



One minute guide

Private Fostering



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What is private fostering?

If a child under 16 (or 18 if they are disabled) is not living with their parent, close relative or legal guardian for more than 28 days this is usually classed as a private fostering agreement. The carer may be a family friend or neighbour, or a distant relative (as defined by Children Act 1989) such as a great-aunt, great grand-parent or cousin. The person who looks after the child is known as a private foster carer.

There should be an agreed arrangement between the carer and the child's parent (or whoever holds parental responsibility). The child is not considered 'looked after' by the local authority as they have not been placed with the person looking after them by children's social care. However, the local authority must be informed about private fostering arrangements.

Private fostering arrangements can go on for a short time or several years. They can end whenever the child, parent or carer decides. If the private foster carer is unable or unwilling to continue caring for the child, it is up to the parents to arrange alternative care, and children's social care should be informed.

Why are children in private fostering arrangements?

There are many reasons why children and young people are privately fostered. Some of them are listed below:

- Their parent or carer may be seriously ill.
- Children or young people may have been sent to this country for education or healthcare by their birth parents from overseas.
- Children or young people may be living with a friend/boyfriend/girlfriend's family because their parents have separated, divorced or there are arguments at home.
- Their parents may work or study long or antisocial hours and be unable to give them the day to day care they need.

The role of partner agencies

Adults in schools or nursery provision, health workers, police, social workers, volunteers and other professionals may become aware of private fostering arrangements due to their everyday conversations with children and families. Professionals from all agencies have a legal duty to notify the local authority if they become aware, or believe that a child is living in a private fostering arrangement.

The role of the local authority

The local authority has a legal duty to make sure privately fostered children are safe and well. When a private fostering arrangement is identified, the local authority (where the carer lives) must be contacted. In Nottinghamshire this is the Nottinghamshire Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which can be contacted on 0300 500 80 80.

Where they are informed of an existing or proposed private fostering arrangement, a social worker will be allocated to assess the suitability of the arrangements and the need for any additional help and support (according to section 44 of the Children Act 2004). The duties are set out in the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

The social worker will contact the parents to gain their views regarding the arrangement. They will check that the private foster carers can care for the child properly and provide a suitable, safe home. They will carry out a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check on the carer and any other adults living in the home, with their consent. A worker will continue to visit the child every 6-12 weeks and provide information to the carers about how to access support if needed.

Parental and financial responsibility

When a child lives in a private fostering arrangement, the child's parents keep all legal rights and retain their parental responsibility and financial responsibility for the child. They are expected to continue to support their child. Private foster carers may be able to apply for benefits however there is no specific financial support from the local authority.

Parents must be:

- Involved in planning the child's future.
- Kept in touch about the child's progress.
- Involved in major decisions made about the child like medical treatment, schooling and travel abroad.

Private foster carers can still make day-to-day decisions and have a responsibility to keep the child safe by doing what makes sense and is reasonable. To make it clear which decisions they can make, the parent will be asked to complete a form detailing this.

For further information:

The national charity Kinship have made a helpful video about private foster care. [Watch the video online](#). More information can also be found on the [Kinship website](#) and on [Nottshelpyourself | Nottinghamshire Kinship Support Service](#).