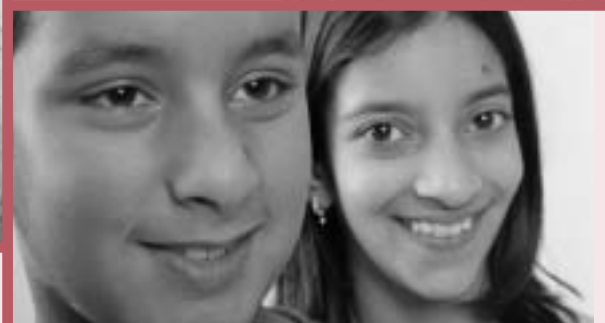




Nottinghamshire  
County Council

# Private Fostering

Information and advice  
for Parents



July 2005

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# Introduction

This booklet is for parents who will be placing their children with 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.

## *Do you mean me?*

Read the following 4 questions and answer yes or no to them:

- Is your child living with and being looked after by someone else?
- Is your child below the age of 16 (18 if disabled)?
- Is your child being cared for by someone who is not their parent, grandparent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, legal guardian or other person with parental responsibility?
- Is your child going to be cared for more than 27 days?

If you have answered 'yes' to ALL these questions then your child is being privately fostered, regardless of whether the foster carer receives payment or not. If this is you, or if you are thinking about placing your child with private foster carers, please:

1. Read this booklet.
2. Contact your local Social Services office and speak to the duty social worker who will be able to provide you with 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 cannot 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

If your child is living with someone else who is not related to them they are privately fostering that child, unless the child has been placed by a local authority or voluntary organisation or they will not be staying more than 27 days.

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 you tell the private foster carers why you are unable to care for your child and that they try to understand and accept these reasons.

All kinds of people are attracted to being private foster carers and may do so for a variety of reasons. Whatever their motives, private fostering means caring temporarily for someone else's child. You should try to get to know the private foster carers as well as possible before making a final decision about placing your child. This will ensure that you have the best possible chance of choosing a home where your child will be happy.



### *What should you do next?*

If you intend to place your child with private carers you must give the Social Services Department at least 6 weeks written notice. If your child is already staying with the carers you must contact the Social Services Department straight away.

### *What information will you be asked to provide?*

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

- your name, address and telephone number
- your 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 reason for 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
- the name and address of the proposed private foster carer



## 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. Once you have told us about the proposed private fostering arrangement, a social worker will arrange to visit both you and the foster carers, to discuss the plan.

The social worker will ask the private foster carer to sign forms, which allow them to take out statutory reference checks with the police, probation, child protection register, Department of Health, local authority, GP and health authority. This is to make sure that your 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 be checked in this way.

If the private foster carer and their family do not agree to this process we will not be able to check whether they are suitable to be a foster carer. We will have to consider them unsuitable.



The foster carers will also be asked to give the names and addresses of 2 people who have known them personally for over 2 years and who can give a reference about their suitability as carers of children.

The social worker will write a report about the private foster carers, the suitability of their home, the reasons for the placement, how long it is expected to last, your involvement in the arrangements and the child's views about the placement.

The Social Services Department will then make a decision about the private foster carer's suitability.

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

The private foster carer can appeal against these decisions if they disagree.

### *If the placement is agreed*

After the placement has been agreed a social worker will regularly visit the child and the carers, and keep in touch with the parents, for as long as the placement lasts.





### ***If the placement is not agreed***

If the carers are not considered to be suitable to privately foster a child, they will be told in writing by the Social Services Department. If the carers wish to appeal against this decision, they should do so within 14 days of being notified of the decision. First, the carer should contact the Social Services Department to try to resolve the disagreement. If they cannot reach agreement with the Department, they may appeal to the Family Proceedings Court within 14 days of the notification.

If at any time we have concerns about your child's welfare or safety in the private foster home, we will contact you so that you can make other arrangements for your child's care if necessary.

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 the care of the private foster carers, they 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 the private foster carer, they should notify the Social Services Department in writing within 48 hours.

## **Part three**

### ***Education***

If your child is of school age you will need to discuss plans for their education with the private foster carers before the placement starts. It is best if both you and the private foster carers can arrange to visit the relevant school before the placement starts so that you can:

- Give the name and address of your child's previous school(s) so that school records can be transferred and the new school will be aware of the child's progress at school and of any difficulties they have had.
- Discuss directly with the school your child's background and educational needs. Their 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 to ask the carers to give you school reports and information about the child's progress regularly.

In some cases, when the child has been living abroad 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

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

It is important to give the private foster carers as much information as possible about your child's medical history. Pass on information about any illnesses, allergies etc. which your child has and the name and address of the child's last GP. You should also give the private foster carers any immunisation or other personally held medical records to keep updated during the placement.

If the child needs non-emergency treatment, the private foster carers should let you know, and discuss the matter with you fully 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 these will need to be clearly recorded in writing.

## Finance

Any financial arrangement is made between you and the private foster carers. 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 let the Benefits Office know that you are no longer caring for your child on a full-time basis.

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



## Part four

### Working together

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

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

As well as providing information you should give the private foster carers items which may help your child settle in a new home. These could be photographs of home and family, toys or other special items.

The private foster carers should be told of any routines your child had at home, as these will help the child to settle and to feel more secure in their new home.

### The Placement Agreement

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



## ***How does your child feel?***

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

Because of this, the private foster carers 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 the private foster carers find the child's behaviour very difficult to cope with they should talk to you or consult their social worker, GP or health visitor, who will provide advice on how best to deal with this.

Try to visit the private foster home with your 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 stay in touch with your child and their carers throughout the placement, so you know their day to day routine and progress and so that you can discuss any decisions which need to be made.

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

## ***Making the placement work***

It is important that you work together with the private foster carers and social worker to make sure that the placement is as successful as possible for your 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.



## 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 placing your child with a foster carer whose ethnic origin is different from that of your child.

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

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  
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Nottinghamshire  
DN22 6DG  
Tel: (01777) 716161

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Worksop  
Nottinghamshire  
S80 2BZ  
Tel: (01909) 533533

### *Broxtowe*

Prospect House  
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Beeston  
Nottingham  
Tel: (0115) 917 5800

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Sir John Robinson Way  
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