

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.

Copies of this publication can be obtained from

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Please quote ref: PFL3

department for
education and skills

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Published by the Department for Education and Skills

D35/0404/55

PRIVATE
FOSTERING



Is someone else looking
after your 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 your child is being privately fostered you should read the next few pages of this leaflet. They will help you to ensure that your child is properly cared for.



What must I do if someone else is privately fostering my child?

It is the parents' responsibility to ensure that the proposed private fostering placement is suitable for their child.

The law requires that you tell your local council at least six weeks before the arrangement begins, unless the arrangement is made in an emergency in which case the notification must be made within 48 hours. Knowing where your child is will help the council to make sure he or she is being well cared for. If you do not inform the council they may not be in a position to protect your children from abuse or neglect. Although the council will not be as directly involved with your child as the carer, it has a duty to satisfy itself that the welfare of your child is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted. It is an offence not to notify within the time specified. If in doubt you should seek advice from the local authority.

What do I tell the carer?

Give the person who is to care for your child as much information as possible about your child, including their health, eating

preferences, school, hobbies, religion and ethnic or cultural backgrounds. This will help the carer to understand your child and take better care of him or her.

Does this mean I am giving up all rights to my child?

No. You remain the person with parental responsibility for your child and should continue to be involved in all decisions concerning your child's development. It is very important that you remain in frequent contact with your child.

What will the local council do for my child?

The local council has a duty to find out whether the carer is suitable to care for your child. They will make regular visits to see your child, and they will give help and advice to the carer when it is needed. This is very important as in some cases a parent may not be in a position to find out much about how their child is being cared for.

What if I decide to change my carer?

Your local council is there to make sure that your child is living in a safe environment and is properly cared for. They can only do this if they know where your child is, so you should make sure they are told of any change of carer or address.

What if I can't find out what's happening to my child?

If the carer is not giving you enough information about your child, or you are unhappy with the standard of care he or she is receiving, contact your local council. They will do everything possible to help you, and to safeguard and promote the welfare of your child.