will recommend at each meeting of the Management on the acceptance or otherwise of applicants. No details other than an applicant was accepted or otherwise shall be given or minuted. The SSM may indicate an opinion on any application at this stage, in child protection terms. The Management shall consider the RO's recommendation and their decision shall be recorded in the minutes.

6.4 Any discrepancies revealed between the applicant's statements and the replies must be investigated thoroughly with the applicant by the RO and the SSM, especially as regards dates of residence, employment, voluntary work, past offences and convictions. The replies given may be taken into account by the RO, in consultation with the SSM, in making a recommendation to the Management.

6.5 The RO shall be authorised to undertake any additional enquiries as sanctioned by the applicant as may assist the making of a recommendation to the Management.

6.6 The enquiry result will be recorded in the applicant's file

6a. Foster Carers Reporting Of Enquiry Results

6.9 Foster carer's checks shall be carried out as a part of their assessment process, if the enquiry results are satisfactory the assessment process will proceed towards a panel meeting for approval

6.10 On receipt of all replies to enquiries, the applicant shall be visited by the assessing social worker under the supervision of the RO. The assessing social worker and/or the RO will show the applicant all replies received. The SSM will also read these, to ensure fair play, and non-bias/collusion etc.

7. PERSONNEL AND FOSTER CARERS RECORDS

7.1 The RO shall maintain a confidential file on each applicant in which shall be kept:

- a. Copies of all forms, consents and replies as in paragraphs 5.7 and 5.11 above;
- b. A progress check form indicating progress of the checks and replies;
- c. Notes for file - where the RO receives a phone call or other non-written communication, the main points shall be recorded and filed with the applicant's records.

7.2 The file of an unsuccessful applicant shall be kept for six months and then safely destroyed by the RO - likewise for a successful applicant who declines to commence with Time Out Fostering - this period will be increased to 12 months from the date of leaving Time Out Fostering's service for any successful applicant who commences work with the Project.

7.3 Anyone working with the Project has the right to inspect their own confidential records as at 6.1 above, and may do so on request to the RO who shall not withhold consent unreasonably and will do so within one working day. The RO may only withhold such agreement and access if to do so might jeopardise a Time Out Fostering or police or social services investigation relating to child protection matters or might lead to a child's welfare and safety being compromised. The RO need give no reason for such withholding of consent. S/he will report such a situation to the Management, purely on the lines that a request was made and refused for reasons relating to the welfare of children.

7.4 The SSM may have access to such records as kept at 7.1 above, with the caveat at 7.3 above applying.

8 SAFETY OF FOSTER CARERS HOME

8.1 Prior to any placement commencing, the RO shall ensure that adequate child protection procedures are in place.

8.2 In consultation with the SSM, the RO shall ensure a site /potential foster home audit is undertaken to ascertain the layout of the premises/site. There are basic standards of safety within the home the children or young people are to be placed in to achieve adequate personal safety. The following checklist is designed to ensure that each area of the home is looked at and reviewed yearly. Some of the checkpoints are dependent on age and needs of child/young person placed:

- Accommodation suitable for number of children to be placed (NB. Children with physical disabilities may need more space)
- Space for play and quiet time e.g. homework
- Adequate furnishings and decoration
- Clean and hygienic
- Child/young person to have own bed and or room, Bunk beds have safety bars
- Windows and doors opening and accessible in case of fire
- Smoke alarms fitted working and checked monthly (minimum one on each floor)
- No smoking in bedrooms
- Electric conforms to current safety standards in the house
- Gas fires, heating and boilers regularly serviced
- All medicines and chemicals including cosmetics are stored in original containers and out of reach of kids
- Garden equipment secure and maintained
- Any pets must be supervised when around children, they must be hygienic and not aggressive (child friendly)
- Lockable first aid box which is kept fully equipped
- Alcohol cigarettes and lighters are kept out of reach
- Front and back doors can be securely fastened
- Any major alterations to the house comply with Local authority building regulations
- A working fire extinguisher and or/fire blanket is available
- Adequate light and temperature to be maintained
- Safety film fitted to low windows
- Fireguard available and used appropriately
- Stair gates fitted correctly and secured
- Cooker guards fitted and kitchen access supervised
- Balcony doors and access areas secured
- Outside hazards such as ponds are covered or fenced off
- Furniture is safe ,large pieces secured so they cannot be pulled over
- Electric sockets covers are used and electric equipment stored safely
- Upstairs windows have locks that are fitted and working and the whereabouts of the key is known
- Garden fences and gates are lockable
- Childcare equipment and toys conform to current British safety standards
- Tools etc stored safely and out of the reach of children.

