



Nottinghamshire  
County Council

# Private Fostering

Information and advice for  
private foster carers



July 2005

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# Introduction

This booklet is for people who look after children as private foster carers.

The aim of this booklet is to help you to understand more about the law on private fostering and the role of the Social Services Department.

## *Are you a private foster carer?*

Read the following 4 questions and answer YES or NO to them:-

- Are you looking after someone else's child?
- Are they below the age of 16 (18 if disabled)?
- Are you a person who is NOT the child's parent, grandparent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, legal guardian or other person with parental responsibility?
- Are they going to be cared for more than 27 days?

If you have answered 'yes' to ALL these questions then you are a private foster carer, regardless of whether or not you receive payment for looking after the child.

If you are thinking about becoming a private foster carer, or if you are already caring for someone else's child you should:

1. Read this booklet.
2. Contact your local Social Services office and speak to the Duty Social Worker who will be able to give you more information and advice.

## *Note*

Being a private foster carer is NOT the same as being an approved foster carer for the Local Authority Social Services Department.

# Part One

## What is Private Fostering?

Private fostering is an option sometimes used by parents who are unable to provide full-time care for their children. There may be all kinds of reasons why they are unable to do so. Some examples are if parents:

- have to be admitted to hospital
- go abroad for lengthy periods
- undertake full-time education lasting several years.

Parents should not, and usually do not, seek a private foster home for their child without a great deal of thought. It is important that the child's parents tell you why they are unable to care for their child and that you try to understand and accept these reasons. Try to tell the parents as much information as possible about yourself, so that they can make the best decision for their child, and choose a home where the child will be happy.

## What should you do next?

- If you are already caring for a child who is privately fostered, or have received a child in an emergency, you must notify your Social Services Department immediately (within 48 hours).
- If you have arranged to privately foster a child you must give the Social Services Department at least 6 weeks written notice of your intention to foster the child.

The address and phone number of your local office is provided at the back of this booklet.



## What information will I be asked to provide?

The Social Services Department will send you a form to complete including:

- your name, address and telephone number
- the child's name, date of birth, place of birth, ethnic origin and language
- the names and addresses of the child's parents or anyone with parental responsibility
- the purpose of the placement and the date it started or is due to start
- the length of time that the placement is likely to last
- the name and address of anyone involved with arranging the placement
- the name and address of the person with whom the child has been living
- information about any offences of which you or any member of your household have been convicted
- any disqualifications or prohibitions imposed on you or any member of your household in relation to private fostering.



## Part Two

### *Why does the Social Services Department have to be involved?*

The Children Act 1989 and Section 44 of the Children Act 2004 say that the Social Services Department has a legal duty to make sure that the welfare of all privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted.

We also provide advice and support to parents, private foster carers and the child who is fostered.

### *What happens next?*

The Social Services Department has a legal duty to check that the placement, the private foster carers and their premises are all suitable. So once you have told us about the proposed private fostering arrangement, a social worker will arrange to visit both you and the child's parents to discuss the plan.

The Social Worker will ask you to sign forms which allow them to take out statutory reference checks with the Police, Probation, Child Protection Register, Department of Health, Local Authority, G.P. and Health Authority. This is to make sure the child will be looked after by suitable people who will not harm him or her.

Everyone living in the house who is over 16 years old will have to agree in writing to be checked in this way.

If you do not agree to this process we will not be able to check whether you are suitable to be a foster carer, and will have to consider you unsuitable.



A fee will be charged for the Police check. You may not have to pay this fee if you receive benefits.

You will also be asked to give the names and addresses of 2 people who have known you personally for over 2 years and who can give a reference about your suitability as a carer of children.

The Social Worker will write a report about you, the suitability of your home, the reasons and intended length of the placement, the involvement of birth parents in the

arrangements and the child's views about the placement.

The Social Services Department will then make a decision about your suitability to be a private foster carer.

You will get a letter telling you what the decision is. As part of the arrangement we might need to impose some requirements. For example, this could be about the number of children a private foster carer may have living with them.

You can appeal against these decisions if you disagree.

### *If the placement is agreed*

After the placement has been agreed, a Social Worker will regularly visit you and the child, and keep in touch with the parents, for as long as the placement lasts.





### *If the placement is not agreed*

If our decision is that you are not considered to be suitable to privately foster a child you will be informed in writing. If you wish to appeal against this decision, you should do so within 14 days of being notified of the decision. First you should contact the Social Services Department to attempt to resolve the disagreement. If you cannot reach an agreement with the Department, you may appeal to the Family Proceedings Court within 14 days of the notification.

It is an offence to accept the placement of a child when the purpose is for adoption. In general, only an Adoption Agency can arrange such a placement.

### *What if the placement ends?*

(i) If the child leaves your care, you must inform the Social Services Department within 48 hours, giving the name and address of the person who has taken over the care of the child.

(ii) If the child dies whilst living with you, you should notify the Social Services Department in writing within 48 hours.

## Part Three

### *Education*

If the child you are fostering is of school age you will need to discuss plans for their education before the placement starts.

It is best if both you and the parents can visit the relevant school before the placement starts so that you can:

- Give the name and address of the child's previous school(s) so that school records can be transferred and the new school will be aware of the child's progress and of any difficulties they have had.
- Discuss directly with the school the child's background and educational needs. Racial, cultural and linguistic needs should also be considered.
- Discuss how long the child will be at the school, admission dates, parents' evenings etc.

It is important that you regularly pass on to parents school reports and information about the child's progress.

