

Safeguarding Guide for Adopters



Parents And Children Together

Table of contents

Introduction	3
Why do we need to consider safe caring and safeguarding when a child is in an adoption placement?	3
What is safeguarding and child protection?	3
Recognising abuse	4
Child abuse	4
Other risks to children	5
Expectations of adoptive parents	6
Accidental injuries and hazards	6
Managing difficult and challenging behaviours	7
How can you promote safeguarding and safe care for an adopted child?	7
Managing allegations of abuse	7
Managing allegations of abuse: Prior to Adoption Order	7
What to do and say if a child discloses abuse to you	8
Managing allegations of abuse: Post Adoption Order	9
Allegations against a adoptive parents prior to an Adoption Order being granted	10
Support from the adoption agency	10
Allegations against professionals and professional carers	11
Additional safeguarding information	12
Social networking sites	12
Useful contacts	12
Appendix 1: Jargon explained	13

Introduction

‘Children feel safe and are safe; children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm including neglect, abuse, and accident.’

STANDARD 4 - Safeguarding children DFE National minimum standards

Why do we need to consider safe caring and safeguarding when a child is in an adoption placement?

PACT believes that all children, young people and adults have a right to protection from mistreatment, neglect, physical, emotional and sexual abuse and that anyone accessing our services should feel safe and able to trust the services PACT provides.

PACT’s adoption service ensures 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 for children and develop each child’s sense of worth and self-esteem. PACT recognises that children and young adults may be particularly susceptible to the more recently recognised forms of abuse as they are growing up, and it is therefore important to prepare adoptive parents for these as far as is reasonably possible. PACT further recognises that in very rare circumstances adopters do deliberately harm their children and therefore our child centred approach is to focus on the needs of the child at all times.

The aim of this guidance is to help you understand what is safeguarding and child protection, and how to keep your children safe. It will also help you to understand what will happen if an allegation of abuse is made by your children and the support you can access through PACT. You will also have information from attending the NSPCC online child protection training.

There is also lots of helpful information for you to access through CATCH - the Children and Trauma Community Hub. As a PACT adopter you have unlimited access to the Hub. If you need a log in, please visit PACT’s website: www.pactcharity.org/catch

What is safeguarding and child protection?

Safeguarding is the action that is taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm.

Safeguarding means:

- protecting children from abuse and maltreatment
- preventing harm to children’s health or development
- ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes.

Child protection is part of the safeguarding process. It focuses on protecting individual children identified as suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. This includes child protection procedures which detail how to respond to concerns about a child.

Recognising abuse

Child abuse

Child abuse is any action by another person – adult or child – that causes significant harm to a child. It can be physical, sexual or emotional, but can just as often be about a lack of love, care and attention. We know that neglect, whatever form it takes, can be just as damaging to a child as physical abuse. Some children are more vulnerable to abuse, often having additional needs or disabilities.

An abused child will often experience more than one type of abuse, as well as other difficulties in their lives. It often happens over a period, rather than being a one-off event; it can increasingly happen online.

Children may be vulnerable to neglect and abuse or exploitation from within their family and from individuals they come across in their day-to-day lives. They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children. Child abuse can have major long-term effects on all aspects of a child's health, development and well-being.



The four main forms of maltreatment have been recognised in legislation and guidance over many years and are as follows:

Physical abuse is deliberately causing physical harm to a child. This might involve punching, kicking, biting, burning, scalding, shaking, throwing or beating with objects such as belts, whips, or sticks. It also includes poisoning, giving a child alcohol or illegal drugs, drowning or suffocation. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of illness in a child.

Emotional abuse is where repeated verbal threats, criticism, ridicule, shouting, lack of love and affection causes a severe adverse effect on a child's emotional development. It includes conveying to children that they are worthless, unloved, and inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. Emotional abuse may include not giving a child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature inappropriate expectations being imposed on a child, over protection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child from taking part in normal social interaction. It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children.

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. This may involve physical contact including penetrative sex, oral sex, masturbation, kissing, rubbing, or touching outside of clothing, or it may involve non-contact activities such as involving children in watching sexual activities, producing or looking at sexual images, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect is when a parent or carer fails to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment), medical care, or protection from physical and emotional harm or danger.

Other risks to children

Risk outside the home: Extra familial threats can take a variety of different forms, including: 'exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups; trafficking; online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.

Child sexual exploitation: 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 a 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 and rural areas, market and seaside towns. Like other forms of abuse and exploitation, county lines exploitation is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the exploitation. Whilst age may be the most obvious, this 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.

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. And it can happen 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 happen online.

