



# private fostering

information for professionals and  
private and voluntary organisations

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## Definition of private fostering

Private fostering is a care arrangement in which a child under 16 years old (or 18 years old if they have a disability) is looked after full time for more than 27 days by someone who is not their:

- ✿ Parent (or step-parent or someone else with parental responsibility or legal order).
- ✿ Grandparent.
- ✿ Sibling (including half-siblings).
- ✿ Aunt or uncle.

Private fostering is very different from the care of children by council approved foster carers. Private fostering is an agreement between the child's parent and a private carer to look after the child while the parent is away.

By law, private fostering arrangements must be registered with the Safeguarding and Social Care Division, who have a duty to make sure that children living with private foster carers are being well cared for.

New regulations mean that all agencies that are in contact with children have a duty to report any private fostering arrangements that come to their attention to Safeguarding and Social Care.

Although private and voluntary organisations that work with children are not under a duty to inform Safeguarding and Social Care about private fostering arrangements, their role in persuading parents and carers to come forward and register the arrangement is vital.

This information leaflet provides professionals from a variety of agencies with information on how to recognise when a child is living with a private foster carer, and what to do to make sure the arrangement is registered.



## Some common examples of private fostering

Private fostering often occurs where:

- ✿ A teenager who isn't getting on with their parents goes to live with a friend's family.
- ✿ An unaccompanied minor is looked after by family friends while their parents are abroad.
- ✿ Parents pay someone to care for their child while they are away working or studying.
- ✿ Children are sent from abroad to live with other families in the UK.
- ✿ Children are brought to the UK for adoption.
- ✿ Children at boarding schools do not return home for the holidays.
- ✿ Children from abroad attend language schools in the UK.

## Duty to notify the local authority

Parents and private foster carers have a duty to notify their local authority of any private fostering arrangement. However, this doesn't always happen. Because of this, some privately fostered children are very vulnerable, as often there is no one to safeguard their welfare.

Recent government enquiries, most notably the Laming report into the death of Victoria Climbié, who was herself privately fostered, have highlighted the real risks to privately fostered children by a lack of regulatory control.

## Role of Safeguarding and Social Care

Social workers must assess and register all private fostering arrangements to make sure:

- ✿ The carer is able to look after the child adequately.
- ✿ The carer's home is a suitable and safe environment for the child.

They must also visit the child regularly to make sure they are being adequately cared for and to provide advice, information and practical help to private foster carers so that they are able to care for the child.

To do this, Safeguarding and Social Care need to know about any private fostering arrangements in Camden.

## Role of professionals

The reluctance of parents and private foster carers to register private foster care arrangements presents a major problem for Safeguarding and Social Care.

That is why under new regulations the following professional groups have a duty to inform Safeguarding and Social Care of any private fostering arrangements that come to their attention:

- ✿ Schools.
- ✿ Education staff.
- ✿ Education welfare workers.
- ✿ Drug and alcohol workers.
- ✿ Health professionals.
- ✿ Housing officers.
- ✿ Play service workers.
- ✿ Probation.
- ✿ Police.
- ✿ Youth and Connexions.

Some professionals, especially teachers and health visitors, are well placed to recognise when a child is in a private foster care arrangement because they are in such close contact with the child and their carer.

Because a child's birth certificate must be produced when applying for and enrolling at schools, education and school staff may become aware that a school place is being sought for a child by someone who is not a parent or close relative.

Housing officers may become aware of private fostering arrangements when a tenant applies for rehousing or when a child joins the household of a tenant.

If you know that a child you are in contact with or working with is living with someone who is not their:

- ✿ Parent (or step-parent or someone else with parental responsibility or legal order).
- ✿ Grandparent.
- ✿ Sibling (including half-siblings).
- ✿ Aunt or uncle.

you should ask the carer to contact Camden's fostering team to register the arrangement.

You should explain to them that it is an offence not to register. If they don't register within two weeks, you are legally bound

to do so and you must contact the fostering team to make sure that the arrangement has been registered. If it hasn't, you will need to give the team contact details for the family and must advise the family that you are doing so.

Some children live with family and friends under a kinship care arrangement, and Safeguarding and Social Care will already know about these. But if you are not sure about this, or about any other aspect of care arrangements for children, you can check with the fostering team.

## Role of private and voluntary organisations

Private and voluntary organisations may know about private fostering arrangements through contact with parents, carers and children. If you become aware of a private fostering arrangement, you

should ask the parent or carer to contact Camden's fostering team to register the arrangement. You should explain to them that it is an offence not to register, and that they risk being fined.

## Benefits of registration

Most private foster carers don't know that as well as monitoring the arrangement, Safeguarding and Social Care can offer support and advice. By making contact with Safeguarding and Social Care, you could be helping to ensure the welfare of the child, and give private foster carers an opportunity to get help and support in looking after the child.

You can call the dedicated private fostering worker, Raj Munisami, on 0800 0281 436.