

Looked after children

“A child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours is known as a looked after child. Looked after children are also often referred to as children in care, a term which many children and young people prefer.”

“.....in general, looked after children are:

- *living with foster parents*
- *living in a residential children's home or*
- *living in residential settings like schools or secure units”*

NSPCC

The Life Nursery is committed to providing quality provision based on equality of opportunity for all children and their families. All staff in the nursery are committed to doing all they can to enable ‘looked after’ children in our care to achieve and reach their full potential.

The Life Nursery recognise that children who are being looked after have often experienced traumatic situations; physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect. However, the nursery also recognise that not all looked after children have experienced abuse and that there are a range of reasons for children to be taken in to the care of the local authority. Whatever the reason, a child’s separation from their home and family signifies a disruption in their lives that has an impact on their emotional well-being. Most local authorities do not place children under five with foster carers who work outside the home; however, there are instances when this does occur or where the child has been placed with another family member who works. It is not appropriate for a looked after child who is under two years to be placed in a day care setting in addition to a foster placement.

The Life Nursery place emphasis on promoting children’s right to be strong, resilient and listened to. Our policy and practice guidelines for looked after children are based on two important concepts: attachment and resilience. The basis of this is to promote secure attachments in children’s lives, as the foundation for resilience. These aspects of well-being underpin the child’s responsiveness to learning and enable the development of positive dispositions for learning. For young children to get the most out of educational opportunities they need to be settled enough with their carer to be able to cope with further separation, a new environment and new expectations made upon them.

Principles

- The term 'looked after child' denotes a child's current legal status; this term is never used to categorise a child as standing out from others. The Life Nursery do not refer to such a child using acronyms such as LAC.
- We offer places to two-year-old children who are in care. In such cases, the child should show signs of having formed a secure attachment to the carer, and the placement in the setting will last a minimum of one term, however, we understand that situations can change, and this may not be possible.
- The Life Nursery offer places for funded two, three and four-year-olds who are in care to ensure they receive their entitlement to early education. We expect that a child will have formed a secure attachment to the carer. The nursery will expect that the placement in the setting will last a minimum of one term, however we understand that a situation may arise whereby this is not possible.
- Where a child who normally attends The Life Nursery is taken into care and is cared for by a local foster carer, we will continue to offer the placement for the child.

Procedures

- The designated person for looked after children is the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- Every child is allocated a key person once they start. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will ensure the key person has the information, support and training necessary to meet the looked after child's needs.
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead liaises with agencies, professionals and practitioners involved with the child and his or her family and ensure that appropriate information is gained and shared with the key person.
- The Life Nursery recognises the role of the local authority children's social care department as the child's 'corporate parent' and the key agency in determining what takes place with the child. Nothing changes, especially with regard to the birth parent's or foster carer's role in relation to the setting, without prior discussion and agreement with the child's social worker.
- At the start of a child starting nursery there is a 'Team Around the Child' meeting to determine the objectives of their time at nursery and draw up a care plan incorporates the child's learning needs. This plan is reviewed after two weeks, six weeks and three months. Thereafter at three to six monthly intervals.
- The care plan needs to consider issues for the child such as:
 - their emotional needs and how they are to be met;
 - how any emotional issues and problems that affect behaviour are to be managed;
 - their sense of self, culture, language(s) and identity – and how this is to be supported;
 - their need for sociability and friendship;
 - their interests and abilities and possible learning journey pathway; and
 - how any special needs will be supported.
- In addition the care plan will also consider:
 - how information will be shared with the foster carer and local authority (as the 'corporate parent') as well as what information is shared with whom and how it will be recorded and stored;
 - what contact the child has with his/her birth parent(s) and what arrangements will be in place for supervised contact. If this is to be at the nursery, when, where and what form the contact will take will be discussed and agreed;

- what written reporting is required;
- wherever possible, and where the plan is for the child to return home, the birth parent(s) should be involved in planning; and
- with the social worker's agreement, and as part of the plan, the birth parent(s) should be involved in the setting's activities that include parents, such as outings and fun-days etc alongside the foster carer.
- The settling-in process for the child is agreed. It should be the same as for any other child, with the foster carer taking the place of the parent, unless otherwise agreed. It is even more important that the 'proximity' stage is followed until it is visible that the child has formed a sufficient relationship with his or her key person for them to act as a 'secure base' to allow the gradual separation from the foster carer. This process may take longer in some cases, so time needs to be allowed for it to take place without causing further distress or anxiety to the child.
- In the first two weeks after settling-in, the child's well-being is the focus of observation, their sociability and their ability to manage their feelings with or without support.
- Further observations about communication, interests and abilities will be noted to form a picture of the whole child in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage prime and specific areas of learning and development.
- Concerns about the child will be noted in the child's file and discussed with the foster carer.
- If the concerns are about the foster carer's treatment of the child, or if abuse is suspected, these are recorded in the child's file and reported to the child's social care worker according to the setting's safeguarding children procedure.
- Regular contact should be maintained with the social worker through planned meetings that will include the foster carer.
- The transition to nursery/school will be handled sensitively. The Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or the child's key person will liaise with the nursery/school, passing on relevant information and documentation with the agreement of the looked after child's birth parents.

Further guidance

- NSPCC
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)
- The Bradford Partnership

This policy was reviewed by Louise Gray, Nursery Manager and Kirsty Beck, Deputy Manager – September 2024