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## **One Minute Guide: Private Fostering**

### **What is it?**

Private fostering is very different from the care of children provided by local authorities through approved foster carers. It occurs when a child under 16 (18 if the young person has disabilities) is cared for longer than 28 days by an adult who is not a relative. A private arrangement is made between a parent and carer. The child is not 'looked after' by the local authority under the [Children Act 1989](#).

A relative, in relation to private fostering, is defined by the Children Act 1989 as:

- a grandparent
- a brother
- a sister
- an aunt
- an uncle either through blood or affinity or
- a step parent

Therefore a cousin or great aunt is not a 'relative' as defined by law. As a child who is privately fostered is not a looked after child local authorities are not involved in the making of such arrangements.

Private foster carers should inform the local authority of any proposed arrangement at least six weeks before it is due to begin. If the arrangement is made in an emergency then the private foster carer should notify the local authority within 48 hours that the arrangement has begun. It is an offence for a private foster carer not to inform the local authority of a private fostering arrangement. Anyone other than a relative (as defined in the Children's Act) intending on looking after someone else's child (under 16 or 18 if disabled) for 28 days or more should notify LB Redbridge Child Protection and Assessment Team (CPAT), in the Children's Trust, on 020 8708 3781 or via [CPAT.referrals@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:CPAT.referrals@redbridge.gov.uk).

The local authority, private foster carer and the child's birth parents all have a legal duty to ensure the private fostering arrangement is safe for the child.

### **Why might children be privately fostered?**

There are a number of possible reasons, including:

- children sent to this country for education or health care by birth parents from overseas;
- children living with a friend's family as a result of a parental separation, divorce or arguments at home;
- a teenager living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend; and
- children living with host families for any number of reasons.

### **What is the role of the parent(s) in a private fostering arrangement?**

The parent(s) continue to have parental and financial responsibility for their child and need to provide financial support directly to the private foster carer. The agreement with the private foster carer should identify who is responsible for each area of the child's care whilst they are living with the carer.

The private foster carer should keep the parent informed about the child's health and development as far as possible. The parent/s should ensure that the carer knows as much as possible about the child and their needs before the child is placed with them and is proactive in maintaining contact with the child.

### **What is the role of professionals?**

Professionals who come into contact with children or adults and think that a private fostering arrangement may be in place should speak to the family to make them aware of this and that they need to notify the local authority about the arrangement. Even if the family agree to notify the local authority it is important that professionals immediately contact and inform the council of a possible private fostering arrangement. This is not a breach of confidentiality but vital to help to ensure that the child is safe and secure.

It may be that the parent of the child or the private foster carer is not aware of notification requirements and that they have entered into a private fostering arrangement.

Professionals can become more informed about private fostering by attending a [LSCB Training Programme](#) course or by inviting a member of the [Fostering Team](#) to provide a briefing to one of their team meetings.

### **What is the role of the Children's Trust in private fostering arrangements?**

Following notification of a private fostering arrangement a social worker will arrange to visit the private foster carer to undertake an initial assessment and checks. The assessment ensures the suitability and safety of the environment for the child. During the assessment the child is spoken to on his/her own in order to obtain his/her wishes and feelings. Private fostering arrangements are then subject to regular monitoring and the child and the private foster carer have an allocated social worker to support and supervise the arrangement.

### **Monitoring of private fostering arrangements**

A monthly monitoring meeting is held in the Looked After Children (LAC) Service attended by representatives from the Looked After Children Teams and the Fostering Team.

### **What information is available to the general public?**

Awareness raising learning and development activities take place regularly in the Borough to inform the workforce across all agencies, including the private, voluntary and independent sector, via face to face meetings, training courses and briefings.

A Redbridge-wide public awareness campaign is ongoing throughout the year involving newspaper advertising (e.g. [Redbridge Life](#)) and meetings with various community leaders and professionals. Information leaflets and posters are distributed throughout the Borough and can be made available in a range of languages.

### **What should I do if I think a child may be privately fostered?**

If you think a child may be privately fostered please contact the Duty Social Work Team at:

LB Redbridge Child Protection and Assessment Team (CPAT) on 020 8708 3781, or visit Lynton House, 255/259 High Road Ilford, IG1 1NN or email [CPAT.referrals@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:CPAT.referrals@redbridge.gov.uk).