

Private fostering: A guide for professionals





Northumberland County Council has a duty to protect any child or young person who is not in the care of a parent or close relative. Private fostering is different to working as a foster carer - it is privately arranged care between family and friends.

We know that without our supervision children and young people in private fostering arrangements can be particularly vulnerable.

If a child or young person, anyone aged under 16 years old or 18 years old if they are disabled, is being cared for by someone other than a parent or close relative* for more than 28 days then they are being privately fostered.

A privately fostered child is defined in section 66 of the children's act 1989 as one who, being under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled), is cared for and accommodated by someone other than a parent or close relative (as defined in section 105 of the Act).

Legally, parents must inform us if their child is living with a private foster carer six weeks prior to the arrangement beginning, or within 48 hours in emergency situations.

There are a wide variety of reasons which might lead to a child being privately fostered.

Usually a birth parent will choose and make

a private care arrangement. This might be:

- a child living with a friend's family due to parental separation or divorce
- a teenager living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend
- a child who has been sent from overseas by their birth parents to study or receive healthcare
- a child living with a family friend during summer holidays
- children living with another family because their parents work unsociable hours or work away from home

If you are unsure if a child or young person you come into contact with is being privately fostered, please get in touch with Children's Services (contact details are on the back cover) as soon as possible.

Any professional working with children or young people has a responsibility to work with us to make sure all privately fostered children and young people are well cared for and are safeguarded from harm.

ASK...

When checking basic details ask who do you live with? Do you live with your parents? If not, how long have you lived with the person that looks after you?

THINK...

Are they living with a blood relative? Paternal and maternal aunts, uncles, grandparents and siblings are NOT private foster carers.

Are they living with a Legal Guardian, with step parents or under local authority care?

This is NOT private fostering.

CHECK...

Ask the child or young person how the people they are living with are related to them; 'is your mum or dad's sister?' 'Is this your biological dad, or mother's partner?' for example.

TELL...

Think is this private fostering? Is the child or young person under 16 years old, or 18 years old and disabled, are they staying more than 28 days? Is the carer someone other than a blood or close relative? If so you need to notify Northumberland County Council Children's Services (details are on the back cover).

This includes encouraging a parent or carer to get in touch to inform us of any private fostering arrangements and following this up by contacting us yourself and reporting the situation.

It is important that we know about any private fostering arrangements, as soon as possible; it is against the law for a parent or private foster carer to purposely withhold this information.

If you need to tell us information about a private foster care arrangement with a child or young person you have come into contact with, please get in touch.

Parents and private foster carers can also use these contact details to talk to us. It is never too late for them to tell us about who is looking after their child and they will not be in trouble if they have not told us within the time frames specified.

My organisation does not gather information about a child or young person's living circumstances, isn't that Children's Services role?

Answer:

It's everyone's duty to identify, verify, record and report any circumstances which may be private fostering, and to promote this with the children and families concerned.

Victoria Climbié died because individuals, teams, agencies and systems failed to gather and share information.

Children's Services are responsible for assessing the suitability of the arrangements and visiting the child regularly.

You will not be breaching confidentiality by notifying us about an arrangement, or any changes to current arrangements, as you will be ensuring that the child / young person is safeguarded.

You should tell the child / young person that you intend to inform us.



* Close relatives are parents, step parents, a partner with parental responsibility, grandparent, brother, sister, aunt or uncle or a special guardian – either by blood or by marriage.



Northumberland social care central contact details:

Onecall 24-7 phone line on **01670 536 400**

Email: childrentriage@northumberland.gov.uk

Please note out of office hours are for emergency referrals only and if emailing outside of office hours please be aware that this will be dealt with the next working day.

Web: www.northumberland.gov.uk/privatefostering

If you are a Northumberland County Council employee, have you completed the short and useful course on Learning Together? Click to complete the Private fostering e-learning module: <http://ncc.learningpool.com>