

Do you work with children
or young people?



Help us to identify private
fostering arrangements!

Private fostering
A guide for professionals





When is a child privately fostered?

The legislation about private fostering arrangements is contained within the Children's Act, 1989. It is legally defined as an arrangement that occurs when a child who is under 16 (if disabled, under 18) is cared for by someone other than their parent or a close relative, with the intention that it should last for 28 consecutive days or more. Private foster carers are not approved as local authority foster carers and usually have had no training to become carers. Families find private foster carers themselves, and it is their responsibility to find carers that are suitable.

Close relatives are defined as step-parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts (whether of full blood, half blood or marriage/affinity).

Examples of private fostering arrangements

Each private fostering arrangement will be different, depending on the child's circumstances and needs. Examples of private fostering arrangements may include:

- A teenager living with friend's family because they don't get on with their own family.
- Children living with a friend's family because their parents study or work unsociable hours, which makes it difficult to use ordinary day care or after-school care.
- Children staying with another family because their parents have separated or divorced.
- A child from overseas staying with a host family while attending a language school, or overseas students at boarding school who stay with a host family during the holidays.





Private fostering is not the same as fostering

Private fostering is very different from the care of children by the local authority through approved foster carers.

Although most private foster carers do an excellent job, often stepping in when a family is in crisis, many privately fostered children experience feelings commonly associated with being separated from their birth families – loneliness, confusion and anxiety. If we aren't informed of private fostering arrangements the private foster carer and the young person will not be able to access the support that is available to them.

What is required of the parents and carers?

The law places a duty on the parents of the child (or those with parental responsibility) and the ‘foster carers’ to notify the local authority. This should be done as soon as the arrangement has been made.

Sometimes a placement is unplanned. In such cases, we should be notified as soon as it becomes apparent that the placement is likely to extend to 28 days or more.

However, families are not always aware of the requirement to notify us and this is why it is important that we have the help of professionals with this.





Signs to watch out for

- Has the child mentioned that they are not staying at their usual home or their parents are away for a long time?
- Does the carer seem vague about the child's routines (bedtimes etc), their health history, development checks and immunisation record?
- Has the school been informed of a change of address for the child?
- Is someone else collecting the child from school?

Things you can do in your workplace and school

- Familiarise staff with the film ‘Somebody Else’s Child’ (7 mins long). This can be found by visiting www.somebodyelseschild.org.uk
- Make sure everyone is familiar with and understands the term private fostering and understands their responsibilities regarding safeguarding.
- When a child is being registered at a GP practice or school ask them what their relationship is to the carer. Remember ‘aunty’ can be used as a colloquial term and may not mean blood relative.
- If you think you have identified a private fostering arrangement speak to the families who might be involved and ask the private foster carer and parent (or person with parental responsibility, if details known) to notify us.
- Let the private foster carer and parent (or person with parental responsibility, if details known) know that you will also need to inform us.
- Ensure school admission policy and practice is robust and that evidence of a child’s identity and the person with parental responsibility or relationship are seen.
- Inform us by calling **03000 26 79 79**.

Our role

Once notified we have a duty to contact the child, carers and parents. We will undertake checks and enquiries to ensure that the carers are suitable as private foster carers.

Our assessment will include:

- Visiting the proposed premises where the child/young person will be living.
- Speaking to all members of the household.
- Visiting the child/young person concerned.
- Making arrangements to support the child and placement. We have a duty to investigate and support private fostering arrangements.

For more information please contact the First Contact Service on:

 **03000 26 79 79**

 **scd@durham.co.uk**

 **www.durham.gov.uk/privatefostering**

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