

London Borough of Sutton

# Is your child living with someone else?

Essential facts about private fostering

Information and advice for parents

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## **If your child is living with someone else, they may be privately fostered**

### **Is your child privately fostered?**

If you answer yes to all of the following questions then your child may be privately fostered, regardless of whether their carer is receiving payment.

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

### **What is Private Fostering?**

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

We know this is not usually done without a great deal of thought. It is important that you and the private foster carer have discussed why you want them to look after your child and what arrangements and contingencies should be made if, for example, your child falls ill or has an accident. You should also have discussed your child's health and education and agreed financial arrangements.

### **What next?**

If you think your child is being privately fostered, 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:

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

- How long you expect your child to stay with someone else;
- Your name and address and anyone else who has parental responsibility for your child;
- The date the placement started (or is expected to start).

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

Children's Services will:

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

If Children's Services feel that it is better that your child is not privately fostered by the private foster carer, the Social Worker will discuss with

you, your child, and the private foster carer as to what the best alternate arrangements may be. This could be a range of options, including your child returning to live with you, your child moving in with a relative or another trusted friend, or your 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 the private foster carer and your 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 your child alone if your child is old enough. They will also arrange a review meeting with the private foster carer every six months to see how the arrangement is working for them and your child and what support they may need. The Social Workers will help the private foster carer obtain services from other agencies as well as Children's Services to help your child and them if necessary. The frequency of visits will reduce after the first year.

## **Education and Health**

The private foster carer will be given specific advice on Education and Health for your child. If your child is of school age, they will need to agree which school your 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 your child may need at school and with homework. You should be fully involved in this.

Regarding health, it needs to be ensured that your 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 may need to give parental consent in writing for the private foster carer to be able to take your child to the doctor and in the case of an emergency, you 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 inform the private foster carer about these issues so they can make any special arrangements necessary to carry on these practices. The private foster carer may also need to be vigilant if your child is of a different ethnic origin to their local community and look out for discrimination and take action to deal with this if it occurs.

## **Finance**

Finance for your child needs to be agreed between you and the private foster carer. You will need to inform the Child Benefit Office that your child is no longer living with you and is now living with someone else. If the private foster carer is claiming benefits they may be entitled to claim benefits for your child if you are not receiving them yourself.

## **Working together**

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

Contact can be in lots of different ways – face-to-face is best, but if you 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.

Your child may have difficulties settling in and show this through behaviour which may be difficult to manage – for example: tempers, unusual behaviour, or bedwetting. The private foster carer needs to discuss these issues with you. If it becomes a problem, the Social Worker can offer advice and strategies to help.

## **What if the placement ends?**

You should agree with the private foster carer the circumstances in which the arrangement should end, and what arrangements will be made for your 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 your 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](http://www.sutton.gov.uk)**

