



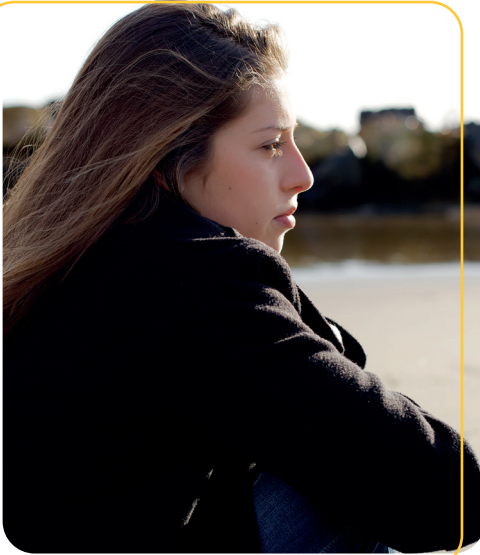
**Brighter
Futures for
Children**

Private Fostering

A guide for parents, carers and professionals

Information about private fostering and what you can do to help ensure the safety and welfare of children living in private fostering

Introduction



Children who live away from their families with people who are not closely related to them may be privately fostered. Private fostering arrangements are often made directly between the child's parents (or person with parental responsibility for the child) and the people who look after them, without any involvement from children's services.

Local authorities have a legal duty to safeguard the health and welfare of children living in private

fostering arrangements. In Reading borough, Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) holds this responsibility. However, we cannot meet our statutory responsibilities if we do not know that a private fostering arrangement exists. If you know of a child who is not living with their parents or relatives, or you are looking after someone else's child, this leaflet tells you what you need to know about private fostering and what you should do.

What is private fostering?

A private fostering arrangement is where a child under the age of 16 years (or under 18 years if they are disabled) lives with, and is cared for by, someone who is not their parent or close relative for 28 days or more. This is usually as a result of a private agreement between the child's parents (or someone else with parental responsibility for the child) and the carers, and without any initial involvement from children's services.

In this case a 'close relative' means a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt. It also includes half-relatives, step-parents and people who are related to the child by marriage.

Private fostering arrangements can involve:

- Children sent to this country for education and/or health care by birth parents who are living overseas
- Children living with a friend's family as a result of separation, divorce or arguments at home
- Teenagers living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend, or school friend because of family breakdown
- Children whose parents' work or study involves unsociable hours which make it difficult for them to use ordinary day care or after school care
- Children whose parents may have a long term illness and are unable to look after them
- Children who are sent to friends during the holidays or for an extended holiday period

Note: this is not an exhaustive list and other family situations may result in children being privately fostered.

Private fostering is very different from foster care provided by children's services - a privately fostered child is **not** classified as a child looked after under the Children Act 1989. Private foster carers do **not** have parental responsibility for the child.

The law relating to private fostering

Private foster carers provide day-to-day care of the child in a way which promotes and safeguards their welfare. Overall responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the privately fostered child remains with the child's parent(s) or guardian(s).

Although these arrangements are private, the child's parents, their private foster carers and children's services have some legal duties and responsibilities laid down by the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

Birth parents (or person with parental responsibility for the child)

Under the legislation the child's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) must:

- Advise the private foster carer's local children's services of the private fostering arrangement at least six weeks in advance or, if an arrangement is made in an emergency, within 48 hours of the start of the arrangement.
- Notify local children's services within 48 hours when the care arrangements change.
- Notify the carer's local children's services when the private fostering arrangement ends.



The child's parent(s) are responsible for ensuring that the proposed private fostering arrangement is suitable for their child. They retain their parental responsibility and continue to be involved in all decisions about their child's care and future.

They must give the person looking after their child as much information about the child as possible and come to a formal agreement about essential aspects of care (health, education, religious and cultural needs, discipline etc). This agreement is expected to be in writing and BFfC is able to provide a pro-forma for such an agreement.

Private foster carers

Under the legislation private foster carers must:

- Advise their local children's services of their intention to privately foster a child at least six weeks before the start of the arrangement or, if a child is placed in an emergency, within 48 hours of the arrangement
- Notify the local children's services within 48 hours when a child leaves their care and the private fostering arrangement has ended, and provide the name and address of the person(s) now responsible for providing care to the child
- Allow a social worker to visit them and the child regularly and to assess that the home where the child is cared for is appropriate.

People working with children

Anyone working with children has an important role in keeping children safe. This includes helping parents and private foster carers to meet their legal responsibilities to notify the local authority of private fostering arrangements.

