

# *safer* caring



second edition  
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the fostering network  
the voice of foster care



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# About this book

## Is it just for foster carers?

While this book is primarily written for foster carers, it may be of interest to anyone with an interest in safeguarding the welfare of fostered children, including professionals in related services and disciplines. While it offers insights and guidance to new carers, we hope that experienced carers will benefit from reviewing their practice and considering, again, the questions contained in these pages.

## Why do we have to think about *safer care*?

**There are three powerful reasons for focusing on this area of practice:**

- The particular history of fostered children makes them more vulnerable, and at greater risk, than children living with their birth family.
- Fostered children deserve to fulfil their potential: their safety and wellbeing are central to this.
- Fostering families, parents, and sons and daughters of carers can be at risk of complaints about the standards of care provided and, sometimes, of allegations of abuse of the fostered child.

## How can children be *unsafe* in a foster home?

A child's behaviour, or contact with unsafe people, outside the foster home may place them at risk. Alternatively, a child may report feeling unsafe, or inappropriately cared for, by the foster carers, the carers' wider family or their friendship network, while the child is staying with the carer or after they have moved on. The case studies which follow are a few examples of how children and carers can feel, or actually be, vulnerable.

### case study

**Marian and Peter** were fostering **Ellie**, a young mother, and her baby. An assessment was taking place to ascertain whether or not **Ellie** could adequately care for her son. **Marian and Peter** discovered that **Ellie's** use of her mobile phone was enabling her to maintain contact with, and to send pictures of her baby to, the paedophile who had targeted her and her child before they were looked after by the local authority.

## case study

**Michaela** and **Thomas** were respite carers for a *Home from Home* scheme for disabled children. Their youngest son **William**, aged 18, lived with them and occasionally helped with the care of the children who came to stay. **Maria** was linked with the family for respite, having had several previous respite families. After one weekend with **Michaela** and **Thomas**, **Maria** told a teacher that **William** had touched her inappropriately and she did not want to go back.

## case study

**Adam** is a single carer looking after **Ritchie**, aged 14. Four months into the placement, a young person who had been previously placed with **Adam** for a short period, during a family crisis, made an allegation that **Adam** had shown him pornographic books and websites while he was in his home.

## case study

**Rashid** and **Tasneen** had fostered **Salina**, aged eight, for three months. Before moving to them, she had lived with several different members of her birth family as well as three previous foster families. **Salina** told her teacher that **Tasneen** made her stand against the wall for hours if she was naughty.

Carers need to take all possible steps to keep children safer – and help them *feel* safer – within and outside their home.

## Is Safer Caring a set of procedures?

*Safer Caring* is about good practice. However, policies and procedures are important. The broad outlines of the child protection investigation process are described in the Fostering Network's information leaflet *Allegations Against Foster Carers*, but ask your fostering service about other policy and procedure documents you should look at.

## Is this the only book on safer caring that I need?

*Safer Caring* has been written to introduce, or complement, the work you undertake with your fostering service and to aid discussion in your family. For the experienced carers among you, it offers an opportunity to 'touch base' again with some of the basic, but essential, elements of safer caring.

## Is the book applicable to all foster families?

Foster carers live in very different family structures and have different lifestyles. Some have children and others do not. A child might be in a household with one or more carers. The carers may be of the same or opposite sex. Some have a significant religious faith and others do not.

We have tried to give relevant examples and helpful advice but, of course, we have not been able to cover every situation. Some of the messages in this book may be more relevant to some carer households than to others. We have tried to be clear about this in the text.

## Why can't social workers see that we are a safe family?

Sadly, we have to accept that many of the abuses children suffer in their birth families, or from strangers, can, and do, happen in foster and adoptive families too. This means that everyone has to be alert and vigilant and safety in foster families cannot be taken for granted,

## Long-term or short-term – does it make a difference to safer caring?

Carers should consult their supervising social workers about how safer caring issues are addressed in their particular circumstances and, importantly, be able to explain the reasons for decisions they take. Ultimately, foster carers cannot avoid the fact that fostered children, even those placed 'long-term' or 'permanently', require care based on a recognition of their different parentage and their past history.

## Why are there specific references in the book to the role of men in foster care?

We are not making an assumption that all men are abusers: we are asserting that children need to feel safe and there are particular issues for men in how they achieve this.

## Appendix 5: The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care

*Safer Caring* provides a solid foundation for considering the issues of education in relation to the Children's Workforce Development Council's seven standards (England, 2007).

<p><b>Standard 1</b> Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people</p>	<p>Introduction to principles and values in relation to safeguarding children who live in foster families and protecting members of the fostering family.</p>
<p><b>Standard 2</b> Understand your role as a foster carer</p>	<p>The foster carer's role in providing a service as part of the corporate parenting responsibilities of public authorities and working as part of a team.</p>
<p><b>Standard 3</b> Understand health, safety and healthy care</p>	<p>Awareness of emotional and physical health issues for children living in foster families.</p>
<p><b>Standard 4</b> Know how to communicate effectively</p>	<p>Provides advice and guidance about listening and communicating with children about their safety and wellbeing in the home and with professionals in children's and other services.</p>
<p><b>Standard 5</b> Understand the development of children and young people</p>	<p>Invites considerations of safer care in relation to the changing needs of children as they grow and develop.</p>
<p><b>Standard 6</b> Keep children safe from harm</p>	<p>Considers the range and balance of risks to the safety of children in foster homes and the need for carers to be alert to the safety of their own children.</p>
<p><b>Standard 7</b> Develop yourself</p>	<p>Encourages and reinforces reflective learning, reference to useful literature and the value of training and support.</p>