



fosteringfirst

SERVING CHILDREN, FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES

CHILD SAFEGUARDING STATEMENT

NATURE OF SERVICE

Fostering First Ireland (FFI) is an independent fostering agency offering fostering services across the Republic of Ireland. It has its head office in Dublin and is part of the Key Assets group of companies that operates in Europe, Australasia and North America. Key Assets' head office is in the United Kingdom.

The Director and administrative staff are based in the head office in Dublin. The Principal Social Workers, Team Managers and Link Social Workers are all based in the geographical areas in which they work. Other staff who have a national remit include the Education Liaison Officer, Children's Services Team, and Therapists, and they are based in various locations around the country.

The main business of FFI is to recruit, assess, train and support Foster Carers who can offer high quality placements for children referred by Tusla to the agency. As such FFI has a significant duty of care to, and contact with, the children and young people placed in FFI foster homes, including the birth children of foster carers.









FFI places children from age 0-18 in foster care placements, many of whom have suffered abuse and trauma and therefore have particular safeguarding needs. A significant number of the children placed have other special needs.














FFI also offers related services including Supported Lodgings and other specialised placements for children and young people. It also undertakes external fostering assessments and foster carer reviews for Tusla and other agencies and offers Link Social Work support to Tusla Foster Carers and to external agencies where children are placed with relatives.

PRINCIPLES TO SAFEGUARD CHILDREN FROM HARM

FFI is committed to safeguarding children from harm and has developed a Child Protection and Welfare Policy that is consistent with the Children First Act 2015 and the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)

As part of the commitment to safeguard children FFI has developed a set of guiding principles which informs all practices within the agency:

-  The best interests of the child are the paramount concern.
-  The safety and welfare of children is everyone's responsibility.
-  FFI honours the child's fundamental right to protection from exploitation, neglect, physical, emotional and sexual abuse.
-  FFI will take seriously and immediately report allegations or suspicions of abuse and neglect concerning children. Detailed procedures about how staff must respond to specific concerns are available and must be followed when applicable.
-  FFI will work in partnership with Tusla and other agencies to enable children to understand what abuse and neglect is and their right to be protected from harm.
-  FFI will remain open-minded in respect of allegations made by children, avoiding making assumptions about children, carers, parents or staff and ensure that matters are dealt with fairly and transparently.
-  FFI will cooperate with Tusla and other agencies in relation to sharing of information as appropriate and as specified by legislation and guidance.
-  FFI will ascertain the wishes and feelings of children in their care or with whom they work, inform them of their rights, help them put forward their views (using advocacy services if appropriate) and keep them fully informed.

-  FFI will positively promote the needs of children and young people and will consider their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, health, gender, sexual orientation/gender identity and special needs.
-  FFI will pay particular attention to the needs of disabled children who are statistically at an increased risk of abuse and neglect.
-  FFI will provide an effective complaints procedure for children and young people in foster care.
-  Each young person placed with FFI will be provided with a Children’s Guide, which includes information about advocacy and support services.
-  FFI will work in partnership with the families of children and young people who have suffered abuse and neglect and where appropriate support safe parenting within the family.
-  FFI will ensure that confidential, detailed and accurate records of all safeguarding concerns are maintained and securely stored.
-  FFI will provide high quality support and supervision to staff and Foster Carers to ensure that any safeguarding issues are identified and acted upon.
-  FFI will use safe recruitment practices to prevent the employment of unsuitable individuals.
-  FFI will use comprehensive assessment processes to assess the suitability of potential carers. This will include criminal and local area checks, references, and a quality home study which will include in depth scrutiny and analysis of the carers’ skills, abilities, emotional stability, and capacity to care for children with complex needs.
-  FFI will provide Children First Training and Safeguarding training for all staff as part of their continuous professional development.
-  Foster Carers will also receive Child Protection and Welfare training along with relevant information in the Foster Carer handbook.
-  FFI will not enter into contractual obligations with relevant services unless satisfied that they are compliant with Children First Guidance.
-  FFI will review their Child Protection and Welfare Policies and associated documents and practices every two years as a minimum

RISK ASSESSMENT

FFI continually risk assesses any potential harm to a child while availing of its services. Below is a list of the areas of risk identified and the list of procedures for managing these risks.

