



# Private Fostering

Information and advice for  
Private Foster Carers

# INTRODUCTION

This leaflet is for private foster carers. It aims to give you a better understanding of the law on private fostering and the role of Children's Social Services.

## WHAT IS PRIVATE FOSTERING?

Private fostering is a private arrangement made by parents (or those with parental responsibility for a child) for someone to care for their child because they are unable to do so.

There are many reasons why a parent may be unable to provide full-time care for their child, such as:

- *A parent being admitted to hospital*
- *A parent going abroad for lengthy periods*
- *A breakdown in relationship between a parent and young person*

If you are thinking about looking after someone else's child in a private fostering arrangement, it is important that the child's parents tell you why they are unable to care for their child. You will need to know about the reasons in case you need to help the child understand.

## AM I A PRIVATE FOSTER CARER?

- *Are you looking after a child who is not related to you (a child or young person who is not a sister, brother, grandchild, niece, nephew or stepchild)?*
- *Are they aged under 16 (under 18 if disabled)?*
- *Do they live with you as part of your family?*
- *Is this a full-time arrangement?*
- *Is the arrangement going to last for 28 days or more?*

If you have answered 'yes' to these questions, then this is a private fostering arrangement and you are a private foster carer.



## WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT?

If you are already caring for a child who is privately fostered you must notify your local authority's Children's Social Services Department immediately (within 48 hours).

If you are planning to foster a child privately you must give your local authority's Children's Social Services Department at least six weeks' written notice of your intention to foster privately.

The details of who to contact are at the back of this leaflet.

## WHY DO CHILDREN'S SOCIAL SERVICES HAVE TO BE INVOLVED?

The law states that Children's Social Services has a legal duty to make sure that the welfare of all privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted.

Children's Social Services will provide advice and support to parents, private foster carers and the child who is being privately fostered.



## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Once Children's Social Services have been told about the proposed private fostering arrangement, they have a legal duty to check whether or not the arrangement is suitable. A social worker will visit both you and the child's parents to discuss the plan. The social worker will need to check:

- Your suitability as a private foster carer and the suitability of others in the household aged over 16 years
- The suitability of the premises where the child will be living
- How long the arrangement will last
- The child's wishes and feelings about the arrangement
- What arrangements have been made for the child's health and educational needs
- What arrangements have been made for contact between the child and his or her parents
- What financial arrangements are in place or are proposed

The social worker will ask you to sign forms that allow them to carry out reference checks with the police, probation service, local council, GP and education authority. This is to make sure that suitable adults will look after the child. Everyone living in your household who is over 16 years old will also be asked to agree to be checked in this way.

If you or others in your household do not agree to this process then we will not be able to check whether or not you are suitable to be a private foster carer and we may not be able to consider the placement as suitable.

The social worker will write a report (known as an assessment) about the private fostering arrangement and will include the information you have given. Children's Social Services will then make a decision about your suitability to be a private foster carer. You will get a letter telling you what the decision is.

## **WHAT HAPPENS IF THE PLACEMENT IS NOT AGREED?**

Children's Social Services can prevent you from being a private foster carer if it is considered that you or your accommodation is not suitable. If we decide that you are not suitable to foster a child privately we will tell you in writing. If you wish to appeal against this decision, you should do so within 14 days of being notified of the decision. In the first instance you should contact Children's Social Services to attempt to resolve the disagreement. If you cannot resolve this with Children's Social Services then you may appeal to the Family Proceedings Court within 14 days of the notification.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF THE PLACEMENT IS AGREED?

If the placement is agreed, a social worker will visit you and the child regularly, and keep in touch with the child's parents. This will continue as long as the placement lasts.

## MAKING THE PLACEMENT WORK

It is important that you work together with the child's parents and the social worker to try to make the placement as successful as possible for the child.

It is essential that the parents give you an address and phone number where they can be contacted at all times. The social worker will also need this information.

Ask the parents about any routines the child may have at home, as these will help them settle and feel more secure in their new home.

If the child has a different racial, cultural or religious background to you, it will be important to give this careful consideration. You will need to think how you will provide for the child's particular needs, help them to understand their racial/cultural/religious history and develop a positive sense of identity. As well as obtaining information about the child, you should also 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. Your social worker will be able to help you with this and will provide a written agreement form for this purpose. Using the form will ensure that everyone is clear about how long the placement will last, what the financial arrangements will be and what the arrangements are for contact between the child and their parents/family.

## FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS



Any financial arrangement is made between you and the parents and will not involve Children's Social Services. These arrangements should ideally 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?**

You need to let Children's Social Services know if there are any changes to the private fostering arrangement. This includes:

- *A change of address*
- *Someone else joining your household*
- *If you, or another person in your household is convicted of a criminal offence*
- *The death of a child or of the child's parents*
- *The private fostering arrangement ending - in which case we need to know the child's new address, who is looking after him or her and their relationship to the child*

## WHAT NEXT?

Contact Children's Social Services using the details below if you need:

- To advise about a proposed private fostering arrangement
- To advise that you already have a child living with you in a private fostering arrangement
- Advice on private fostering

Please contact Kent County Council Contact Centre:

**08458 247100**

If you would like this leaflet in another language or format please contact the Contact Centre on the number above or visit the website:

[www.kent.gov.uk/socialcare/children](http://www.kent.gov.uk/socialcare/children)

