

An introduction to

Private Fostering Arrangements





Private fostering

A private fostering arrangement is when a child or young person under 16 (under 18 if they have a disability) is cared for and provided with accommodation for 28 days or more by someone who is not a close relative.

Someone who is not a close relative could be defined as:

- cousin
- great-aunt or great-uncle
- family friend.

A close relative is an:

- aunt
- uncle
- a legal step-parent
- grandparent
- sibling.

The local authority has a duty to ensure the welfare and safety of a child or young person, and that the arrangement meets the needs of a child.

Despite the term 'private fostering arrangement', this is not related to foster care, however, it sits within the fostering service. The people looking after children in private arrangements are not local authority foster carers, and are not governed by the same legislation or regulations.



A private fostering arrangement is organised between:

- a parent or person with parental responsibility
- the child
- the adult who is providing the care, known as a private foster carer.

There are many reasons why a child may live in a private fostering arrangement, they include:

- Children and young people that have to live away from their family as a result of separation, divorce or disputes at home.
- Children and young people sent to the UK for education or health opportunities.
- Foreign exchange students.
- Children and young people from overseas whose parents are studying or working during unsociable hours, which makes it difficult for them to use ordinary childcare provisions.
- Any child or young person whose parents may be planning for their child to be living in a private arrangement.

These are only examples. There may be other arrangements which do not fall into any of these categories.

Children and young people

Am I privately fostered?

Why can't I live with my mum or dad?

They might not be able to look after you for different reasons. They may feel it's best to ask another adult to look after you for a while.

What happens to me?

If you are privately fostered, you will be living with a private foster carer in their house. It's important that your parents and your private foster carer tell Medway Council that you are living in someone else's house, so we can make sure you are safe and being cared for.

What will Medway Council do?

A social worker will visit you where you are living to make sure you are okay and being looked after in the way that you should be. The social worker will talk to you, and you can also contact your social worker if you want to talk at any time.

Can I still see my mum and dad?

Yes. Your mum and dad and your carer need to think about your needs and will make arrangements for you to see your parents.



What happens if I'm not happy where I am living?

You can always talk to your social worker about your concerns, and they will try to help make things better.

What do I need to know?

Before you move in, you should be given information about your carers; if they have children of their own; your carers' full names and address. You should be given your social worker's phone number.



Social workers

Upon receipt of a notification regarding a child living in a private fostering arrangement, Children's Services will:

- allocate a designated private fostering social worker who will be able to provide support and advice to the families, children and adults caring for children living in private fostering arrangements.
- visit the private foster carer and the child within 7 working days to discuss the arrangements.
- consider if a further assessment is to be carried out within 42 working days to gather more information about the arrangement and to ensure that it is suitable and safe. Other necessary checks will also be carried out at this point.

The private fostering social worker will:

- visit the child and their carer every 6 weeks in the first year, every 12 weeks after the first year and provide continued support
- offer therapeutic support to the child
- offer training and support groups
- maintain regular contact with the child's parents to ensure they are happy with the arrangements.





Parents

If someone else is, or will be, looking after your child you must:

- ensure that the arrangement is suitable for all of your child's needs
- tell us, at least six weeks before the arrangement begins or within 48 hours of the arrangement being made in an emergency
- be aware that you still have parental responsibility
- provide as much information as possible to the carer about all aspects of your child's life
- have a financial agreement with the carer in place for your child
- remain involved and engaged with your child and the carer.

What should you tell the carer?

You should make sure that the person who is looking after your child has as much information about them as possible. For example, their health, school records, religious and cultural requirements, eating preferences, hobbies, likes and dislikes.

Are you giving up your rights to your child?

You are not giving up any rights to your child, as your child is only being looked after temporarily. You still retain parental responsibility for your child and should be involved in all decisions concerning your child's development and upbringing. Frequent contact with your child is important so you can help make these decisions.