9. TRAINING AND SUPPORT OF FOSTER CARERS AND STAFF

- 9 The Project shall ensure that there is adequate and appropriate induction and ongoing training and information to all employed staff and voluntary workers concerning child protection matters, which shall be the responsibility of the SSM to devise and implement, in consultation and liaison with the RO.
- 9.2 All directors, employees and voluntary workers shall have this policy drawn to their attention on joining Time Out and it shall be the duty of the SSM, in consultation with the RO, to ensure that such persons are fully aware of how and where to access the full policy statement, and that the SSM is the person through whom they should route queries concerning the policy.
- 9.3 All foster carers shall be given a copy of this child protection policy before a child /young person is placed with them.
- 9.4 All foster carers will be required to attend training about child protection before a child/young person is placed with them. During preparation for becoming a foster carer, signs and symptoms or various types of abuse should be understood. Foster carers should therefore be alert to signs of abuse; sexual, physical, emotional and neglect.
- 9.5 All foster carers and staff will be required to attend periodic training about child protection.
- 9.6 Supervising Social Workers will allow and encourage foster carers to discuss all matters pertaining to child protection at any time
- 9.7 For their own protection, as good practice and good manners, staff are advised that physical contact should be initiated by the child – this will not apply e.g. where a child needs to be removed from a situation threatening its or others' safety.
- 9.8 Foster carers need to have a clear understanding of the child protection plan and their role within this. The placed child's social worker should ensure that parents are aware of what social services department has asked the foster carers to do
- 9.9 All foster carers shall be offered supervision and access to contact to a member of Time Out Fostering's qualified staff team at all times and child protection issues will be regularly discussed to maintain the foster carers awareness of such matters
- 9.10 All staff shall be offered an appropriate level of supervision and a regular opportunity to discuss issues of child protection
- 9.11 All placements shall be conducted with the provisions, aims and objective of this policy in mind

10. RECOGNITION OF CHILD PROTECTION ISSUES

- 10.1 Every placement shall be undertaken with the possibility in mind that a child may be suffering undisclosed abuse. A disclosure or symptom relating to this may become apparent within a Time Out Fostering placement, or there will be children in the service who have not as yet revealed they are being abused. The environment created for a Time Out Fostering placement should be as conducive to support of a child in such a situation as is possible.
- 10.2 The placed child will be given the telephone number of the area authority and/or placing authority and CSCI, their social worker and any other relevant agency. The foster carers supervising social worker will discuss with them using these contacts to discuss any issues, which concern them in relation to child protection.
- 10.3 The role of the foster carer is to listen to the child and not to interrupt or question the child if they are talking about the events of the alleged abuse.**

11. GENERAL REPORTING OF CONCERNS

The following points refer to both foster carers and employees

- 11.1 Foster carers and employees working for Time Out Fostering, have a duty to ensure that any suspicion, incident, allegation or other manifestation relating to child protection is reported as provided below.
- 11.2 Disclosure or evidence for concern may occur in any number of ways. This may be by what a child says, about itself or another child or children. It may be through interception of a written item, or through observation of activity or behaviour giving cause for concern. It may be through changes in behaviour or attitude. There may be physical, emotional pointers such as bruising, staining, inappropriate behaviour or knowledge.
- 11.3 IT IS VITAL FOR THE SUCCESSFUL OPERATION OF THIS POLICY THAT ALL INCIDENTS, OBSERVATIONS, HOWEVER INSIGNIFICANT-SEEMING, ARE LOGGED BY THE OBSERVER (S) IN THE APPROPRIATE FOSTER CARER DIARY.**

FOSTER CARERS MUST NEVER ASK LEADING QUESTIONS AS THIS CAN INVALIDATE FUTURE OFFICIAL ACTION.

- 11.4 Many reports will be purely minor in nature. It is important to treat them with due seriousness, however, in case there already exists information within Time Out Fostering concerning a child or e.g. a related child.
- 11.5 The SSM will ensure the Responsible Officer has as much background, supplementary detail about a child or an incident as possible. The RO will keep records in such a way as will enable appropriate cross-referencing of reports. The object is that any persistent pattern is identified as soon as possible.