RISK IDENTIFIED	PROCEDURE IN PLACE TO MANAGE RISK IDENTIFIED
<p>Children in placement may be subject to abuse and neglect from Foster Carers</p>	<p>FFI has a range of policies and procedures in place to ensure that children in placements are safe from harm. These include:</p> <p>Robust assessment practices and policy are in place in line with agency procedures and all Foster Carers in FFI are approved by Tusla Fostering Committee. <i>Assessing and Approving Carers Policy, Criminal Record Check Policy.</i></p> <p>All Foster Carers are offered regular support and supervision in line with agency policy: <i>Supporting and Supervising Foster Carers Policy and Procedure</i></p> <p>All Foster Carers receive appropriate and ongoing training including Child Protection and Welfare Training, Safe Care and Promoting Positive</p>

	<p>Behaviour training. <i>Child Protection and Welfare Policy, Supporting and Supervising Foster Carers Policy and Procedure.</i></p> <p>All Foster Carers receive at least one Unannounced Visit per year. <i>Unannounced Visit Policy and Guidance</i></p> <p>All Foster Carers are reviewed at least every three years and contributions are requested from all stakeholders, including children in placement. <i>Foster Carer Review Policy and Guidance</i></p> <p>There is a robust policy in place which details the procedures to be followed in case of allegation being made against Foster Carer. <i>Allegations against Foster Carers Policy and Procedure</i></p> <p>Children receive written and verbal information about how to express a concern following placement. <i>Matching and Placement Policy and Guidance, Complaints Policy, Procedure and Guidance.</i></p> <p>FFI has a clear reporting structure where there are concerns that a child may be suffering from abuse or neglect. <i>Child Protection and Welfare Policy, Critical Incident Policy and Guidance.</i></p> <p>FFI has a staff code of conduct obliging staff to report all suspicions of child abuse, and all concerns and allegations. <i>Staff Code of Conduct Policy and Child Protection and Welfare Policy.</i></p>
<p>Children in placement may be subject to abuse and neglect from staff</p>	<p>FFI maintains high standards in the recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers. All staff have criminal record and background checks and references undertaken prior to employment.</p> <p>Full induction and six month probationary period. Annual appraisals.</p> <p>Regular supervision in place and clear line management structure.</p> <p>Whistleblowing policy in place.</p> <p>Policy in place detailing procedures in case of allegation being made against staff member. <i>Allegations against workers Policy</i></p> <p>Children receive written and verbal information about how to express a concern following placement. <i>Matching and Placement Policy and Guidance, Complaints Policy, Procedure and Guidance.</i></p> <p>All staff receive Children First Training. <i>Child Protection and Welfare Policy</i></p> <p>FFI has a clear reporting structure where there are concerns that a child may be suffering from abuse or neglect. <i>Child Protection and Welfare Policy, Critical Incident Policy and Guidance</i></p> <p>FFI has a staff code of conduct obliging staff to report all suspicions of child abuse, and all concerns and allegations. <i>Staff Code of Conduct Policy and Child Protection and Welfare Policy.</i></p> <p>FFI provides guidance to staff on safe working practice. <i>Safe Working Guidance.</i></p>
<p>Children in placement may be subject to abuse and</p>	<p>All Foster Carers and staff receive training on recognising signs of abuse and neglect.</p>

<p>neglect from sources other than above</p>	<p>All children in placement receive written and verbal information about how to express a concern.</p> <p>All Foster Carers receive training on how to respond to disclosures of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>FFI has a clear reporting structure where there are concerns that a child may be suffering from abuse or neglect. <i>Child Protection and Welfare Policy, Critical Incident Policy and Guidance</i></p>
<p>Children in Placement may be at risk of abuse from siblings</p>	<p>All Foster Carers and staff receive training on recognising signs of abuse and neglect.</p> <p>All children in placement receive written and verbal information about how to express a concern.</p> <p>All children coming into placement have an individualised Placement Plan which takes account of any known risks to the child. <i>Matching and Placements Policy</i></p> <p>All children have their own bedrooms unless otherwise specified. In the unusual event of a child sharing a bedroom a risk assessment is undertaken beforehand. <i>Policy for Children Sharing a Bedroom</i></p> <p>All Foster Carers receive regular supervision with standing agenda items for discussion that include ‘promoting safety’ of the fostered child. <i>Supporting and Supervising Foster Carers Policy and Procedure.</i></p> <p>FFI has a clear reporting structure where there are concerns that a child may be suffering from abuse or neglect. <i>Child Protection and Welfare Policy, Critical Incident Policy and Guidance</i></p> <p>All Foster Carers receive at least one Unannounced Visit per year. Children are encouraged to express any concerns during this visit. <i>Unannounced Visit Policy and Guidance</i></p>
<p>Children in placement may be at risk of abuse from other Children in Care</p>	<p>All Foster Carers and staff receive training on recognising signs of abuse and neglect.</p> <p>All children in placement receive written and verbal information about how to express a concern.</p> <p>All children coming into placement have an individualised Placement Plan which takes account of any known risks to the child. <i>Matching and Placements Policy</i></p> <p>All children have their own bedrooms unless otherwise specified. In the unusual event of a child sharing a bedroom a risk assessment is undertaken beforehand. <i>Policy for Children Sharing a Bedroom</i></p> <p>No child is placed alongside another child in care without a thorough assessment and consultation with both children’s Tusla Social Workers. <i>Matching and Placements Policy.</i></p> <p>All Foster Carers receive at least one Unannounced Visit per year. Children are encouraged to express any concerns during this visit. <i>Unannounced Visit Policy and Guidance</i></p>

