



Little Forest Folk

Whistleblowing Policy

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Reviewed by: Xiao Flynn

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Statement of Intent

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within their setting. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances, it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may be just suspicion of malpractice and wrongdoing at work.

Little Forest Folk is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with this commitment, we encourage employees and others with genuine concerns about any person linked with the setting and/or others (e.g. Parents / Carers) to come forward and voice those concerns.

This policy document makes it clear that employees, Parents/Carers and others can do so without fear or reprisals. The Whistleblowing Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees and others to raise such concerns within Little Forest Folk rather than overlooking the problem.

The procedure allows employees, Parents/Carers and outside agencies to raise concerns about the Management/Staff of Little Forest Folk.

Aim

This policy aims to:

- Provide avenues for you to raise genuine concerns and receive feedback on any action taken;
- Allow you to take the matter further if you are dissatisfied with the outcome or response;
- Reassure you that steps will be taken to protect you from reprisals or victimisation for
- whistleblowing in good faith.

There are existing procedures in place to enable you to lodge a grievance relating to staff's own employment, Parent / Carer concerns or complaints, and issues raised by outside agencies.

This Whistleblowing policy is intended to cover genuine concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures.

That concern may be about something that:

- Is against the policies and procedures of Little Forest Folk;
- Falls below established standards of practice;



- Amounts to improper conduct;
- Is a Health and Safety risk, including risks to the public as well as children, other colleagues, Parents / Carers and others;
- Contradicts Little Forest Folk's Code of Conduct;
- Contributes to a safeguarding risk involving children in the care of Little Forest Folk;

The procedure will be communicated to all employees as well as Parents / Carers and others.

Harassment or Victimisation

Little Forest Folk recognise that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal. Little Forest Folk will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith. However, should you feel that you have suffered harassment, either directly or indirectly as a result of raising a concern, you should refer to the Employees Handbook or Complaints Policy.

This does not mean that if you are already the subject of disciplinary or redundancy procedures, that those procedures will be halted as a result of your whistleblowing. This applies to Parents / Carers of the setting who then decide to seek alternative childcare.

Confidentiality

Little Forest Folk will do its best to protect your identity when you raise a concern. However, it must be appreciated that, in the interests of natural justice, any investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement by you may be required as part of the evidence.

Anonymous Allegations

You are strongly encouraged to put your name to any allegation. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful. Anonymous allegations will be considered and any action taken at the discretion of Little Forest Folk and in conjunction with the relevant agencies where appropriate.

In exercising this discretion, the following factors will be taken into account when considering how to deal with any allegations:

- The seriousness of the issues raised;
- The credibility of the allegation;
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

Malicious or Vexatious Allegations - Staff

If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make a malicious or vexatious allegation, disciplinary action may be taken against you in accordance with the Little Forest Folk's Procedures.

How to Raise a Concern: Employees

As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your immediate Line Manager or the setting Manager. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who you think may be involved in the malpractice. For example, if you believe that your Line Manager is involved, you should approach the Nursery Manager.



If you feel your Manager may be involved, you should approach the Operations Manager.

All Little Forest Folk employees can also use SafeCall to report any concerns. SafeCall is an independent external reporting channel where you may raise your concerns and be assured, they will be fully addressed. All calls are treated with utmost confidentiality by independent staff who will, should you wish for whatever reason, not disclose your name to Bright Stars

SafeCall can be contacted 0800 915 1571 at any time. Alternatively, SafeCall can be contacted via the web: www.safecall.co.uk/report.

With specific regard to Safeguarding issues that may involve a member of staff, you should initially consult with the senior management of Little Forest Folk. If you suspect they or the owner may be related to the issue you should contact the relevant childcare officer attached to the setting (Merton's safeguarding hub).

If an employee doesn't feel able to make a complaint to their employer, there are also further avenues they can pursue which include:

1. NSPCC whistleblowing advice line is available. Staff can call 0800 0280285 – 08:00 to 20:00, Monday to Friday and 09:00 to 18:00 at weekends. The email address is: help@nspcc.org.uk. Alternatively, staff can write to: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH.
2. Further information and guidance about whistleblowing can found at <https://www.gov.uk/whistleblowing>

For more information refer to Little Forest Folk's Safeguarding Policy.

Concerns are better raised in writing. You are advised to set out the background and history of your concerns, giving names, dates and places, where possible, and the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation.

The earlier you express your concern, the easier it is for Little Forest Folk or the relevant Childcare Officer attached to the setting to take action. All staff need to be aware that it is a disciplinary offence not to report concerns about the conduct of a colleague that could place a child at risk.

Although you are not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for initial enquiries to be made.

How Little Forest Folk will Respond

The action taken by Little Forest Folk will depend on the nature of the concern. The matters raised may:

- Be investigated internally;
- Be referred to the Police.

If the allegation is made against another Little Forest Folk employee, the Children and Families Hub for Merton and LADO will be contacted within 4 hours of the allegation being made. Little Forest Folk will not investigate such allegations unless instructed to do so. Contact details are available at the end of this policy. Ofsted will also be informed no later than 14 days after the allegation is raised.



Allegations include direct verbal or written comments which call into question a member of staff's appropriate handling of a child, abuse of a child, or their inability to protect children from unsuitable adults or unsuitable / unsafe resources / environment.

Allegations referred directly to the Childcare Officer or Social Services will be dealt with in accordance with their policies and procedures. Any person who is the subject of an allegation should, at the appropriate times be given details of the allegation in order to respond.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for an investigation. The following process will be followed in the event of complaints:

- Little Forest Folk will ensure that a letter is sent to confirm the receipt of the complaint.
- The complaint will then be fully investigated and within 5 days of when the complaint was first received. Little Forest Folk will endeavour to investigate all complaints in a non-discriminatory manner.
- A letter will be sent detailing how Little Forest Folk has dealt with the complaint.

How the Matter Can Be Taken Further

If the complaint has not been dealt with in a manner which is satisfactory to the employee, Parent / Carer or others involved, then they can contact Ofsted directly at the following address.

OFSTED

Picadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

TEL: 0300 123 4666

Enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

By registering a formal complaint with Ofsted an Officer in most cases will be sent to the Nursery to carry out a further investigation. If applicable, a report would then be sent with action points.

CONTACT DETAILS – Safeguarding Issues.

- The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO): 0208 274 4993 or LADO@merton.gov.uk. In their absence call:- the Children and Families Hub for Merton team 020 8545 4226 /4227 (9am – 5pm);
- Ofsted: 0300 123 4666 / 08456 404040 (as soon as possible and within 14 days of the allegation being made). The registered person MUST make the referral to Ofsted to comply with the statutory framework



For advice as to whether a family would benefit from enhanced preventative support you can call:
Supporting Families Advice Team: 0208 646 4038

Policy Statement

Little Forest Folk undertakes to ensure that all aspects of the nursery policies and procedures are kept under review and that they operate in a non-discriminatory manner.

The Management will ensure that all Staff, Parents / Carers, Voluntary Workers and others, are aware of the policy and any channels through which they lodge complaints and appeals on all matters.