

Information for parents about private fostering

If you are thinking about placing your child with someone who is not a close relative for 28 days or longer you need to tell us. This is private fostering. You should do this six weeks before the arrangement starts, or immediately if it has already started. (It is an offence not to notify the local authority that you have placed your child with a private foster carer). You will need to complete our form 'Notification of private fostering arrangements, declaration to privately foster children and permission to request information' or ring your local office (see below). We will offer advice and help you to make the best arrangement for your child.

What you have to do

- Give the private foster carer as much written information as possible about your child. This should include details about your family routine, language and culture. You also need to tell them about your child's eating preferences, school, hobbies and interests
- Make sure that the carer and we know how to contact you
- Give written consent to the carer enabling them to seek medical treatment for your child
- Reach agreement with the private foster carer about covering the cost of looking after your child
- Be clear about how long the arrangement will last - it is rarely in the child's best interest to be away from their family for more than a short period
- Let us know of any change in circumstances, addresses etc or if the child is leaving the private fostering arrangement. Please use the form 'Notification of change in private fostering arrangements'.

You are encouraged to have a written agreement with the carer. This helps safeguard the child's welfare and protects them and reduces risk of misunderstandings. We can help you write an agreement.

Why should we be made aware of private fostering arrangements?

Safeguarding the child

Private fostering a child is always a big responsibility, and we have a duty to oversee the arrangements to promote the welfare of the child and to ensure they are protected. It is important that the carer has a good understanding of the child's needs.

Providing support

Taking on the care of someone else's child is not often straightforward. Misunderstandings and conflicts can easily arise, even between friends. Living away from their parents for any length of time can present challenges to children and their carers, and we can support you all.

After you contact us

The law says we have to find out if private fostering will keep the child safe and meet their needs. This includes:

- Assessing a carer's suitability
- Talking to you about your child's needs and possible alternative arrangements
- Discussing the length of the arrangement

As a parent you remain responsible for your child's safety and well being although the private foster carer takes on the every day care of your child. You remain the person with parental responsibility and should continue to be involved in decisions concerning your child e.g important decisions relating to medical treatment, changing schools or moving the child. You continue to be responsible for the financial support of your child, including any maintenance payments. It is very important that you remain in contact with your child and his/her carers. Please keep us informed about where you are living.

What Children and Young People's Services must do

It is our duty to make sure the child is safe and well looked after. We work with and help birth parents and private foster carers to make sure arrangements are legal, safe and will meet your child's needs. We have to make sure an arrangement is in the child's best interests.

A social worker will arrange to visit you and your child to talk about your child's needs and the proposed arrangements. A social worker will gather information about all members of the private foster carer's household, including getting enhanced disclosures from the criminal records bureau, and inspect the accommodation.

We will make a full assessment and can impose restrictions or requirements on the arrangement. We can prohibit the arrangement or disqualify the person from being a private foster carer. We'll do this if it is best for the child, but carers can appeal to a court if they think we are wrong. If we think a private fostering arrangement isn't suitable for your child we will let you know.

When private fostering is agreed we regularly visit the child and carer and we will visit or keep in touch with you to make sure the arrangement works successfully. You can ask for assistance and support at any time from a social worker.

For more information contact the Children and Young People's Services office nearest where the child will be living:

Bristol North 0117 903 8700

Bristol East/Central 017 903 6500

Bristol South, Symes (near Hartcliffe) 0117 353 2200

Bristol South, Broadwalk (near Knowle) 0117 903 1414

Email: childprotection@bristol.gov.uk

www.bristol.gov.uk/privatefostering

If you would like this information in a different format, for example, Braille, audio CD, large print, electronic, BSL DVD or community languages, please contact 0117 9037788