<p>Children may be at risk from Bullying due to their 'in Care' status</p>	<p>All Foster Carers and staff receive training on recognising signs of abuse and neglect. This includes recognising signs of bullying.</p> <p>FFI has a Bullying Policy which is shared with staff and Foster Carers. The policy includes guidance on the definition and recognition of bullying (including cyber-bullying), how to respond if bullying is suspected, and how to assess whether any incidents should be reported under Child Protection and Welfare Procedures. <i>Bullying Policy, Child Protection and Welfare Policy.</i></p> <p>FFI employs an Education Support Officer who links in with schools in situations where a child may be struggling. This includes a situation where a child might be subject to bullying.</p> <p>All Foster Carers receive regular supervision with standing agenda items for discussion that include 'promoting safety' of the fostered child. <i>Supporting and Supervising Foster Carers Policy and Procedure.</i></p> <p>FFI has a clear reporting structure where there are concerns that a child may be suffering from abuse or neglect. <i>Child Protection and Welfare Policy, Critical Incident Policy and Guidance</i></p>
<p>Children may be placed at risk of exposure to inappropriate or abusive materials either directly or indirectly through their use of social media and digital devices</p>	<p>FFI provides Foster Carers with a Handbook that contains information and advice on keeping children safe in their online activities, and in particular draws attention to the vulnerability of children who are fostered in the area of internet safety.</p> <p>FFI notes any known vulnerabilities children may have in relation to the use of internet and social media in a Safety Plan that is reviewed as required.</p> <p>All Foster Carers are offered training on internet safety</p> <p>When taking children on outings, FFI requires that Young People do not have access to devices overnight, and that these are handed to staff for safekeeping.</p> <p>All work smartphones/tablets/laptops in the possession of an employee while working with a child are password protected.</p> <p>FFI has a clear reporting structure where there are concerns that a child may be at risk of harm or abuse by exposure to inappropriate or abusive materials through their use of social media and digital devices.</p>
<p>Children may be at risk of emotional harm within the community when identified as 'fostered'.</p>	<p>All Foster Carers and staff receive training on recognising signs of abuse and neglect. This includes recognising signs of emotional harm.</p> <p>All Foster Carers complete a 'Safe Caring Plan' during assessment. This plan encourages Foster Carers to think about and plan for the integration of the fostered child into the fostering family. <i>Safe Care Policy.</i></p> <p>All Foster Carers receive regular supervision focused on supporting safety and development of children in placement. <i>Supporting and Supervising Foster Carers Policy and Procedure.</i></p>

	<p>FFI has a clear reporting structure where there are concerns that a child may be suffering from abuse or neglect. <i>Child Protection and Welfare Policy, Critical Incident Policy and Guidance</i></p>
<p>Children may be at risk of harm during access – e.g. risk of abduction or sexual abuse.</p>	<p>All Foster Carers and staff receive training on recognising signs of abuse and neglect.</p> <p>All children coming into placement have an individualised placement plan that includes detailed information regarding access to family and friends, based on prior knowledge. Foster Carers will therefore have a written record of any restricted access arrangements in place. <i>Matching and Placements Policy</i></p> <p>All Foster Carers receive regular supervision with standing agenda items for discussion that include ‘promoting Belonging and Kinship’ of the fostered child. This includes exploration of access to family and friends and Foster Carers are encouraged to be alert to any signs of distress following access. <i>Supporting and Supervising Foster Carers Policy and Procedure.</i></p> <p>Foster Carers keep records on children placed with them which help to identify any behavioural ‘themes’ that may emerge following access.</p> <p>FFI has a clear reporting structure where there are concerns that a child may be suffering from abuse or neglect. <i>Child Protection and Welfare Policy, Critical Incident Policy and Guidance</i></p>
<p>Children may suffer harm through accidental means</p>	<p>All FFI Foster Carers undergo a comprehensive Health and Safety Check of their home in line with Carer Reviews. This includes, where applicable, checks of activities undertaken by the Foster Carer family that might involve a risk to the child – e.g. boats, swimming pools, holiday homes.</p> <p>All FFI Foster Carers undergo Health and Safety and First Aid Training.</p> <p>All group activity venues are risk assessed prior to any activity involving children taking place. Adequate adult child ratios are maintained for all activities and staff are expected to adhere to the FFI Code of Behaviour at all times.</p>
<p>Staff may not recognise signs of abuse or risk of abuse.</p>	<p>All staff with the responsibility for placements are fully qualified Social Workers and ALL staff receive Children First Training on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>All staff receive supervision on a regular basis and are subject to an annual appraisal.</p> <p>FFI has policies and guidance in relation to: Child Sexual Exploitation, Missing Children, Bullying, Extremism and Radicalisation, Gang Activity and Honour Based Abuse. Staff are required to read these policies as part of their induction.</p>
<p>Staff may be unaware of their responsibilities under the Children First Act and Children First Guidance 2017 and</p>	<p>All staff undertake mandatory training in relation to their responsibilities under the Children First Act 2015 and Children First Guidance 2017.</p> <p>All staff are aware of their responsibilities to report without delay where there are reasonable grounds for concern in respect of any child protection or welfare concern.</p>

