

Social Services may also decide that there should be a limit on the number of children that you should be allowed to foster privately, or requirements might be imposed about the accommodation or the care provided. You will be notified in writing about these and you will have the same right to appeal against this decision as above.

If the placement is not agreed, parents will be told to make alternative arrangements for the child.

What happens when the private fostering arrangement is agreed?

If the private fostering arrangement is agreed, a social worker will visit you and the child regularly and will also keep in touch with the child's parents for as long as the arrangement lasts, or until the child reaches 16 (18 if disabled). If the placement comes to an end and you later decide to foster another child privately, you must give fresh notice to social services.

Making the private fostering arrangement work

It is important to work with the child's parents and the social worker to make sure things run smoothly. Keeping a child's routines, having their own belongings and having some structure helps them to settle into their new surroundings. The child's parents must give you and the social worker an address and telephone number where they can be contacted at all times. It would be helpful for you to ask the parents about any routines the child might have at home, these will help the child to settle and feel secure

with you in their new home. If the child has a different cultural, religion or ethnic background from you, it will be important to give this careful consideration. For instance how you will provide for the child's particular needs, help them to understand their cultural/religious/ethnic history and develop a positive sense of identity. You can ask the social worker for advice and sources of information, As well as getting information about the child you should ask for any personal items such as toys or photographs that might help the child settle into their new home.

A written agreement should be drawn up between you and the parents so that it is clear who is responsible for what. The social worker will be able to help you with this. Using this approach will ensure that everyone is clear about how long the arrangement will last and what the financial and contact arrangements will be between the child and their parent's/family.

Financial arrangements

This should be agreed between you and the child's parents. Social Services will not provide financial support for routine care of a child in a private fostering placement. If there are difficulties a further assessment may be carried out. Any financial support would be provided for a specific purpose under S.17 of the Children Act 1989 and would likely be a one off payment.

This information should be included in the written agreement so that everyone is clear about what has been agreed.

If you are claiming any benefits including Child benefit you will need to inform the Department For Work and Pensions (DWP) that you are privately Fostering a child. You should also let the DWP know about any money you are receiving for Private Fostering.

What if there are changes to the private fostering arrangement?

The social worker will explain which changes have to be notified to social workers.

Next Steps

Contact the Contact Cares Team on **01744 676767** and ask to speak to someone about Private Fostering arrangement if you need to:

- Advise about a proposed fostering arrangement
- Advise that you already have a child living with you in a private fostering arrangement.
- Get advice on private fostering.
- Advise on a change of circumstance that might affect your agreement.



**St Helens
Safeguarding Children
Partnership**

Private

Fostering



**Looking after
someone else's child?**

**Find out if you are a
Private Foster carer and what
it means for you and the
child.**

Introduction

Private Foster Carers are people who are looking after somebody else's child (under the age of 16 or under 18 if the child is disabled) for 28 consecutive days plus. This leaflet aims to provide a better understanding of the law on private fostering and the role of social services.

About Private Fostering

Private fostering is an arrangement made by parents (or those who act as parents) for someone to care for their child 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 called private fostering. There are many reasons for a child being privately fostered. It may be because:

- Family crisis or bereavement.
- A parent is going abroad.
- A parent is ill
- A parent is in prison
- Relationships between the parent and the person have broken down.
- Parents might be working or having to study for long hours.
- A child from another country has come to study English privately or at a language school.
- 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 a 'aunt', 'uncle' but is not actually related to the child's parents.
- A friend of the family offering help
- Someone, not married to the child's mother or father but is a partner or ex partner.

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

What should I do next?

The law requires anybody privately fostering a child or intending to do so to notify social services. If you are already caring for a child under a private fostering arrangement you must notify social services immediately.

If you are planning to foster a child privately you must give social services at least six weeks written notice. When the child comes to live with you, you must notify social services within 48 hours, In each case you will need to give social services information about yourself, the child or children you are proposing to foster, when the arrangement is due to start and how long it will last for.

Why do social services have to be involved?

Social Services have a legal duty to make sure that the welfare of all privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted and that they are living in safe and suitable surroundings. Social Services will provide advice to parents, private foster carers and any child who is being privately fostered.

In a private fostering arrangement, the parent retains parental responsibility. This means that the parent still has to make all key decisions such as where the child is educated, what medical treatment the child can have, and whether the child can travel abroad. A private foster carer cannot change the child's name. Social Services will allocate a social worker who can advise you about all this and other issues such as access to benefits, and other services available to help with the care of the child.

What happens next?

Once social services have been told of the proposed arrangement, a social worker will visit you, the child and the child's parents to discuss the plan.

They will need to check:

- Your suitability as a private foster carer this includes anyone else in the household who is over 16.
- Suitability of the premises where the child will be living
- Length of the arrangement
- The child's wishes and feelings about the arrangement
- Agreements made for the child's health and educational needs.

- Arrangements made for the contact between the child and their parents
- Financial arrangements that are in place or proposed.

The social worker will ask you to sign forms allowing social services to carry out reference checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service, probation service, local council, GP and education authority to make sure that suitable adults will look after the child. Everyone living in your household who is 16 or over will need to be checked against Disclosure and Baring Service records.

If you or others in your household do not agree to this, then you will not be able to check suitability to be a private foster carer and this could prevent us from agreeing the placement.

The social worker will write a report (assessment) about the arrangement and will include the information you have provided. Social Services will make a decision about your suitability to be a private foster carer and send you a letter telling you what the decision is.

What happens if the placement is not agreed?

Social Services can prevent you from being a private foster carer if it is considered that you or your accommodation is not suitable or if it would be prejudicial to the welfare of the child. If so, you will be told in writing. If you wish to appeal against this decision, you should do so within 14 days of being notified. In the first instance you should contact social services to attempt to resolve the disagreement. If you cannot resolve this with social services you may appeal to the Family Court within 14 days of notification of the decision