

Is your child living with someone else?

Essential facts about Private Fostering
Information and advice for parents



If your child is living with someone else they may be in Private Foster Care.

- 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 longer than 27 days?

If you have answered yes to all of these questions, then your child is in Private Foster Care.

What is Private Fostering?

There are many reasons why you might need to ask someone you trust to care for your child in a private arrangement; if you need to be admitted to hospital for a long period of time, are living abroad, or are in conflict with your child, you may turn to someone as a private foster carer.

Parents do not usually do this without a great deal of thought. It is important that you and the carers have discussed why you want them to look after your child and what arrangements and contingencies should be made if, for example, your child falls ill or has an accident. You should also have discussed your child's health and education and agreed financial arrangements.



What next?

If you think your child may be in Private Foster Care, you need to contact Children's Services to register your situation as soon as possible. It is a legal requirement and you may be committing an offence if you do not do so. Call 0300 123 5012 and explain your circumstances for more information and advice.

You will need to inform Children's Services of basic facts such as:

- You child's name, date of birth, religion, racial origin and language
- How long you expect your child to stay with the carers
- The name and address of your child's carers and anyone else who has parental responsibility for them
- The date the placement started (or is expected to start)
- The previous addresses of the carers for the last five years
- Any offences the carers have been convicted of (Having convictions does not mean they cannot privately foster, but the convictions will need to be considered)
- If the carers have been disqualified from private fostering before.



What will Children's Services do?

The Children Act 2004 states that Children's Services have a legal duty to make sure all privately fostered children are safeguarded and their needs promoted.

To do this a Social Worker will visit you.

The Social Workers will:

- Assess the carers' household to ensure it is safe and suitable for your child
- They will ask the carers to complete forms to consent for Children's Services to make statutory reference checks with other agencies – the Disclosure and Barring Service, Health, Education, etc.
- Ask if all arrangements have been made for your child's health and education, etc.
- Help you and the carers work together
- Help your child get the services they may need to meet their needs
- Help the carers get the support they may need to care for your child
- Discuss the arrangements with your child alone, if old enough
- Discuss all the above arrangements with you
- Notify other agencies of the arrangements
- Consult with other agencies to obtain information about your child

What next?

Following these enquiries and discussions, the Social Worker will write a report summarising all the information they have gathered. Then a decision will be made by the Children's Services on whether the arrangement is approved or not. You and the carers will be told this by the Social Worker and informed in writing.

If approved

If the arrangement is approved, the Social Workers will continue to support the carers and your child. The Children's Services has a legal requirement to see children in Private Foster care regularly; this will be at least every six weeks within the first year. They may request to see your child alone if they are old enough. They will also arrange a review meeting with you, the carers and your child every six months to see how the arrangement is working for you all and what support is needed.

The Social Workers will help obtain services from other agencies as well as the Children's Services to help your child and carers if necessary. They can also arrange training for the carers.

Education and Health

You and the carers will also be given specific advice on Education and Health for your child. If your child is of school age, you will need to agree with the carers which school your child is to go to, who will inform the school of the arrangements, who will attend parents' evenings and school functions, who the teacher will talk to if there is a problem, and what help and support your child may need at school and with the homework.

Regarding health, it needs to be ensured that your child is registered with a GP and Dentist. Any allergies, illnesses or treatments need to be noted, and immunisations need to be up to date. You need to give parental consent in writing to the carers for them to take your child to the doctor and in the case of an emergency you should be informed.

Race, Culture and Religion

It is important that children retain their cultural identity, racial identity and religious beliefs. You should inform the carers about these issues so that they can make any special arrangements necessary to carry on these practices. They will need to be vigilant if a child is of different ethnic origin to the local community and look out for discrimination and take action to deal with this if it occurs.

Finance

Finance for the child needs to be agreed between you and the carers. You will need to inform the Child Benefit Agency that the child is no longer living with you and that they are living with the carers.

If you need further advice you can ring the Child Benefit Helpline on 0845 302 1444 or speak to the Social Worker.



Working Together

It is important that you work together with the carers and that your child sees you are working together for their benefit. You need to provide carers with as much information as possible about your child. You will need to agree what arrangements are to be made about your child's contact with you and make sure your child understands. Your child may have a lot of anxieties about living with carers and worry about when they will see you again. Contact can be in lots of different ways; face-to-face is best, but if you are abroad or a long distance away, it may only be possible to use indirect forms of contact such as telephone, e-mail, text messages and letters.

You will also need to think together about what to do if there are difficulties. The child may have difficulties in settling and show this through behaviour which might be difficult to manage – for example, tempers, unusual behaviour, bedwetting. You need to discuss these with the carers. If these become very difficult, the Social Worker can offer the carers advice and strategies to help deal with these behaviours. They could also offer training alongside other carers who deal with similar difficult behaviour.

What if approval of the placement is not agreed?

The Social Workers will discuss with you, the child and the carers what are the best alternative arrangements for the child. This could be a range of options, including:

- The child returning to live with you, with support services provided
- The child moving to live with a relative
- The child being cared for by the Local Authority

If approval has been denied by the Local Authority and you continue to place the child with carers, this may be seen as an offence.

If you wish to appeal against this decision, you should notify Children's Services, in writing, at the earliest opportunity. You will then be advised of what action the Local Authority will take and any further action you may wish to take.

What if circumstances change or the placement ends?

It is essential that you keep in touch regularly with the child's carers and the Social Workers and inform them of any change of address or telephone numbers, etc.

You should agree with the carers in what circumstances the arrangement should end and how – it is very upsetting for a child if this is done suddenly without preparation and planning.

If your child moves you must inform the Children's Services of the situation within 48 hours and give the name and address of the person who the child has gone to live with.



Children's Services can provide you with more information on all of the issues covered within this leaflet.

Call 0300 123 5012
or visit:
www.cheshireeast.gov.uk