

PRIVATE FOSTERING

Guide for parents



Is your child living in private foster care?

- Is your child living with and being looked after by someone else?
- Is your child below the age of 16? (18 if disabled)
- Is your child being cared for by someone who is not their parent, grand parent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, legal guardian or other person with parental responsibility?
- Is your child going to be cared for, for more than 28 days?

If you have answered yes to all of these questions, then your child is in private foster care.

Are you thinking about asking someone to care for your child?

There are many reasons why you might need to ask someone you trust to care for your child in a private arrangement; if you need to be admitted to hospital for a long period of time, are living abroad, or are in conflict with your child, you may turn to someone as a private foster carer.

Parents do not usually do this without a great deal of thought. It is important that you and the carer(s) have discussed why you want them to look after your child and what arrangements and contingencies should be made if for example your child falls ill or has an accident.

You should also have discussed your child's health and education and agreed financial arrangements.

What is Private Fostering?

A private fostering arrangement is when a child, under 16 years of age (or 18 if the child is disabled) is looked after for more than 28 days by someone other than that child's parent, legal guardian or close relative e.g. grandparent, aunt or uncle.

What to do if you are thinking of having someone who is not a close relative to look after your child.

If you are thinking of having someone who is not a close relative to look after your child or you think your child may already be in private fostering arrangement, you need to contact social services to register your situation as soon as possible. It is a legal requirement to do so and you may be committing an offence if you do not.

Call **0151 606 2008** and explain your circumstances and receive more information and advice.

You will need to give in some basic facts, such as:

- Your child's name, date of birth, religion, racial origin and language
- How long you expect your child to stay with the carer(s)
- Name and address of your child's carer(s) and anyone else who has parental responsibility for them
- The date the placement started (or is expected to start)
- The previous addresses of the carers for the last five years
- Any offences the carer(s) may have been convicted of. (Having convictions does not mean they cannot privately foster, but the convictions will need to be considered)
- If the carer(s) have been disqualified from private fostering before

How soon do parents need to notify the local authority?

Parents have a duty to notify the local authority (Council) Children's Services of the intention to place the child in private foster care, no less than six weeks before the arrangement is intended to start, unless it is made as an emergency. If this is the case, notification should not be more than 48 hours after the child has been placed with carer(s).

If any person realises that a private fostering arrangement takes place, they should notify children's services. The number is **0151 606 2008**.

Why is it important to notify Children's Services?

Every local authority has a legal responsibility to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered in their area is being safeguarded and promoted.

When Children's Services are notified, they want to ensure that children in private fostering arrangements are safeguarded and their needs are met. They will work with carers, parents and speak with children to ensure children are happy and there can be as little intrusion as necessary.

What will Children's Services do?

Children's Services will undertake an initial visit of the proposed arrangement to check that the accommodation and the private foster carer can meet the needs of the child. They will meet with the child and parents to ensure that everyone understands the arrangement that will be in place.

Children's Services will also inform local agencies such as schools and doctors about the arrangement.

Assessments will be undertaken by a social worker - these will be to examine the private fostering arrangement and the safeguarding of the child. A report will be written and discussed with managers in Children's Services to decide whether the arrangement is suitable.

If the arrangement is not suitable, the local authority may ask the private foster carer to make several changes, or alternatively may prohibit the foster carer from looking after the child.

If there is agreement that the arrangement is suitable, the private foster carer and child will be informed.

The local authority will support the private foster carer and the parents to draw up an agreement which will meet the child's emotional, educational, health and cultural needs.

How often will Children's Services be in touch?

Ongoing support to the arrangement will be provided and there will be a review of the arrangement after three months.

The social worker will visit the child every six weeks to assess the private fostering arrangement. If there are any concerns about the safeguarding and welfare of the child as a result of the child's assessment, the child may be visited more regularly.

If the child wants to be visited more frequently, the social worker will arrange for this to take place.

Working Together

It is important that you work together with the carers and that your child sees you are working together for their benefit. You need to provide carers with as much information as possible about your child.

You will need to agree what arrangements are to be made about your child's contact with you and make sure your child understands. Your child may have a lot of anxieties about living with carers and worry about when they will see you again.

Contact can be in lots of different ways – face-to-face is best, but if you are abroad or are a long distance away, it may only be possible to use indirect forms of contact such as telephone, e-mail, text messages and letters.

You will also need to think together about what to do if there are difficulties. The child may have difficulties in settling and show this through behaviour which may be difficult to manage – for example; tempers, unusual behaviour, bedwetting. You need to discuss these with the carers. If these become very difficult, the Social Worker can offer the carers advice and strategies to help with these behaviours. They could also offer training alongside other carers who deal with similar difficult behaviour.

What if approval of the placement is not agreed?

The Social Workers will discuss with you, your child and the carers what are the best alternative arrangements for the child. This could be a range of options, including:

- The child returning to live with you, with support services provided
- The child moving to live with a relative
- The child being looked after by the Local Authority

If approval has been denied by the Local Authority and you continue to place the child with carers, this may be seen as an offence.

If you wish to appeal against this decision, you should notify the Children's Services Department, in writing, at the earliest opportunity. You will then be advised of what action the Local Authority will take and any further action you may wish to take.

What if circumstances change or the placement ends?

It is essential that you keep in touch regularly with the child's carers and the Social Workers and inform them of any change of address or telephone numbers etc.

You should agree with the carers in what circumstances the arrangement should end and how – it is very upsetting for a child if this is done suddenly without preparation and planning.

If your child moves, you must inform Children's Services of the situation within 48 hours and give the name and address of the person who the child has gone to live with.

Help or advice

If you are unsure about any of the information and advice or would like further information about private fostering please call the Integrated Front Door on **0151 606 2008**.

Contact us

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