Carers

If you intend to look after a child privately, you need to contact us as soon as the arrangement is made or at least six weeks before the child comes to live with you.

If it is an emergency situation the Children Services department should be notified within 48 hours.

In summary, you need to:

- notify us if you are looking after someone else's child
- notify us if the arrangement comes to an end
- commit to the assessment process and to work closely with the private fostering social worker for the duration of the arrangement.

What information do I need to have?

You should make sure the child's parents give you as much information as possible about the child, including their health, school records, religious and cultural requirements, eating preferences, hobbies and likes and dislikes. This will help you understand and to ensure that the child's needs are met.

Where do I go if I need help or advice while I am privately fostering?

You should contact your allocated Private fostering social worker for advice.



Will I be financially responsible for the child I am looking after?

It is advised that you have a financial agreement in place with the child's parent(s) before the arrangement starts.

For more information about claiming tax credits and/or social security benefits such as Child Benefit, your local Benefits Agency office and Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) will be able to advise you.

What do I do when the child leaves my care?

You must tell us within 48 hours that the child has left your care. You must also give the name and address of the person who will be caring for the child in the future.

You also have a duty to inform the child's parent(s) of any changes to the arrangement.



Professionals

Private fostering arrangements can be a positive response from within the community to difficulties experienced by families. Nonetheless, privately fostered children remain a diverse and potentially vulnerable group.

Professionals who come into contact with children and young people play an important role in ensuring that parents and carers of privately fostered children are aware of their responsibilities and the children are well cared for and are safeguarded from harm.

Professionals who work with children have a duty to notify the Council of any private fostering arrangements they become aware of. This is a matter of good practice and means the local authority can then discharge its duty to satisfy itself that the welfare of the privately fostered child concerned is safeguarded and promoted.

Failure to report could result in a fine.



Under the Children Act 1989, it is essential that Medway Council fostering services is informed when a private fostering arrangement is being planned or has been made. Ideally notification of a private fostering arrangement should come from the carer or parent. Professionals should encourage the carer or parent of the child to notify the local council.

The penalty for non-reporting is a maximum £5,000 fine.

If you would like an informal discussion about private fostering arrangements, or if you know of a child living under a private fostering arrangement, you can phone: **01634 335726**, email: **private.fostering@medway.gov.uk** or visit: **Medway.gov.uk/PrivateFostering** to get advice, support and to comply with regulations.

This leaflet can be made available in other formats, if you have any questions about this leaflet and you want to speak to someone in your own language, please ring **01634 335726**.



Who to contact

If you have any worries, you should speak with your social worker, private foster carers or another adult that you trust.

If you feel that you cannot speak to them, there are other people that you can talk to. Their contact details are below.

Medway Children's Social Care Complaints

Phone: **01634 333036**

Phone or text: **07712 391359**

Email: **sccm@medway.gov.uk**

Childline

Freephone: **0800 1111**

Visit: **childline.org.uk**

You can talk to Childline about anything, there is no problem too big or small.

NSPCC

If you are having a bad time at home, being bullied at school, or if you are worried about something, you can phone the NSPCC for free on **0800 800 5000**.

Ofsted

Ofsted are responsible for making sure that Medway Council are running fostering services properly. If you have any concerns you can write to them at:

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD



Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Private fostering checklist	Yes	No
Is the child or young person aged under 16 (or under 18 with a disability)?		
Is the child living in the care of someone other than a parent, a person with parental responsibility or a close relative by private arrangement without the involvement of a local authority?		
Does the child agree with the arrangement?		
Do the parents agree with the arrangement?		
Are the child's parents or the person with parental responsibility living in separate accommodation from the young person?		
Has the young person been accommodated for a period of more than 28 days? If not, is the intention to accommodate the child for a period of 28 days or more?		
If the arrangement is less than 28 days, is it one in a series of arrangements that add up to more than 28 days?		

If the answers to the above are 'Yes' then the arrangement is likely to come under Private Fostering regulations.