

Private Fostering

Private fostering is when a child or young person under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled) is cared for, and provided with accommodation for 28 days or more, by an adult who is not a close relative. If a child is staying with their aunts, uncles, step-parents, grandparents, siblings or step-siblings, this would not be considered a private fostering arrangement as they are deemed as close relatives.

It is different to fostering formally organised by the council through approved foster carers.

Why is Private Fostering Important

In England and Wales many children are believed to be private fostering arrangements that have not come to the attention of local councils and is therefore difficult to obtain an exact figure. The lack of reporting may be as many families and individuals may not know they are in a private fostering arrangement. This means that children, their parents and carers can miss out on a range of support and services available.

Parents, carers and children may be initially worried about the council being notified. It is understood there are a number of reasons why a parent may be unable to care for their child on a short or long-term basis. Regardless, it is acknowledged that children separated from their parents may be vulnerable. In some instances, children who are privately fostered may have insecure immigration status which also increases their vulnerability.

The local authority has a legal duty to check that the child is well cared for whilst living outside of their close family and that any private fostering arrangement is safe and suitable. Therefore, we all have responsibilities to ensure the care any privately fostered child receives meets their welfare and safety needs.

Examples of Private Fostering Arrangements

Children may be privately fostered for a range of reasons. We know that some circumstances increase the likelihood of a private fostering arrangement, these include children who:

- are in the UK for education or health care reasons and separated from their birth parents/legal guardians
- have birth parents/legal guardians who live in another country
- have parents that work or study long, anti-social hours and do not have close relatives to support them
- are living with a friend's family due to difficulties at home (eg. parental divorce or arguments)
- are attending language schools
- are attending an independent boarding school and do not return home during the holidays

Disclaimer: Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of these materials, advice should be taken by your own agency before action is implemented or refrained from in specific cases. No responsibility can be accepted by the Safeguarding Partnership for action taken or refrained from solely by reference to the contents of these materials.

Learning from Practice

The death of Victoria Climbié in 2000 who was privately fostered by her Great Aunt led to a significant change in private fostering legislation. After Victoria's death, legislation was introduced that **requires local authorities to be proactive in checking potential private fostering arrangements. All partners, parents and private foster carers have a legal duty to notify the local authority if they know of a child being privately fostered.**

In Practice:

- Confirm a child's living arrangements
- Check with the parent or legal guardian they are aware of the arrangements and have consented
- Confirm who is providing financial support
- Check birth certificates and ID's for the legal guardians, carers and child
- Ensure you have checked who and where the child's legal guardian is

If the child is already in a private fostering arrangement, you need to notify the council of this arrangement immediately



Notify the council of private fostering

Let us know of any private...

hillinqdon.gov.uk



National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering for Local Authorities



National minimum standards for private fostering
Statutory guidance for local authorities on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately



What happens when LB Hillingdon is notified of a private fostering arrangement:

Where they are told of a proposed (6 weeks prior to arrangements starting) or existing Private Fostering arrangement, a social worker will:

- check that the private foster carer's home is safe
- check that all members of the household are suitable to care for the child
- help the carer to work together with the child's parents for the benefit of the child
- offer support and advice about looking after someone else's child and how to meet the child's day to day needs
- offer support with finding a school place and registering with a GP/medical practice
- offer parenting support and advice as well as access to training courses provided for approved foster carers
- offer access to support groups for private foster carers and children if this will be helpful.

The local authority does not intend to disrupt what is working well. The aim is to provide support and advice to ensure that the arrangements met the welfare needs of the child.