

Children who are cared for on a full-time basis by people who are not their parents or a relative* may be in private foster care.

Private foster care occurs when a child under 16 (or under 18 if disabled) is cared for, and provided with accommodation, by an adult who is not a relative*, for 28 days or more, by private arrangement between parent and carer.

The local council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of privately fostered children.

* The Children Act defines 'relative' in relation to a child as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt. They could be a full or half relation, and could be related by marriage. The term also includes a step-parent. A cohabitee of the mother or father would not qualify as a relative, neither would extended family such as great aunt/uncle or parent's cousins. Where children are cared for by a 'relative', the situation is classified as 'family and friends care' and different arrangements apply – see separate leaflet for details.

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PRIVATE
FOSTERING



Do you look after
someone else's child?
private foster care

department for
education and skills

Private fostering situations could involve:

- children sent to this country for education or health care by birth parents living overseas
- children living with a friend's family as a result of parental separation, divorce or arguments at home
- teenagers living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend
- children whose parents' study or work involves unsociable hours, which make it difficult for them to use ordinary day care or after school care.

If you are privately fostering a child or children you should read the next few pages of this leaflet. They will help you understand what you must do as a private foster carer.



What must I do if I intend to foster a child privately?

The law requires that you tell your local council at least six weeks before the arrangement begins that you intend to privately foster a child, unless the arrangement is made in an emergency in which case the notification must be made within 48 hours. Make sure the child's parents give you as much information as possible about the child, including their health, eating preferences, school, hobbies, religion and ethnic or cultural background. This will help you to understand the child and take better care of him or her.

It is an offence not to notify within the time specified. If in doubt you should seek advice from the local authority.

How can I get help while I am privately fostering?

You can contact your local council for advice on caring for the child(ren) you are privately fostering.

Will I get any support?

There may, in some cases, be financial help available through the local council for children assessed to be in need. This may include a range of support services and, in exceptional cases, cash. There may also be local support networks in place for carers.

Can I claim social security benefits and how do I go about it?

You may be able to claim tax credits and/or social security benefits such as Child Benefit, and possibly Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance, if you receive Child Benefit. Contact your local Benefits Agency Office who will be able to advise you.

What if the child leaves my care?

You must tell your local council within 48 hours that the child has left your care. You must also give the name and address of the person who will be caring for the child.

Where do I go for further information?

If you require further information on the contents of this leaflet, please contact your local social services – the phone number can be found in your local telephone directory.