If you come across what you think may be a private fostering arrangement in Reading you should:

- Ask the parent(s) and/or private foster carer(s) if they have notified BFFC children's services of the private fostering arrangements.
- Inform the private foster carer(s) and the child's parent(s) of their legal responsibilities (you could give them this leaflet or ask them to visit www.brighterfuturesforchildren.org/private-fostering) and encourage them to contact us.
- Notification should come from the child's parents and carers. However, to ensure all private fostering arrangements are brought to our attention please also contact us yourself.

If you have concerns that a child may be at risk of harm you should follow Child Protection procedures.

Children's Services

Under current legislation local authorities have a duty to check that children living in private foster care arrangements are safe and well cared for.

Under the legislation, BFFC's duties include:

- Checking the suitability of private foster carers and assessing the circumstances surrounding each private fostering arrangement
- Making regular visits to the child in their private foster home to check on their welfare and monitor the overall standard of care provided. This includes listening to the child's wishes and feelings
- Ensuring that private foster carers get the advice and support they need to keep the child safe and well
- Providing preventative and support services where appropriate
- Continuing to provide support services to the child after the end of the private fostering arrangement, if they are needed.

Private foster carers **do not** have to be ‘approved’ by BfFC, but we do have legal powers to take action if we identify concerns with a private fostering arrangement.

We can:

- Require a private foster carer to take action to sort out any matters arising, for example, by installing fire guards or smoke alarms or to accept preventative and support services if the accommodation or care is unsatisfactory
- End the placement and return the child to their parents, or take the child into our care if the concerns are more significant.

Private foster carers are legally required to notify children’s services, but they often don’t know they have to. It is vital that in these situations BfFC is still made aware of the private fostering arrangements by other adults who know the child or carer(s) of private fostering arrangements.

FAQs

Q What is the difference between private foster care and foster care?

Foster care is where children who become looked after by children’s services are placed with approved foster carers. Private foster care can be provided voluntarily by any member of the community and tends to be a private arrangement between the child’s parent(s) or guardian(s) and the private foster carer(s) rather than children’s services accommodating the child.

Q My friend wants me to look after her children for six weeks while she recovers from an operation. Do I need to tell the local authority?

Yes - if they will be living with you for more than 28 days and you are not closely related to them, this will be a private fostering arrangement.

Q My nephew from overseas will be staying with me for a year for study. Do I need to inform you?

No - because you are closely related to each other.

Q I want to leave my child with a friend for two weeks. Do we need to tell you about this?

No - because your friend will be providing care for less than 28 days.

Q Why does Brighter Futures for Children need to be told about children in Private Foster Care?

The law says you have to tell us because we have a duty to protect children living in private fostering arrangements. We need to know so we can make sure the children are safe and well cared for and can get any support that they need.

Q How do you 'check'?

We make regular visits to the private foster carer's home to talk to the carer(s) and the child(ren) being looked after. We offer help and advice. We are here to help - how often we visit depends on the situation and the individual needs of the child.

We also carry out police and other background checks to make sure all carers are safe and suitable to look after child(ren).

Q I am of good character and don't have any criminal convictions - why do I need to be police checked?

Anyone who works with or provides care to children has to be police checked regardless of their social background, status and personal character. This is the law.

Q What happens if parent or private foster care doesn't tell you about the private fostering arrangement?

They may be liable to prosecution. The law says they must tell us if:

- their child lives with people who are not closely related to them for 28 days or more
- they provide a home and care to a child who is not closely related to them for 28 days or more.

Q One of my neighbours is looking after someone else's children. Should I tell Brighter Futures for Children?

If you know them well you could show them this leaflet and ask them to get in touch. If you don't know them well enough, or don't feel comfortable with this then please call us in confidence to let us know. Your details will be kept confidential under the Data Protection Act.

Contacting us

To tell Brighter Futures for Children about a private fostering arrangement or if you have concerns about a privately fostered child, please contact the Children's Single Point of Access on

Call **0118 937 3641**

or email: cspoa@brighterfuturesforchildren.org

Visit our private fostering webpage

www.brighterfuturesforchildren.org/private-fostering

Or scan the QR code
to open the page



Information about private fostering can be made available in other languages or in a non-written format on request. We can also help with a translation service.

For information please contact the Family and Friends Service on
0118 937 4451

Or email familyandfriends.referral@brighterfuturesforchildren.org.



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