Peer on peer abuse: Children can abuse other children (often referred to as peer-on-peer abuse). This is most likely to include, but may not be limited to: bullying, physical abuse, sexual violence and harassment, upskirting (see below), sexting, initiation rituals.

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 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.

More information is available on CATCH: www.catchconnect.org

The signs of child abuse aren't always obvious, and a child might not tell anyone what's happening to them. Children might be scared that the abuser will find out, and worried that the abuse will get worse. Or they might think that there's no-one they can tell or that they won't be believed. Sometimes, children don't even realise that what's happening is abuse. The effects of abuse may be short term or may last a long time, sometimes into adulthood. Please see NSPCC website: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/briefings/definitions-signs-child-abuse>

Young children and children with disabilities: PACT recognises 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. PACT ensures that staff and prospective adopters will be made aware of the need to be particularly vigilant when working or caring for such children.



Expectations of adoptive parents

When a child is placed with you for adoption, you are not yet that child's legal parent. Both the local authority who placed the child with you and the birth parents have parental responsibility although the birth parent's ability to act on this is very limited.

On placement the local authority will delegate some parental responsibility to you and this will be outlined in the pre matching panel paperwork. This often includes your ability to make day to day decisions for the child for example when they go to bed, how they have their hair cut and what they wear. More significant decisions regarding a child, such as starting school should always be discussed with the local authority.

Any concerns you have about the child's behaviour or emotional well-being, or your ability meet the child's needs, should always be discussed with your PACT social worker and the local authority. You have a responsibility to be open and honest about this with the child's social worker who is acting on behalf of the child's "corporate parent" until the Adoption Order is granted and you then have sole parental responsibility.

Accidental injuries and hazards

During the assessment process you will have undergone a home safety check and it will be important to continue to monitor your home for any risks for example stairs, garden steps, kettle cords, getting into the knife drawer or the hazardous substances cupboard. The children will need monitoring and supervision, so please discuss with your PACT social worker if you have any concerns or need advice. We understand that children do get bumps and bruises but **we do ask that should a child placed with you suffer an injury please inform both your PACT social worker and your child's social worker** if the Adoption Order has not yet been granted. If you cannot get hold of either of them please inform their manager. Please always seek appropriate medical attention and if a child is seen by a medical professional you must let the social workers know immediately or as soon as it is possible.

If your child goes missing you must inform the police, the child's social worker and your PACT social worker when you become concerned. The length of time you wait will depend on the age and needs of the child.

Managing difficult and challenging behaviours

PACT recognises that some families may end up in a safeguarding situation due to the pressures and difficulties experienced by parenting children who have been highly traumatised in their early life and are finding life difficult to cope with. Parents managing complex behaviour over time can become exhausted, entrenched and unable to think clearly and may resort to behaviour management strategies that are unacceptable. We provide ongoing support to families as a means of safeguarding children who may currently be difficult to parent so please contact your PACT social worker, if the Adoption Order hasn't been granted, or the post adoption team after the Adoption Order.

How can you promote safeguarding and safe care for an adopted child?

Much of the harm that has been caused to your child prior to them coming to live with you has taken place in the context of relationships. Children have been taught by the parenting they have received that adults cannot be trusted to meet their needs. Their behaviour is often designed to obtain a better relationship with a caregiver, for example by demanding attention or not expressing feelings or needs. This may have worked in the dysfunctional setting of their birth family but will not easily make sense in a functioning and nurturing adoptive home. It is important that children are supported to feel safe when placed in an adoptive family. Being safe and feeling safe are not the same thing. Therefore creating a safe base and building a trusting relationship with your child is the key to safe caring and safeguarding. Please feel able to contact your PACT social worker, or the post adoption team for advice and support in helping to create this. There is also lots of helpful advice on CATCH and details of PACT courses and support groups on the PACT website.

Managing allegations of abuse

Managing allegations of abuse: Prior to Adoption Order

Children being, or who have been, abused will often experience more than one type of abuse, something that can have a long-lasting impact on their health, development, and wellbeing. It can be extremely difficult for children to disclose abuse that they have experienced, and so it is important that you respond appropriately and sensitively. It is also important to remember that any allegations made regarding child abuse or neglect may lead to a criminal investigation. It is therefore especially important to follow the advice below to avoid compromising a police investigation unintentionally.

An allegation could be made about any adult or peer your child has had contact with or is currently in contact with. Allegations of abuse can also be made against adopters, and while this is understandably a difficult thing to hear as a parent, it is important that you respond sensitively to any allegations of abuse and follow the appropriate safeguarding procedure.