11A FOSTER CARERS REPORTING OF CONCERNS

- 11.15 Foster carers will be given the telephone number of the area authority and placing authority and CSCI, their supervising social worker and any other relevant agency. Their supervising social worker will discuss with them using these contacts to discuss any issues, which concern them in relation to child protection.
- 11.16 Following any suspicious event foster carers should note the dialogue/incident including the time, date, place, people who were present, the observed behaviour and what was said.
- 11.17 If a child confides in a foster carer he/she should explain to the child that they have a duty to refer alleged abuse to the appropriate social worker and that this is in the best interest of the child, but only people who need to know will be informed.
- 11.18 The foster carer should inform the supervising social worker, the child's social worker or /and a duty social worker immediately
- 11.19 The supervising social worker shall then ensure that the RO is fully informed
- 11.20 The foster carer may be asked to provide social services with a full report for the child protection conference. The supervising social worker will support the foster carer in this task, in order that together they can clarify what was fact, opinion, allegation and observation. This report may be available to the child's parents at the conference.
- 11.21 The foster carer may be asked for an opinion during the child protection conference; however this can be withheld if the foster carer decides a conflict of interest may occur.

12 ALLEGATIONS AGAINST WORKERS OR MANAGEMENT

- 12.1 If a child, parent or foster carer makes allegations against ANY staff working for Time Out Fostering the following procedure will come into force - incident reports will be made at all stages as appropriate:
- 12.2 The person receiving the complaint will contact a SSM who will immediately contact a Director. The Director will contact the RO. On receipt of the complaint, the RO will contact Social Services to appraise them of the situation. Normally this will be by informal channels but if there is a criminal allegation, the contact will be formal to the duty social worker and also to the police.
- 12.3 The Director should inform the person against whom an allegation has been made as soon as possible UNLESS THERE APPEARS TO BE A CASE THAT THIS MIGHT PREJUDICE A CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION. This will require consultation with the police to ascertain.

The course of action to be taken from thereon will be decided by the nature of the allegation(s).

- a. If a criminal allegation e.g. of sexual abuse and impropriety is made, or physical assault, or inappropriate behaviour, the Director will activate the Disciplinary Procedure and suspend the person from any activity in Time Out Fostering under the heading of alleged Gross Misconduct. If it is warranted, this may be without pay, should the evidence appear strong enough to justify the matter. For example, a worker discovered in a situation of actual wrongful behaviour. The matter must then be reported immediately to the police and duty social worker. The suspension will remain in force unless and until the police and/or social services confirm there was no substance to the report. An incident report will be made and treated as confidential.
- b. If there is no criminal allegation the RO will gather as much detail from available sources of information as possible, by way of investigation, but not including seeking to interview any child if there is a criminal allegation (which is a matter for the authorities). The person against whom the allegation is made should not be involved in any fact-finding procedures. The RO should examine to see if there is any company report relating to a child protection matter concerning any involved child. This is most important.
Where appropriate, the RO should consider whether suspension of the worker is advisable and recommend accordingly to the director. This may include a situation which, though non-criminal, could lead to a decision of gross misconduct. The worker concerned may be advised to leave the premises for the rest of the day to diffuse tension and minimise stress. This should not be regarded as suspension. The staff member will not be expected to work until the matter is resolved.
- c. The RO will report to the Director on the outcome of an investigation and will recommend whether the circumstances constitute grounds either:

- To treat the matter as a disciplinary issue, either as misconduct or gross misconduct, with associated rights of appeal

Or;

- To dismiss the allegations as unfounded, or to make such other non-disciplinary recommendations as are appropriate. The director shall consider such recommendations and report to the next meeting of the Management and action taken.

