

PRIVATE FOSTERING



ARE YOU LOOKING AFTER SOMEONE ELSE'S CHILD? IS SOMEBODY ELSE LOOKING AFTER YOUR CHILD?

Information for parents, legal carers
and private foster carers



This booklet helps you as parent or legal carer of a child going to or being cared for by someone who is not their close relative, to consider the following.

1 What is a Private Fostering Arrangement?

2 Examples of what is and what is not private fostering.

3 The private fostering duties of parents or legal carers.

4 Professionals duties and roles regarding private fostering.

5 How parents or legal carers can notify the local authority about private fostering arrangements.

WHAT IS PRIVATE FOSTERING?

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately by a parent or a carer with parental responsibility (that is to say without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if the child is disabled) with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. However, if the 28 days is broken, for example by a weekend visit home, it is still considered private fostering. Private foster carers may be from the extended family such as a cousin or a great aunt, or they may be a family friend.

It is private fostering if your child is going to or living with adults who are not their:

- Mother or Father
- Grandparent
- Carer with parental responsibility
- Step-parent
- Aunt
- Uncle
- Sister
- Brother

Private fostering is normally an arrangement which is agreed between the child's parents or person with parental responsibility and Private Foster Carers. It is still private fostering if your child is going to or living with Private Foster Carers if your child moved out of your care without your agreement.



EXAMPLES OF PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Examples of private fostering can be the result of and include the following.

- Younger children placed with friends of the family on a long- term basis following family breakdown or a parent's ill health
- Children whose parents work unsociable hours making it difficult for them to use day care
- Overseas students who are living with a carer or 'host family' for 28 days or more
- Children attending in boarding schools who live with another family during school holidays
- A teenager under the age of 16 living with friends or in the home of a boyfriend or girlfriend

It is not private fostering when:

- the carer is a close relative. The Children Act (1989) defines a close relative as either a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle (birth parents brother), aunt (birth parents sister) or step parent.
- the carer has legal parental responsibility (for example, birth mother, adoptive parent);
- the carer is an approved foster carer and the placement was made by social services;
- the placement lasts for less than 28 days; or
- the Children Act (1989) defines a child's 'close relative' as either a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle (birth parent's brother), aunt (birth parent's sister), or step-parent.

Family relationships can be complex; if you are unsure, please seek advice from the West Sussex County Council Integrated Front Door – see the contact details on the back page.

WHAT MUST PARENTS DO?

It is a legal requirement that West Sussex County Council is informed that your child is being cared for by somebody else other than a close relative. It is an offence not to notify the council of any Private Fostering arrangement.

If you are unsure, please seek advice from West Sussex County Council.

- Notify the council of the arrangement six weeks before the placement starts and within 48 hours of the placement starting. It is an offence not to do so.
- Exercise parental responsibility by remaining actively involved in all the decision making regarding your child's life.
- Complete a written agreement giving the private foster carer written permission to seek emergency medical treatment and school admission for your child.
- Provide the private foster carer with as much information as possible; including health records, dietary preferences, school records, hobbies, religion and ethnicity
- Make appropriate financial arrangements with the private foster carer to cover your child's needs in the placement.



WHAT MUST PRIVATE FOSTER CARERS DO?

It is a legal requirement that the council is informed that you are caring for somebody's child. If it is appropriate to do so, speak to the parent or carer before contacting your local authority. It is an offence not to notify the council of any Private Fostering arrangement. If you are unsure, please seek advice from West Sussex County Council.

- Notify the council of the arrangement six weeks before the placement starts and within 48 hours of the placement starting. It is an offence not to do so.
- Work with a social worker to make sure the child is living in a safe and caring environment which meets all of the child's individual needs.
- Comply with all checks such as DBS (formerly CRB) and safety checks undertaken by social workers..
- Continue to work in partnership with the child's birth parents, legal carers and the local authority to ensure the child continues to thrive. This will include regular visits by a social worker.

WHAT DO THE WEST SUSSEX PRIVATE FOSTERING TEAM DO?

When you notify West Sussex County Council of a private fostering arrangement we will:

- assess the suitability of the private foster carer;
- regularly visit the private foster carer and child at home to ensure the arrangement is working well and meeting the child's needs; and
- speak to the parents of the child to make sure they are happy with the arrangements in place

WHAT SUPPORT CAN THE WEST SUSSEX PRIVATE FOSTERING TEAM OFFER?

- We will provide an allocated social worker who meets with the private foster carer to discuss the needs of the child.
- We will offer support with meeting the child's education and health needs and planning for the future.
- We can signpost to a range of local services and offer support in accessing these.
- We will arrange one to one meetings with privately fostered children in order to support them.
- We can offer advice and guidance to all parties involved in the arrangement about childcare and other related topics.
- We will ensure everyone involved in the arrangement is kept informed and is working together on behalf of the child.



West Sussex County Council needs to know if you will be, or are already looking after somebody else's child for 28 days or more so we can support you and provide key information and advice.

Call 01403 229900

www.westsussex.gov.uk/privatefostering

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- **www.gov.uk** – search 'Private Fostering'
- **www.westsussex.gov.uk** – search 'Private Fostering'
- **www.privatefostering.org.uk**

You can contact us at:

- Email: WSchildrenservices@westsussex.gov.uk
- Phone: 01403 229900

If you would like further copies of this booklet, or the information in another format – such as audio book or braille – or in another language, please call 01243 642555.