

Private Fostering

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1. Introduction and definition

Most children spend some time staying with friends and relatives at some time during their childhood. However, for some children and young people these arrangements can be longer term.

If a child or young person aged under 16 years (or under 18 years if they are disabled) stays with people who are not related to them for 28 days or more, this is known as a private fostering arrangement and special rules apply.

Private fostering is the term used to describe an arrangement made privately (that is without the involvement of a local authority) between a child's parent or person with parental responsibility and a Carer of their choice.

A child or young person is considered to be in private foster care if they are in the full time care of someone who is not directly related, nor is a legal guardian, for a total of 28 days or longer.

The period of 28 days does not have to be continuous. If, for example, a child regularly stays with a school friend's family and this arrangement adds up to 28 days or longer, after which he or she returns home to the full-time care of their parents, then this would not be a private fostering arrangement.

However, if a child is cared for by a non-relative or legal guardian but returns to the parent at weekends, then this is a private fostering arrangement.

2. Private fostering and childminding.

Private fostering is different from childminding in that the child in foster care live with the carer. Childminders can only offer daily care and occasional overnight stays.

Private fostering arrangements are used by some parents to meet the needs of their children. Such agreements are acceptable providing specific guidelines are followed for the protection of the child, the parents and the carers.

Some teenagers may choose to live with another family who agrees to care for them. The same rules apply.

3. Letting us know about a private foster care arrangement

What is best for the child or young person is always the first consideration even if the arrangement is not intended to be long term.

If you are looking after a child and think you could be a private foster carer or you are the parent of a child who is cared for by someone who is not a relative, contact fostering and adoption service for advice on telephone number 0800 083 7744 as you may already be involved in a private fostering arrangement.

You may also like to find out about other types of fostering by visiting our website and searching for the following:

- Mainstream fostering
- Specialist fostering schemes

4. How we can help you as a child or young person being privately fostered

It is our first duty to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children or young people is safeguarded and promoted, while respecting the parent's right to make such arrangements. To ensure this happens:

- Arrangements will be made for you to be visited at regular intervals throughout the arrangement
- You will be given an allocated worker so you have someone to contact if you are unhappy about the arrangements made for you. There is an expectation that allocated workers provide those they are supporting with their contact details so you can contact them directly
- You can ask us for advice or information at any time during the arrangements put in place by your parents.
- You can ask for an advocate to speak on your behalf if you are finding it difficult to say what you want to say.

If you need more information or advice please contact Call Derbyshire on 01629 533190 or Children's Rights on 01629 580000

5. How we can help you, as parents, to make appropriate arrangements for the care of your child(ren)

Under the Children Act 1989, we have a duty to make sure that the proposed arrangement will provide for the child or young person's needs and safeguard their welfare. These duties include:

- Working with parents to see if they need this arrangement and look at alternatives if necessary
- Clarifying how long the arrangement will last for
- Making sure that everyone involved is aware of the implications of these arrangements, this includes the wishes and feelings of the child or young person
- Assessing the prospective private foster carers' and their family's suitability for the role
- Ensuring that all the necessary requirements are met

We can stop a person from privately fostering if they, or their household, are considered unsuitable.

We can also impose restrictions upon the way a person may operate as a private foster carer. For example, the number of children they care for and/or the length of time an arrangement should last. Although, private foster carers have the right to appeal to a court against any such decisions.

If you're thinking about placing your child with a private foster carer, the first thing you need to do is contact us:

- At least 6 weeks before the proposed arrangement, and later within 48 hours of the arrangement commencing or immediately if the timescale is shorter.

- To complete a written notification of your intention

Even if you're arranging for someone to care for your child, you remain responsible for them in all ways, so be aware that:

- Separation even for short periods of time can be emotionally damaging, especially for very young children
- Anyone who has cared for someone else's child for 3 or more years has the right to apply to a court for an order granting them parental responsibility

It will be your decision and it needs to be made with the best possible information.

You'll need to provide the private foster carers with as much information as possible to enable them to adjust their lives to accommodate the needs of your child, especially about how long the arrangement is to last, how you intend to maintain contact and continue to be involved in your child's life. This information should be written down for them.

You'll need to include information about your family members and family friends, especially those with whom your child has a close relationship. You'll also need to provide the fullest possible information about his or her needs and routines, likes and dislikes, including details of their first language (if not English), culture, religion, diet, health and education. Most of all, you need to explain if your child has any special needs which come from disability or illness. In particular you'll need to give your written agreement for the private foster carer to be able to give consent for any medical treatment your child may need.

You'll remain financially responsible for your child and will need to agree the arrangements for meeting the costs of your child's care.

We would strongly advise you to have a written agreements signed by both parties setting out clearly how your child's welfare is to be safeguarded and what expectations you have of each other. By keeping this up to date and altering it as the need arises, there is less chance of any misunderstanding.

If you need more information or advice please contact Call Derbyshire on 01629 533190.

6. How we can help you, as a private foster carer, provide appropriate care for a child/children

If you are thinking about caring for someone else's child or young person, we will explain what this involves and provide advice on:

- How to work with the child or young person's parents
- How to help the child or young person you are caring for
- Your rights and responsibilities

Prior to a child arriving, we will:

- Arrange to speak to everyone involved to ensure that they full understand wha this entails and are aware of their responsibilities.

- Provide advice and support for planning the child's stay
- Help you get all the necessary information to meet the child's needs for the duration of the arrangement.

Once the arrangement has begun and the child is in your care you will:

- Receive regular visits to ensure that the arrangement is working well
- Have access to advice and support from a named worker should you require any assistance

Some of the things private foster carers need to know

If you are thinking of looking after someone else's child by private arrangement, the first thing you need to do is contact us:

- At least 6 weeks before the proposed arrangement and later, within 48 hours of the arrangement beginning
- Immediately if the timescale is shorter, or if you are already caring for a child who is unrelated to you

It is our duty to make sure all children are kept safe, and that people wishing to become private foster carers, and all other adults in their households are suitable. This means that:

- They must agree to police and other checks to establish their suitability to care for other people's children
- The accommodation in which the child will live must be suitable for the job of private fostering
- The arrangements proposed for a child, matches their needs and the care provided meets those expectations

As a private foster carer you must meet these expectations and agree to regular visits to check that the arrangements are in proceeding as planned. If these requirements are not met, we have the power to impose restrictions, including stopping you or members of your household from privately fostering children.

To make a private fostering arrangement is first and foremost a matter for the parents and, wherever possible we will want to enable them to make suitable arrangements and assist the private foster carer to meet the child's needs

When the child comes to live with you, you become responsible for their day to day care and upbringing. However, the child's parents remain fully responsible for them, not you as the private foster carer nor us as a local authority

It is your responsibility to make sure:

- The child is happy, healthy and that all their needs are met
- Your costs of caring for the child are adequately met, this is the responsibility of the child's parents
- We are informed of any changes to the arrangements or your circumstances

For more advice and information Call Derbyshire on Tel: 01629 533190