

PRIVATE FOSTERING

Guide for Private
Foster Carers



Are you a private foster carer?

- Are you looking after someone else's child?
- Is the child going to be living with you for longer than 28 days?
- Are you NOT the child's grandparent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, legal guardian or other person with legal responsibility?
- Is the child below the age of 16? Or 18 if they are disabled?

If you answer yes to all of these questions then you may be a private foster carer, regardless of whether you are receiving payment.

What is Private Fostering?

There are many reasons why parents might need to ask someone they trust, like you, to care for their child in a private arrangement; if parents need to be admitted to hospital for a long period of time, are living abroad, or are in conflict with their child, they may turn to someone like you as a private foster carer. Parents do not usually do this without a great deal of thought.

It is important that you and the parents have discussed why they want you to look after their child and what arrangements and contingencies should be made if for example the child falls ill or has an accident.

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

What next?

If you think you may be a private foster carer, you need to contact Children's 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 for more information and advice. You will need to inform Children's Services of basic facts, such as:

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

What will Children's Services do?

Children's Services 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.

A social worker from 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.

They want to check that your household is safe and suitable for the child and what arrangements you have made for the child's health and education. They will ask you to fill in forms to check your records with Disclosure and Barring Services, Health, Education etc.

- They will help you work together with the child's parents
- They will help you to get the services you may need to meet the needs of the child
- They will help you get the support needed to care for the child
- They will want to discuss arrangements alone with the child if the child is old enough
- They will discuss arrangements with the child's parents
- They will discuss with you any arrangements that they feel are not satisfactory
- They will notify other agencies of the arrangements
- They will consult with other agencies to obtain information on the child

‘It is important that you and the parents have discussed why they want you to look after their child and what arrangements and contingencies should be made’



Working together

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

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

Contact can be in lots of different ways – face-to-face is best, but if parents 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.

The child may have difficulties settling in and show this through behaviour which may be difficult to manage – for example, tempers; unusual behaviour; bedwetting. You need to discuss these issues with the parents.

If it becomes a problem, the child's Social Worker can offer you advice and strategies to help. They could also offer you training alongside other carers who deal with similar difficult behaviour.

'It is important that you work together with the parents, and that the child sees you are working together for their benefit'

What to do if your situation changes?

You must inform Children's Services if there are any changes in your household circumstances whilst you are privately fostering:

- Change of address
- If someone moves into your house, or moves out
- If anyone living in your house commits an offence
- If you move to another Local Authority
- If your financial circumstances change

What if the placement ends?

You should agree with the parents the circumstances in which the arrangement should end, and what arrangements will be made for the child. It can be very disruptive and upsetting for a child if this is done suddenly without any warning, preparation or planning.

You must inform Children's Services within 48 hours of the arrangement changing and let them know who the child is now with and why.

Contact us

If you would like further information about private fostering please call us on **0151 606 2008**.