<p>as mandated persons, to report abuse or concerns.</p>	<p>Staff are aware that their duty under the FFI Child Protection and Welfare Policy relates to the safety and welfare of all children.</p> <p>All staff are subject to the FFI code of conduct, which outlines the obligation to report any suspicions of abuse. Staff are obliged to read the code of conduct as part of their induction. <i>Staff Code of Conduct Policy</i></p> <p>There is a robust supervision and appraisal process in place, to address any perceived shortfall.</p>
<p>Foster Carers may not recognise signs of abuse or risk of abuse.</p>	<p>All Foster Carers are issued with the Foster Carer Handbook when they are approved and this contains information about recognising abuse and its definitions.</p> <p>All Foster Carers have training in Children First and Safeguarding practices and this includes recognising potential abuse.</p> <p>FFI has policies and guidance in relation to: Child Sexual Exploitation, Missing Children, Bullying, Extremism and Radicalisation, Gang Activity and Honour Based Abuse. These form part of the Foster Carer Handbook which all Foster Carers are expected to read.</p> <p>All Foster Carers are part of the Carer Review process which specifically addresses their ability to keep children safe from harm.</p>
<p>Foster Carers may be unaware of their responsibilities, under the Children First Act and Children First Guidance 2017 and as mandated persons, to report abuse or concerns</p>	<p>Foster Carers receive training on the role and duties of mandated persons on a regular basis.</p> <p>Foster Carers receive Children First Training and Safeguarding Training so that they are aware of the signs and definitions of abuse.</p> <p>There is a Carer Review process that is designed to identify any shortfall in carers carrying out their duties and invites comments from children, Tusla Social Workers and Link Social Workers.</p>
<p>Personal sensitive information may be shared inappropriately in breach of Data Protection legislation and agency procedures</p>	<p>FFI has a clear policy in relation to photographing of foster children and the publication or uploading of images to any social media site is forbidden. <i>Photographing and Filming of Children Policy</i></p> <p>Foster Carers receive advice on the Photographing and Filming Policy in the Carer Handbook.</p> <p>Clear written consent is sought at the time of placement from the child's legal guardian for the type of photographing or filming allowed in relation to the particular child.</p> <p>FFI is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation and, as such, utilises state of the art processes to keep personal data safe. This includes adhering to the principle of 'Data Protection by Design' and restricting access to personal data to a 'need-to-know' basis.</p>

PROCEDURES

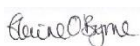
Our Child Safeguarding Statement has been developed in line with the requirements under the Children First Act 2015, Children First Guidance 2017 and Tusla's Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice. In addition to the procedures listed in our risk assessment, the following procedures support our intention to safeguard children while they are availing of our service:

- 🌈 Procedure for maintaining a list of the persons in FFI who are mandated persons
- 🌈 Appropriate training to ensure that all staff who are mandated persons, and Foster Carers understand their responsibilities
- 🌈 Procedure for appointing a relevant person under the Children First Act 2015
- 🌈 Procedure for Quality Assuring and checking all Foster Carer Assessments prior to presentation at the Tusla Foster Carer Committee
- 🌈 Procedure for preparing a Family Safe Care Plan
- 🌈 Procedure for Matching and Placements to ensure as far as possible that a child's needs are met in placement, including safeguarding needs.

All policies listed in this Child Safeguarding Statement and in the FFI Child Protection and Welfare Policy are available on request from the relevant person.

IMPLEMENTATION

FFI recognises that implementation is an ongoing process. Our Child Safeguarding Statement will be displayed in our offices, on our website and copies will be circulated to all staff and foster carers and relevant Tusla offices. Copies will be made available to members of the public on request. We are committed to keeping under review all procedures which keep children free from harm while availing of our services. This Child Safeguarding Statement will be reviewed on 20th January 2025 or as soon as practicable after there has been a material change in any matter to which the statement refers.

Signed (Provider):	
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For queries, please contact the Relevant Person under the Children First Act 2015:

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