Private Fostering – do you look after someone else’s child?

The role of Social Services in private fostering arrangements

What do we mean by private fostering?

Private fostering is when a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative'. It is a private arrangement made between a parent and the person caring for the child (called a private foster carer) for 28 days or more. You do not have to be paid to be a private foster carer.

The law says that either a person caring for a child in this way or their parents must tell the Local Authority.

What is meant by a ‘close relative’?

A parent, grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt or step parent, married to the parent of the child being cared for. So, for example, a cousin looking after a child would be a private foster carer. Someone with legal parental responsibility for the child would not be a private foster carer.

When does Social Services need to be told about these arrangements?

Parents or private foster carers must tell the Council 6 weeks before the arrangement starts. If you couldn’t - for example if it was an emergency - then tell us soon as you can. The law says you must tell us within 48 hours.

Examples of private fostering arrangements

- A child who lives with their great aunt because of parental divorce, separation or other issues at home.
- A child from overseas who has come to the UK for educational reasons and will be living with their cousin

If this applies to you, or to someone you know such as a neighbour or friend, or if you become aware of a private fostering arrangement through your work, please contact us and ask for advice. The details are at the end of this leaflet.

You do not need to tell us if you are looking after a child for a short amount of time, for example to help a friend recover from illness or look after your own child's friend for a holiday. You have to look after someone for at least 28 days for it to become private fostering.

What will happen after Social Services has been told about the arrangements?

Social Services will:

- visit the carer and the child to talk to them and check that everything is going ok
- talk about whether there is any extra advice or support that we or other organizations can give
- make sure everyone has all the information they need check that the carer and other members of their household are suitable to look after the child - this will include a Disclosure and Barring Scheme check
- check that the home where the child will live is safe

After this, we must decide if the arrangements are in the best interests of the
child. This doesn't mean they have to be perfect, but we can stop the placement if we consider it isn't in the child's best interests.

Parents or private foster carers can appeal to a magistrates' court if they disagree.

As part of the arrangements we might ask carers to do certain things, for example to make sure the child stays in touch with his or her parents or to make sure the child's cultural needs are met. We will also need to visit the carer and the child regularly to make sure that all is going well.

What will happen if I don’t tell you?

- The carer misses out on advice and support from the Council and other organisations that could help.
- If you are a parent who allows your child to be cared for by a private foster carer, or if you are a private foster carer and you don't tell us, you are breaking the law. You could be prosecuted and fined.

How to contact us

If you are:

- the parent of a child you plan to place with a private foster carer, or who has placed a child with a private foster carer;
- a person who is currently, or is planning to privately foster a child; or
- someone who believes a child to be privately fostered and that the arrangement has not been reported to the local authority

you should contact:

Children's Central Advice, Referral and Assessment Team
Write to:  Directorate of Social Services
P.O. Box 603
Swansea
SA1 9HT
Telephone: 01792 635700

Email: access.information@swansea.gov.uk

Further information

You can find more information on private fostering on the website Somebody Else’s Child www.privatefostering.org.uk

Private fostering is different from fostering children who are looked after by the local authority. If you are interested in becoming a foster carer please contact Foster Swansea on (01792) 522900

Swansea Social Services and personal information

When you are in touch with Social Services, we will keep information about you in written records and computer files. We will keep this information confidential, except where we need to share it with people providing you with care, or to protect you or other people.

You have a right to ask to see records we keep about you.

We can give you more information about how we handle personal information. Phone 01792 636693 for the factsheet Your Personal Information.

Comments and complaints

We welcome any comments about our services – good or bad. We are interested to hear how we could do things better, and we like to know when we are doing well.

If you are unhappy with the services you receive, we encourage you to make a complaint. Full details are given in the factsheet ‘Making a comment, complaint or compliment about Social Services.’ For more advice or information about making a complaint, you can contact our Complaints Officers on 01792 637345.

This information is also available in alternative formats, such as large print, on audio CD, in Braille, or electronically. Please phone 01792 636693 for copies.