

London Borough of Sutton

Are you looking after someone else's child?

Essential facts about private fostering

Information and advice for private foster carers

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If you have someone else's child living in your home, you may be a private foster carer.

Are you a private foster carer?

If you answer yes to all of the following questions then you may be a private foster carer, regardless of whether you are receiving payment.

- Are you looking after someone else's child?
- Is the child going to be living with you for longer than 28 days?
- Are you **not** the child's grandparent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, legal guardian, or other person with legal responsibility?
- Is the child below the age of 16? Or 18 if they are disabled?

What is Private Fostering?

There are many reasons why parents might need to ask someone they trust, like you, to care for their child in a private arrangement; if parents need to be admitted to hospital for a long period of time, are living abroad, or are in conflict with their child, they may turn to someone, like you, as a private foster carer.

Parents do not usually do this without a great deal of thought. It is important that you and the parents have discussed why they want you to look after their child and what arrangements and contingencies should be made if, for example, the child falls ill or has an accident. You should also have discussed the child's health and education and agreed financial arrangements.

What next?

If you think you may be a private foster carer, you need to contact Children's Services to register your situation as soon as possible. It is a legal requirement to do so and you may be committing an offence if you do not do so. Call 0208 770 6001 and explain your circumstances for more information and advice.

You will need to inform Children's Services of basic facts, such as:

- The child's name, date of birth, religion, racial origin, and language;

- How long you expect the child to stay with you;
- Name and address of the child's parents and anyone else who has parental responsibility for them;
- The date the placement started (or is expected to start);
- Your previous addresses for the last five years;
- If you have been disqualified from private fostering before;
- Any offence you have been convicted of. (Having convictions does not mean you cannot privately foster, but the convictions will need to be considered).

What will Children's Services do?

The Children Act 2004 says that Children's Services Departments have a legal duty to make sure all privately fostered children are safeguarded and their needs are promoted.

To do this you will be visited by a Social Worker, who will assess the needs of the child and see what support and advice you may need. They will need to establish whether the household is safe and suitable for the child and what arrangements have been made for the child's health and education. They will ask you to fill in forms to check your records with Disclosure and Barring Service, Health, Education etc.

Children's Services will:

- Help you work together with the child's parents;
- Help you get the services you may need to meet the needs of the child;
- Help you get the support needed to care for the child;
- Want to discuss arrangements alone with the child if the child is old enough;
- Want to discuss the arrangements with the child's parents;
- Discuss with you any arrangements that they feel are not satisfactory;
- Notify other agencies of the arrangements;
- Consult with other agencies to obtain information on the child.

Following these enquiries, Children's Services will compile a report summarising all of the information they have gathered. Then a decision will be made by Children's Services whether the arrangement is approved

or not. You will be given the result verbally and in writing. This is to ensure the child is safeguarded.

If Children's Services feel that it is better that the child is not privately fostered by you, the Social Worker will discuss with you, your child, and the child's parents as to what the best alternate arrangements may be. This could be a range of options, including the child returning to live with their parents, the child moving in with a relative or another trusted friend, or the child being looked after by the Local Authority.

If the assessment is negative Children's Services will strongly advise against you continuing the arrangement.

If approved...

If the arrangement is approved, the Social Workers will continue to support you and the child. Children's Services have a legal requirement to see children in private foster care regularly; this will be at least every six weeks within the first year of care. They will request to see the child alone if the child is old enough. They will also arrange a review meeting with you every six months to see how the arrangement is working for you and the child and what support you may need. The Social Workers will help you obtain services from other agencies as well as Children's Services to help the child and yourself if necessary. The frequency of visits will reduce after the first year.

Education and Health

You will be given specific advice on Education and Health for the child. If the child is of school age, you will need to agree which school the child is to go to, who will inform the school of the arrangements, who will attend parents' evenings and school functions, who the teacher will talk to if there is a problem, and what help and support the child may need at school and with homework. The parents should be fully involved in this.

Regarding health, it needs to be ensured that the child is registered with a GP and Dentist. Any allergies, illnesses, or treatments need to be noted, and immunisations need to be up to date. You need parental consent in writing to be able to take the child to the doctor and in the

case of an emergency, the parents should be informed prior to seeking treatment.

Race, Culture, and Religion

It is important that children retain their cultural identity, racial identity, and religious beliefs. You should ask the parents about these issues so you can make any special arrangements necessary to carry on these practices. You may also need to be vigilant if a child is of a different ethnic origin to the local community and look out for discrimination and take action to deal with this if it occurs.

Finance

Finance for the child needs to be agreed between you and the parents. The parents will need to inform the Child Benefit Office that the child is no longer living with them and is now living with you. If you are claiming benefits you may be entitled to claim benefits for the child if the parents are not receiving benefits themselves.

Working together

It is important that you work together with the parents and that the child sees you are working together for their benefit. Parents need to provide you with as much information as possible about the child. You will need to agree what arrangements are to be made about the child's contact with the parents and make sure the child understands. The child may have a lot of anxieties about living with you and worry about when they will see their parents again.

Contact can be in lots of different ways – face-to-face is best, but if parents are abroad or are a long distance away it may only be possible to use indirect forms of contact such as telephone, email, text message, facetime, and letters.

The child may have difficulties settling in and show this through behaviour which may be difficult to manage – for example: tempers, unusual behaviour, or bedwetting. You need to discuss these issues with

the parents. If it becomes a problem, your Social Worker can offer you advice and strategies to help.

What to do if your situation changes

You must inform Children's Services if there any changes in your household circumstances whilst you are privately fostering:

- Change of address;
- If someone moves in to your house, or moves out;
- If anyone living in your house commits an offence;
- If you move to another Local Authority;
- If your financial circumstances change.

What if the placement ends?

You should agree with the parents the circumstances in which the arrangement should end, and what arrangements will be made for the child. It can be very disruptive and upsetting for a child if this is done suddenly without any warning, preparation, or planning.

You must inform Children's Services within 48 hours of the arrangement changing and let them know who the child is now with and why.

Children's Services can provide you with more information on all of the issues covered within this leaflet.

Call **0208 770 6001** to be put through to your local Children's Services department, or visit: **www.sutton.gov.uk**

