

Is somebody else's child living with you?

Essential facts about Private Fostering



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 more than 27 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, 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 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 the 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 0300 123 5012 and explain your circumstances for more information and advice.

You will need to inform the Children and Families Service 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 due to start)
- Your previous addresses for the last five years
- If you have been disqualified from Private Fostering before
- Any offences you have been convicted of? (having convictions does not mean you cannot privately foster, but the convictions will need to be considered).

What will the Children and Families Services do?

The Children Act 2004 says that Children and Families Services 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 two Social Workers, one will assess the needs of the child and one will assess 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 you have made for the child's health and education. They will ask you to fill in forms to check your records with the Disclosure and Barring Service, Health, Education, etc.

What will Children's Services do?

- They will help you work together with the child's parents
- They will help you to access the services you may need to meet the needs of the child
- They will help you get the support needed to care for the child
- They will want to discuss arrangements alone with the child if they are old enough
- They will discuss with you any arrangements they feel are not satisfactory
- They will notify other agencies of the arrangements
- They will consult with other agencies to obtain information on the child.

Following these enquiries, the 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 on whether the arrangement is approved or not. You will be given the result verbally and in writing.

If approved...

If the arrangement is approved, the Social Workers will continue to support you and the child. Children's Services has 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 you if necessary.



If not approved...

If Children's Services feels that it is better that the child is not privately fostered by you, the Social Workers will discuss with you, the child and the child's parents what the best alternative arrangements might 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 the child being looked after by the Local Authority. If approval has been denied by Children's Services then you must not continue to care for the child, as this may be deemed a criminal offence. You may appeal against decisions by informing Children's Services of your objection in writing. You will then be advised of further action you can take.

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/with homework.

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 a 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 Agency 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 benefit 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 messages 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. They could also offer you training alongside other carers who deal with similar difficult behaviour.

What to do if your situation changes

You must inform Children's Services if there are any changes in your household circumstances if you are Private Fostering:

- Change of address
- If someone moves into 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 arrangements 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 and 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 living with and why.



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

Call 0300 123 5012 or visit
www.cheshireeast.gov.uk

