

PRIVATE FOSTERING



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Private Fostering Leaflet
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Information for parents and carers

WHAT IS PRIVATE FOSTERING?

Private fostering is when a child or young person under 16 years old (or 18 if they have a disability) is looked after for 28 days or more by someone who is not a close relative, guardian or person with parental responsibility. Close relatives include parents, step-parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents.

It is not private fostering if the arrangement was made by your local council.

People become private foster carers for all sorts of reasons. Private foster carers can be a friend of the child's family, or be someone who is willing to care for the child of a family they do not know.

Common situations may be:

- Children, adolescents and teenagers living apart from their families
- Minority ethnic children with parents working or studying in the UK
- Children with parents overseas
- Children living with host families for a variety of reasons
- Children on holiday exchanges

NOTIFYING US - WHAT THE LAW SAYS

By law, your local social or children's services must be informed about all private fostering situations. The child's parent(s), private foster carer and anyone else involved in the arrangement are legally required to inform us.

People involved in private fostering must inform social services in writing within the following timescales:

- If the child is not yet living with private foster carers - **six weeks beforehand**
- If the child will move in with private foster carers in less than six weeks - **immediately**
- If the child is already living with private foster carers - **immediately**

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU THINK A CHILD IS BEING PRIVATELY FOSTERED?

A wide range of people who come in contact with children including teachers, religious leaders, doctors and health visitors, should encourage the child's parent or carer to notify social services.

They should also ensure that we know about all private fostering arrangements.

You will not be breaching confidentiality by notifying us, but you will be helping to safeguard a child.

WHY DO WE HAVE TO BE INVOLVED?

The Children Act 1989 gives children's services a legal duty to safeguard the wellbeing of privately fostered children.

This includes making sure they are:

- Safe and well looked after
- Healthy
- Receiving a proper education
- Being encouraged to reach their full potential
- Keeping in touch with people who are important to them
- Living with someone who helps them value their culture and sense of identity
- Properly supported when they become independent

Despite this, many private fostering arrangements remain hidden, leaving children vulnerable to abuse and neglect. This was highlighted by the tragic death of privately fostered child Victoria Climbié.

WHAT WILL WE DO?

We will work in partnership with the child, parents and private foster carer to ensure that the best possible arrangements are in place for the child.

This includes:

- Visiting the child and private foster carer
- Helping to make sure that the child's racial, cultural, language and religious needs are being met
- Offering advice and support to the child, their parents and private foster carer.