

What to do if you think a child is being privately fostered

Health, education and care professionals play an important role in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children as they are often the first people to become aware of such arrangements.

If you think that a child is being privately fostered, please encourage the parent or carer to notify social services. If you feel the arrangement has not been, or will not be notified, you should contact Specialist Children's Services directly. You will not be breaching confidentiality and you may help to safeguard the welfare of the child(ren) concerned.

Social Services can only work to protect privately fostered children if they know about them. It is vital that they are made aware of private fostering arrangements so that they can promote and safeguard the welfare of the children involved.

Social Services (Specialist Children's Services) responsibilities

Once Social Services have been told about the arrangement, they have a legal duty to check if it is suitable and the child is safe. A social worker will visit the carer, and discuss the plan with the child's parents, check the carer's suitability and where the child will be living.

Social Services will provide advice and support to parents, private foster carers and the child who is being privately fostered. They have the power to prevent a person from acting as a private foster carer if the care (or the accommodation) they

provide is not considered suitable, or if they refuse to comply with the requirements set out in the regulations. Social Services have a designated team with responsibility for private fostering in each area who can offer advice to professionals concerned about a child.

Next steps

Contact Specialist Children's Services on 03000 41 11 11 and ask to speak to someone about a private fostering arrangement if you need to:

- ➔ **advise about a proposed private fostering arrangement**
- ➔ **advise that you suspect a child may be living in a private fostering arrangement**
- ➔ **get advice on private fostering**

Further information for professionals is available on Somebody Else's Child website (British Association for Adoption & Fostering)
www.privatefostering.org.uk

Kent Safeguarding Children Board works to protect and safeguard the children of Kent. For more information about our work please visit
www.kscb.org.uk

This leaflet is available in alternative formats and can be explained in other languages. For further information, please call **03000 41 11 11**.

Private Fostering



Information for professionals

What you should do if you know a child who is living apart from their parents

This leaflet is for professionals who work with children and young people. It aims to give a better understanding of the law on private fostering and the role of social services (Specialist Children's Services in Kent).

The law regarding private fostering is very clear. Parents and private foster carers must notify social services about a private fostering arrangement that has been, or is going to be made. Carers often fail to do this because they do not know they have to.

About private fostering

Private fostering is an arrangement made by parents (or those with parental responsibility for a child) for someone to care for their child (aged under 16, or under 18 if the child is disabled) because they are unable to do so. Sometimes a young person has chosen to live elsewhere. If they are under 16 (18 if disabled) and living with someone who is not a close relative for 28 days or more, this is also called private fostering.

There are many reasons for a child being privately fostered. It may be because:

- ➔ a parent is ill
- ➔ a parent is in prison
- ➔ a parent is going abroad
- ➔ the relationship between the parent and young person has broken down
- ➔ family crisis or bereavement
- ➔ parents might be studying or working long hours
- ➔ a child has come from another country to study English privately or at a language school (see 'Information and advice for young people living with a host family')
- ➔ a child has come to England as a refugee

Private foster carers can be:

- ➔ extended family members such as great-aunts, great-uncles, cousins.
- ➔ someone who is called 'aunt' or 'uncle' but is not actually related to the child's parents
- ➔ a friend of the family who has offered to help
- ➔ someone who is not married to the child's mother or father but is a partner or ex-partner.

When isn't a care arrangement private fostering?

Not everyone who looks after someone else's child is a private foster carer. If a child is in care and if a local authority/council has formally asked someone to care for a child, this is not private fostering arrangement. If the carer is a close relative of the child, that is - a grandparent, aunt, uncle, step-parent (by marriage or civil partnership), sister or brother, they are not their private foster carer.

Potential safeguarding issues

An arrangement might have started out as private fostering but resulted in the child being trafficked, perhaps from another country. These situations, where parents have been misled into sending their children to England, believing they will get a better education, can lead to children being exploited. All professionals who come across children in their work can help to protect them by letting social services know if they have concerns.

Parents' responsibilities

If a parent is arranging for their child to be privately fostered, they must tell social services (Specialist Children's Services). Parents should provide the



prospective carers with as much information about their child as possible, including their health, dietary preferences, school, hobbies, religion and ethnic background. The parent keeps parental responsibility, meaning that they still make decisions about where the child is educated, what medical treatment they can have, and whether they can travel abroad.

Private foster carers' responsibilities

Private foster carers must legally notify social services (Specialist Children's Services) about the arrangement. Private foster carers are also required to tell social services within 48 hours when a child leaves their care. They must give the name and address of the person who will be caring for the child and their new address. They are responsible for carrying out the day-to-day care of the child placed with them and should care for the child as if he or she were a member of their own family, giving careful attention to the child's needs. A private foster carer cannot change a child's name.