What to do and say if a child discloses abuse to you

Listen carefully and do not make assumptions: It is important that you listen carefully to what is being said. Do not make assumptions about what your child means or what they will say. Avoid putting words in your child's mouth, instead allow them to use language they are comfortable with and go at their own pace. This also means being patient. If your child does not seem comfortable with disclosing the abuse out loud, then it may be helpful for them to write it down, especially if they are older.



Control your reaction and expression: Try not to express your own views and feelings when a child is disclosing abuse or neglect. While it may be difficult to hear about abuse that your child has experienced, your reaction could affect what they say or stop them talking altogether, especially if you appear shocked or in disbelief.

Reassure: Reassure them they are not to blame for what they have experienced; it is important that this is made clear to your child. It is also important that you reassure your child that they have done the right thing

by telling you, and they know they are not in trouble. You should also make it very clear that you believe what they are saying and are taking it seriously. Thank your child for telling you about the abuse and acknowledge how difficult this must have been for them.

Do not investigate: Do not ask leading or direct questions, for example "Did they touch your private parts?" or "Did he hit you?". Any allegations of abuse or neglect may lead to a criminal investigation, so you do not want to compromise a police investigation.

It is best to ask open questions that provide your child with an opportunity to offer more information in a way that is not leading. Clarifying questions can also be useful such as: "Tell me what you mean when you said...".

It is advised to limit your questioning to the following and only ask if your child has not already disclosed this information:

- Can you tell me who did it?
- How do you know them? (If you are unclear of their relationship with your child)
- Can you explain what happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?

Only ask questions to establish whether there is a safeguarding concern. Do not ask for details and do not attempt to investigate the allegations yourself.

Explain what you'll do next: Your child will likely be worried about the next steps, so it may help for them to have an understanding and sense of control about what will happen. Be honest with your child

about what you are going to do, including who you will be telling and the likely next steps. This must be done in an age appropriate way, so please adapt how much you tell them based on your child's age and understanding. If you are unsure about what happens next, explain to your child that you will be telling somebody whose job it is to protect children, and that they will know what to do next.

Do not promise confidentiality: Even if made with good intentions, you should not make promises which you cannot be sure to keep. Do not promise to keep secrets. Instead, tell your child that there are some people who you will need to tell, but more specifically, people whose job it is to protect children.

Document/record details: As soon as possible after your child has disclosed abuse, record what was said while the details are fresh in your mind. Make a note of the date, time, place where your child made this disclosure, and the exact nature of what was said. If possible, document exact quotes using the language your child used, including swear words or slang.

Report abuse as soon as possible: As soon as possible, please report to your social worker (both PACT social worker and local authority social worker). If you are unable to contact your PACT social worker, please contact the PACT team manager, or designated safeguarding officer. If you are unable to contact your local authority social worker, please contact their manager, or the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) if out of office hours. Once your PACT social worker is aware of the allegations, they will follow up with the local authority and keep you updated with regards to the next steps.

Do not confront the alleged abuser: While it is difficult to hear about the abuse your child has experienced, you should not attempt to confront the alleged abuser. Also, try not to speak negatively of this person around your child as they still may be an important person to them and somebody they love and care about.

Managing allegations of abuse: Post Adoption Order

After an Adoption Order has been granted, you will have full parental responsibility for your child, just like any other parent. Therefore, if your child discloses abuse to you post Adoption Order, the procedure you follow will be the same as for any other parent. The previous information about how to respond to disclosures of abuse still remains relevant, though who you report to may be slightly different.

With regard to allegations of abuse, there are a few responses that may be appropriate depending on the situation:

If your child is in immediate danger, call the police on **999**.

You can also report to your local authority and their **Child Protection services**.

You can contact the NSPCC helpline on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000) or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk.

If the allegations of abuse involve a professional then another option involves reporting to the organisation in which the professional is from, for example, reporting to the school a teacher works at, reporting to the organisation/local authority a foster carer works for, or reporting to PACT if the allegations concern a PACT professional. Each organisation will have their own **safeguarding policies and procedures**.

If you are still unsure about how to report disclosures of abuse, or who to report to, then please do contact the NSPCC helpline on [0808 800 5000](tel:0808 800 5000) or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. They will be able to offer you expert advice from their trained professionals, who will talk through any concerns you have and take the appropriate action to protect your child.