In some cases when the child concerned had been living abroad for a period of time they may need to have a medical examination

before their entry into school. Children do not need to have the medical if any of the following apply:

- (a) the child has been abroad for less than 6 months
- (b) the child has been living in a country which is a member of the European Union (EU)
- (c) the child's parents are serving members of HM forces.



## Health

It is important that you get as much information as possible about the child's medical history. The parents should tell you about any illnesses, allergies etc. which their child has, and should give you the name and address of the child's last GP. They should also give you any immunisation or other personally held medical records so that you can keep them updated during the placement.

A medical record should be kept for each child. Parents and private foster carers should ensure that full medical information is given before the placement starts, and that this is constantly updated and stored.

If the child needs non-emergency treatment, you should let the parents know, and discuss the matter fully with them before any treatment takes place, as during the placement the child's parents retain all parental responsibilities.

It is possible for a parent to delegate some responsibilities to another adult, but they will need to record this clearly, in writing.

## Finance

Any financial arrangement is made between you and the parents. Ideally, these arrangements should be set down in writing. The Social Services Department will not become involved in this arrangement.

If you are claiming any benefits, including Child Benefit, you will need to tell the Benefits Office that you have a private foster child. You should also let them know about any money you receive for private fostering.

You can get advice about benefits from Nottinghamshire Welfare Rights Service, Tel: (0115) 977 4018.



## Part Four

### Working Together

It is important that parents provide as much information as possible about their child. It is also important that you keep the parents informed.

It is essential that the parents give you an address and phone number where they can be contacted at all times. The Social Services Department will also need this information.

As well as providing information the parents should also give you items which may help their child settle in a new home. These may be photographs of home and family, toys or other special items.

Ask about any routines the child may have had at home, as these will help them to settle and to feel more secure in their new home.

### The Placement Agreement

An agreement should be drawn up between carers and parents giving details of the arrangements and making it clear who is responsible for what, for instance medical arrangements. Your Social Worker can offer advice on this and a form for this placement agreement is provided by the Social Services Department.



## *How does the child feel?*

When children are separated from their parents or carers, and move to a new home, they will experience a number of different feelings. These may include feelings such as loss, confusion, anger and sadness.

Because of this, you will need to be particularly sensitive and considerate until the child settles into their home. The child may display unusual behaviour because of how he/she feels. Bedwetting, temper tantrums or withdrawn behaviour are all common. If you find the child's behaviour very difficult to cope with, talk to the child's parents or consult your Social Worker, GP or Health Visitor, who will give you advice on how best to deal with this.

The parents should try to visit your home with their child several times before the placement is made, as this will help the child to settle when he/she does move. Children should be allowed and encouraged to have regular visits with their parents and contact by phone and letter during the placement, so that they do not feel unwanted and abandoned.

## *Keeping in Touch*

Visiting arrangements should be clear to private foster carers, parents and the child before the placement begins. Everyone must be committed to keeping these arrangements.



It is important that you and the child stay in touch with their parents throughout the placement, so that they are aware of their child's day to day routine and progress and so that you can discuss any decision which needs to be made.

At the end of the placement, spend some time planning for the child's return home so that everybody can adjust to the idea of the child moving and prepare for the move itself.

## *Making the Placement Work*

It is important that you work together with the child's parents and the Social Worker to make sure that the placement is as successful as possible for the child.

It is helpful to have a clear agreement before the placement which is why Nottinghamshire Social Services Department encourage the use of the agreement form we provide.

Using the form will ensure that everybody concerned is clear about how long the child will be fostered, what the financial arrangements will be, when and how often visiting will take place.



## Part Five

### *The needs of Black and minority ethnic children*

Current research clearly suggests that it is usually best for children to live in a family that has the same racial, ethnic, cultural and religious background. Carers with a similar background to the child are better placed to help the child understand their racial history, provide for their particular needs and help them to develop a positive sense of themselves.

You will need to think very carefully before agreeing to care for a child whose ethnic origin is different from your own.

The law says that when assessing a child's welfare, Social Services Departments have to consider whether their religious, racial, cultural and language needs are being met. This will be an important part of the Social Worker's assessment of the suitability of the placement for black and minority ethnic children who it is proposed will be cared for in a white family.



## Part Six

If you need to tell us:

- about a proposed private fostering arrangement
- a private foster child is already living with you but you have not yet told the Social Services Department
- if there is anything about private fostering that you are unsure of and you would like further advice on

please contact your local Nottinghamshire Social Services Office and ask for the duty social worker.

### *Ashfield / Mansfield*

Meadow House  
Littleworth  
Mansfield  
Nottinghamshire  
NG18 2TB  
Tel: **(01623) 433433**

### *Bassetlaw*

Chancery Lane  
Retford  
Nottinghamshire  
DN22 6DG  
Tel: **(01777) 716161**

Queen's Buildings  
Potter Street  
Worksop  
Nottinghamshire  
S80 2BZ  
Tel: **(01909) 533533**

### *Broxtowe*

Prospect House  
Padge Road  
Beeston  
Nottingham  
Tel: **(0115) 917 5800**

### *Gedling*

Sir John Robinson Way  
Arnold  
Nottingham  
NG5 6DB  
Tel: **(0115) 854 6000**

### *Rushcliffe*

The Hall  
Bridgford Road  
West Bridgford  
Nottingham  
NG2 6AD  
Tel: **(0115) 914 1500**

Contact us if you would like further copies of this publication, or you need the information in a different language or format:



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