The person against whom such non-criminal allegations are made should have opportunity to give an explanation or answer to any allegation at an interview conducted by the RO and the course of such an interview should be minuted by the SSM who should be present.

d. In the case of 12.4 b above the suspension will remain in force on completion of the RO's enquiries if the Director is of the view that the misconduct is so serious as to constitute grounds for immediate termination of employment or voluntary service until the dismissal procedure has been implemented. A Director of Time Out Fostering should advise the person suspended of a person with whom s/he can communicate during the period of suspension on matters relating to their employment. The person so appointed should be told clearly, as should the person suspended, of the address to which any communication should be made, whether or not communication includes personal contact, and the hours/times of contact.

e. In the situation of 12.4a above, if legal proceedings result in the conviction of the person for a serious offence involving a child, the Director shall consider any report or information from the police and /or social services and shall recommend to the Board of Directors the appropriate course of action up to and including instant dismissal. If the proceedings do not result in a conviction but there is evidence to suggest misconduct, the procedure in 12.4b may be invoked.

f. In the situation of 12.4b above the Director shall write to the person concerned to inform them of the outcome of the investigation and will inform the person of any decision to terminate employment or of the date and conditions, if any, of a return to duties, where a disciplinary offence has been committed but is not of a nature as to warrant immediate dismissal.

h. Under no circumstances is any suspended person to re-enter Time Out Fostering foster home or property whilst under suspension. This prohibition includes activities where there are no children/ young persons present.

i. In appropriate circumstances, in consultation with the SSM, and with other Directors as available, the Director may effect an instant dismissal if the evidence warrants it. For example, someone caught in the act of committing an offence involving a child on Time Out Fostering property. This will be reported in the manner detailed above, and the RO will make the appropriate reference to Social Services, or, if appropriate the Police (remembering to report to Social Services). The personal file of such a worker will have the necessary note of action taken entered in it.

j. Lesser forms of misconduct involving a worker in a child protection incident where the worker's actions or behaviour are inconsistent with children's welfare should be

reported and dealt with under the ordinary Misconduct provisions of the Disciplinary Procedure, with appropriate records made in the person's file. Social Services should be informed if the matter is related to child protection, and it is possible they might express a view on the person's suitability to continue to work in Time Out. Each case will be individual, judged on its own merits. The RO and the Director will liaise on such issues, with the SSM, and a report with recommendations made if necessary to the Management next meeting.

k. Where the Police are called in, the provisions of Terms and Conditions as regards e.g. interviews with workers etc and children apply. [See Relationships with the Police.]

12.4 The RO will notify the CSCI of both the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiries affecting the child placed or the registered manager

13 ALLEGATIONS AGAINST FOSTER CARERS OR A MEMBER OF THEIR FAMILY

- 13.1 If the care the child receives is criticised, the foster carer should report this to the supervising social worker, who will contact the child's social worker. All agencies involved will decide if any further action needs to be taken.
- 13.2 If an allegation has been made against a foster carer they should be informed as soon as is practicable, and given information which does not conflict with the need to protect children and obtain evidence. It must be clearly explained to the foster carer that some information may be withheld from them in order that the investigation is objective.
- 13.3 If no further action is to be taken, and the incident does not fall into a child protection issue, the matter shall be clearly recorded by the supervising social worker and a copy kept in the child and foster carers file.
- 13.4 Following a complaint against a foster carer or member of their family or support network, The Local Authority Social Services Department where the child is resident, and the Placing Authority Social Workers of all looked-after young people in the placement will be informed. Decisions about continuation of placements will usually be made in consultation with all parties. The placing authority holds the final responsibility.
- 13.5 When a child has been removed from a foster carers home at short notice recognition will be given as to their possible need for a final visit or resumption of the placement dependent on the outcome of the investigation. Whilst the investigation is ongoing no placements will be made with the foster carers.
- 13.6 If the police make a further investigation and social services child protection procedures are activated, and review of the foster carer's approval status will take place.
- 13.7 Foster carers have a right to see what is written about them in the social workers report; they may also be invited to the Child Protection Conference.
- 13.8 The foster family will have the option of support from their supervising social worker, who should also keep them informed about the investigation process and it's timescales. It is recognised that this will be a difficult time and Time Out Fostering may offer alternative or additional support.
- 13.9 Foster carers can also seek support from friends, other foster carers, support foster carers groups or the National Foster Carer Association. Carers who are members of NFCA have access to legal advice.
- 13.10 If proceedings against foster carers go to court then friends and other people who offered support can be called as witnesses.
- 13.11 Foster carers should consider seeking legal advice before providing written accounts of events they consider relevant to the investigation.

