

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

For the majority of children who have experienced parental abuse and neglect, fostering, adoption or special guardianship (in England and Wales) provide safe havens, and families in which to develop and thrive. Sadly for some children this is not always the case.

This guide to reflective practice is based on the findings from the first study to focus primarily on children who had been seriously harmed while living with foster carers, adopters or special guardians. These children were the subjects of local case reviews undertaken in the UK between January 2007 and July 2019. The study, entitled *Safeguarding Children living with Foster Carers, Adopters and Special Guardians: Learning from case reviews 2007–2019*, examines these reviews. It identifies emerging issues and themes, and draws out the dilemmas and challenges for practitioners and managers in the different agencies involved. Areas of particular concern are highlighted, including: assessing and selecting carers, making appropriate placements for children, and supporting children and carers.

Fifty-two serious case reviews met the study criteria. The majority (45) of the reviews were from England, six were from Wales and one was from Scotland; no equivalent reviews from Northern Ireland met the study criteria. The reviews related to 98 children, of whom 19 died and 79 suffered significant harm. At the time of the incident, children's social care had been involved in 46 cases.

How children died was related to their age, but not to their gender. Younger children died as a result of abuse or neglect, while it was older children who were more likely to have taken their own lives. The majority of children who were abused or neglected had been sexually (62%) or physically (29%) harmed, with children in middle to late childhood, particularly girls, being most vulnerable to being sexually assaulted. Children with disabilities are particularly defenceless; they were over-represented in the study sample and a greater proportion had died than children without disabilities. The study identified a series of issues where professional culture, systems and practice required careful review and improvement.

This short guide sets out some of the relevant and recurring issues identified in the full study, and poses a series of questions for

practitioners to focus attention on how day-to-day practice can address these critical learning points.

*Safeguarding Children living with Foster Carers, Adopters and Special Guardians: Learning from case reviews 2007-2019* is published by CoramBAAF and can be purchased at: [www.corambaaf.org.uk/bookshop](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk/bookshop).

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**Note:** It is important that this guide be read in conjunction with the full study. The practice points and questions are based on the issues identified in the reviews studied. They are not intended to be a comprehensive set of practice guidelines and should assist, not replace, professional judgements. More detailed information and guidance can be found in CoramBAAF's practice guides for professionals and practitioners, which focus on a wide range of issues, including making fostering and adoption assessments, conducting foster carer reviews, running fostering and adoption panels, placing children, achieving best practice in special guardianship, and supporting carers. Key publications have been listed at the end of this guide.

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