Visit the NSPCC website for further information and advice: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/what-to-do-child-reveals-abuse/>

It may also be helpful for your child to know about the help and advice offered to children and young people by Childline. They can call Childline directly on 0800 1111. Further information about how to contact Childline, and the information, advice, and services offered can be found on their website: <https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/contacting-childline/>

Allegations against a adoptive parents prior to an Adoption Order being granted

Many children who are placed with adoptive families have been abused or neglected prior to entering care which may increase the risk of them making allegations. Their behaviours may also make them more vulnerable to abuse. When an allegation is made against an adoptive parent the local authority has a legal duty to investigate and to ensure that children are safe. Although this is a necessary process, we fully understand that it puts the adopters and their family under emotional strain. Even when an allegation is 'unfounded' the impact on adopters can be profound but PACT staff will be able to support you.

Support from the adoption agency

While there is an open investigation into an allegation your social worker may not be able to give you specific details about the allegation as this could interfere with the investigation. This can cause frustration and confusion. Your allocated social worker will be empathetic and mindful of these frustrations. They must also be open minded to the possibility that something has happened, at the same time as being open to the possibility that it hasn't. This is sometimes a very challenging balance to strike. You will hopefully feel less 'judged' personally if you focus on the fact the local authority has a legal duty to ensure that all concerns raised about children and young people are listened to and dealt with appropriately.

Details of the process and more information about managing allegations against you as an adopter is on CATCH.



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



This situation is very rare, but if it should happen, you 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 PACT's 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.

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 PACT social worker or their line manager, or if you are unable to contact them, the designated safeguarding officer 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 PACT social worker about this.

Allegations regarding professionals employed by or working on behalf of PACT:

At PACT 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 PACT. 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 PACT, 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").

Additional safeguarding information

Social media sites

We advise you not post photographs on social media sites eg. Facebook and we advise you to talk to your children about the risks of sharing photographs on social media sites as it could place children and young people at risk of exploitation ie. sexting, abuse, or revealing their whereabouts.

We recommend that you:

1. **Control your default privacy** – Make sure only your friends can view your profile
2. **Restrict access to your profile** – Ensure not everyone can look up your profile by name or contact info
3. **Think carefully about who you accept as a friend** – Make sure you know and trust them in real life
4. **Look at who can send you messages** – It is safer to only receive them from your friends
5. **Have a look at who can post on your wall** – It may be best to limit this to people you trust
6. **Review who can see wall posts by others on your profile** – Some identifying info may be posted
7. **Make sure your contact details are not on your profile page** – Your friends will already know these anyway
8. **Check out your profile visibility** – Decide who sees posts you're tagged in on your profile
9. **Check if your location is visible if using your mobile phone** – Be wary of checking into places on Facebook from your mobile phone. Remember that others may be able to see where you are
10. **Control who can check you into places** – Be aware of whether friends can check you into places. Others may be able to see where you are on someone else's profile

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)

Useful contacts

Designated Safeguarding Officer:

Lorna Hunt
Service Director
PACT
7 Southern Court
Reading
RG1 4QS
Email:
Lorna.hunt@pactcharity.org
Tel: 07867 467489

Deputy Designated Safeguarding Officer:

Amanda Davies
Assistant Service Director
PACT
7 Southern Court
Reading
RG1 4QS
Email:
Amanda.davies@pactcharity.org
Tel: 07717 833446

Deputy Designated Safeguarding Officer:

Lara Rowlinson
PACT
7 Southern Court
Reading
RG1 4QS
Email:
Lara.rowlinson@pactcharity.org
Tel: 07825 620461

Appendix 1: Jargon explained

Prospective adopters – This is how adoptive parents are referred to until the Adoption Order is granted.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) - This is a safeguarding officer who is responsible for managing all allegations against people working with children in trusted positions; eg. teachers, nursery workers, social workers, foster carers, prospective adopters. The LADO will oversee all allegations.

Agency Decision Maker (ADM) - The ADM is the person in the adoption agency or local authority who is responsible for making decisions about the approval of adopters. All decisions about approval must be 'ratified' by the ADM.

Child Protection Enquiry - carried out under Section 47 Children Act 1989

LADO discussion/meeting - This is a multiagency meeting to share information and make recommendations following an allegation being made against a person in a position of trust, which would include a prospective adopter.

Strategy Discussion - A strategy discussion is a decision-making process to establish if an allegation needs to be referred for a S.47 enquiry. It will usually involve the police, the local authority, and the adoption agency.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) – They conduct regular reviews for children who are cared for by foster carers and prospective adopters.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) – Employers can check someone's criminal record if they are applying for a particular role.



Parents And Children Together

0300 456 4800 | www.pactcharity.org | @PACTcharity    

The Oxford Diocesan Council for Social Work Inc., (trading as PACT) is a Company limited by guarantee, registered In England (No. 1636098) and a Registered Charity (No. 285214), whose Registered Office is 7 Southern Court, South Street, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 4QS.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from



Updated October 2025