

## What does the law say?

It is a legal requirement for private foster carers and parents to notify their local authority about their private foster care arrangements. The local authority must then satisfy themselves that the children in these arrangements are being safeguarded and cared for appropriately. If there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or could be harmed, then he or she can be removed.

Private foster carers and birth parents are supposed to inform ESCC six weeks before a private foster arrangement is made – or within 48 hours if the arrangement is made in an emergency.

## Family Plus team

Many people won't be aware that their informal arrangements are even known as private fostering – let alone that they need to notify the local authority. The Family Plus team aims to address this by providing a service for parents and private foster carers.

Through regular home visits we will assess the suitability of private foster carers and ensure there are no causes for concern.

We will also provide family support and advice to carers to ensure that they are getting the help they need. In some cases we can help them access benefits they are entitled to.

## Your responsibilities

If you are aware that a child is being privately fostered, you should encourage the private foster carer to notify the Family Plus team – explaining it is the duty of both parents and carers to do this. They can do this by calling 01323 463010. We will then arrange for one of our workers to visit them. If you are not satisfied they have notified us, you should let us know, particularly if you have any child protection concerns.

## Contact us

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# Family Plus team

## Information about private fostering for professionals



The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 introduced legislation to safeguard children who are privately fostered. As a result, local authorities should be notified about all private fostering arrangements. The process is managed by the Family Plus team, a service dedicated to working with and supporting private foster carers and the children they care for.

This leaflet is for professionals, including teachers, police officers, social workers, GP's and other health professionals who come into contact with privately fostered children. It explains how the Family Plus team will work with private foster carers and outlines your role and responsibilities.

## What is private fostering?

Private Fostering occurs when a child under 16 (if disabled, under 18) lives with and is looked after for more than 28 days by someone who is not their parent or a close relative – and these 28 days do not have to be consecutive.

By 'parent', we mean anyone who has parental responsibility (including step-parents) and therefore private fostering does not include foster and care arrangements arranged by social services. Private foster carers do not hold parental responsibility.

Grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts are all considered to be close relatives under the terms of the Children Act. They can be a full or half relation and can be related by marriage. However, great aunts, great uncles or parents' cousins are not classified as close relatives.

## What kinds of private foster care arrangements are there?

Presently, we don't know very much about private foster care arrangements across the UK. The British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) estimates that there could be between 15,000 and 20,000 children being privately fostered in the UK. There are many different kinds of private fostering situations and some of the most common arrangements are:

- children and young people whose parents live overseas – they have usually been sent to be educated in the UK.

- children whose parents are unable to care for them for a number of reasons, for example, parents may have more than one job or have to work or study for long, unsocial hours and therefore arrange for their children to live with someone else. For some ethnic groups, this is a culturally acceptable practice. In other situations, parents may have drug or mental health problems, that mean they cannot care for their children for periods of time
- children who are seeking asylum and who have arrived in the UK with adults they are not related to
- young people who are estranged from their families. They may have chosen to leave their parents' home for a number of reasons or have been forced to leave by their parents. The young people may make their own arrangements. For example, they may arrange to live with the families of their friends, girlfriends or boyfriends or with other adults.
- children who have been brought to the UK to be adopted. Until formal notice of intention to apply to adopt is given, these children are considered to be privately fostered
- children who have been trafficked and brought into the UK, for example, to work as servants or for prostitution. These are private foster care arrangements even though the adults these children and young people live with are not acting as parents.