14 ACTION TO BE TAKEN FOLLOWING REPORTING OF CONCERNS

The RO will take the following appropriate course of action:

13.1 Immediate Report to Duty Officer at Social Services and/or Police: this covers any situation where, in the judgement of the RO, after due consultation with foster carers or workers involved and SSM, there is perceived to be an immediate danger to a child or detection of criminal offences against a child or other form of obvious, ongoing/future/recent significant harm. Time Out Fostering may otherwise contact the senior child welfare social worker in the Social Services Area Office, if this person can be contacted during office hours in lieu of the Duty Social Worker. Where the Duty Social Worker cannot be located, the Police should be informed and told of this problem in locating the Social Services officer. Where a child seems at imminent harm of danger/ injury or worse, then the RO is authorised to make a complaint to the Police in order to secure immediate action and protection of a child.
NO PROTOCOL SHOULD EVER INHIBIT THIS COURSE OF ACTION IF IT IS TRULY WARRANTED.

- a. In exceptional cases, where action under a. above seems unable to guarantee a child's welfare which appears to be under serious and imminent threat, the RO, consulting with the SSM and the Directors of Time Out Fostering as they can be quickly located, should consider direct action by obtaining a suitable order through the Court.
- b. The RO, SSM and the Directors of Time Out Fostering may need to take an emergency decision to remove a child from a foster placement if he/she is deemed to be at risk of significant harm. The child/young person will then be placed in another suitable foster home if appropriate. The RO will inform social services and the police immediately.
- c. Most situations will not require reference as in a., b. above. It will be more appropriate for the RO to raise concerns informally with a designated liaison contact at Social Services, provided that social worker is dealing with child-related matters in the course of their duties. The RO will always strive to ensure that there is such an informal liaison arrangement so that concerns can be discussed informally and on a regular basis. It will be appropriate at such informal meetings for all recent reports to be copied to the liaison person. The SSM's attendance at such informal liaison meetings is seen as desirable for the detailed information this can afford.
- d. There may quite often be situations arising from the reporting process which will not require the urgent formal reporting of a. or b. above but where it will not be appropriate to wait until a liaison meeting as in c. In such circumstances the RO should never hesitate to contact the Social Services liaison person on an informal basis as soon as possible. Such situations may arise e.g. where there is insufficient hard evidence or facts to warrant a complaint/ urgent formal referral, but there may be enough in terms of e.g. previous reports to justify referral of concerns in an informal manner.

- 14 The point of making informal reports as in 14.1 should not be under-estimated. It may well be that, from a child protection viewpoint, the information given to Social services in a piecemeal manner, informally, is potentially a major way of picking up issues as they develop. Our piece of information may be one part of a jigsaw - it may even be the first piece. It may complete "a puzzle".
- 14.3 The RO, and all workers, should bear in mind that in Time Out Fostering we may not be privy to all information about a given child's situation, as held by Social Services - but our item of information may assist in promoting a child's welfare.
- 14.4 All investigations will be recorded, as will be any action to be taken.
- 14.5 The RO will notify the CSCI of both the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiries affecting the child placed

15 FEEDBACK AND REPORTING

- 15.1 Workers will always wish to be assured that, having made a report, appropriate action has been taken. The RO and the SSM should always attempt to give such feedback from a reporting situation as is appropriate. The RO him/herself may be short on information once a report has been made to Social Services, who for reasons of confidentiality may be unable to give specific details. However, the RO should press for a description about progress from the Social Service's end, usually through the liaison machinery but if necessary by direct action as high as may be warranted if a serious matter has been reported. The RO is entitled to ask what specific action has been taken so far, whether the police have been informed etc.
- 15.2 In giving any feedback to workers, the RO has to bear in mind "need to know" and confidentiality. So, the worker who made a report can be told what action has been taken by the RO including any representations that e.g. the police should be brought in etc. This will usually take place via the SSM through whom such liaison will occur.
- 15.3 In regular reports on child protection matters to Time Out Fostering's Management, the RO will report:
- all new applicant's results of police and other checks: the person's name and whether the checks were satisfactory or not (but without giving detail) and the SSM will confirm this information. The Management will then decide upon each recommendation and their decisions will be recorded in the minutes as to whether agreed or not.
 - any formal report to the Police or the Duty Social Worker, omitting children's and families' names; also any informal report made by the RO to Social Services via our liaison with them.

16 REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

- 16.1 The Management shall review this policy, its effectiveness and its implementation every two years and the RO shall ensure with the SSM that the views of all workers, paid and voluntary, are sought and reflected in such a review process, and that any statutory authority input is sought as appropriate.