

Private Fostering

Checklist for Children's Workforce Practitioners

Understanding procedures

✓ **Do you know what private fostering is?**

Private fostering is when a child under the age of 16 (or 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative'. This is a private arrangement made between a parent and a carer, for 28 days or more. Close relatives are defined as step-parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts (whether of full blood, half blood or marriage/affinity).

See: *Case Example 7*
["Voices of Private Fostering"](#)

✓ **Do you know about the duty to notify?**

There is a duty on the part of parents and carers entering into private fostering arrangements to notify their local authority. This is in order to safeguard and protect the child's welfare as well as ensuring that the child, carer and parent are receiving appropriate support and help.

There is no legal duty for others, including professionals who have contact with children, to notify the local authority if a private fostering arrangement. However, as a professional you have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. You should encourage the carer/parent to notify the local authority. Should you suspect that this has not happened, you should discuss this with the carer/parent, ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child (depending on age and understanding), and request their permission to contact the local authority. If permission from the carer/parent is not given, you should still contact the local authority.

See: [Notifying your LA](#)

✓ **Are you worried about confidentiality?**

If you are confident that the carer/parent has not informed the local authority of their private fostering arrangement, your actions should ensure that the child's welfare and safety come first. A child in a private fostering arrangement who is not brought to the attention of the local authority may be a child potentially at risk. You will be acting appropriately by informing the local authority.

✓ **For children's social services, do you know who your nominated private fostering officer is?**

Each local authority must monitor its private fostering duties and must nominate a private fostering officer for that purpose. This person is likely to be at managerial level. Their responsibilities will include promoting awareness of private fostering; ensuring systems for assessment, decision-making and support; and reporting annually to the Local Children's Safeguarding Board.

✓ **Do you know who can give you specialist advice about private fostering?**

The local authority nominated private fostering officer is likely to be the person with specialist knowledge although, in some local authorities, there may be other private fostering social workers with knowledge and expertise.

See: *Case Examples 8 and 11*

Identifying when a child is privately fostered

- ✓ Do you suspect that a child may be privately fostered?
- ✓ Has the child mentioned that they are no longer living at home / living with someone else?
- ✓ Is the child accompanied to school/nursery/clinic by someone other than a parent/recognised carer?
- ✓ Is the carer vague about the child's routines/needs?
- ✓ Has a patient turned up at the GP surgery with a new child/ series of different children?
- ✓ Has a child in class at school disappeared?
- ✓ Is there anything unclear on files/records about the child's living arrangements?
- ✓ Is the child under the age of 16 (or 18 if disabled)?
- ✓ Is the child living with someone other than a parent, someone with [parental responsibility](#) or a relative?
- ✓ Do you know what the child's living arrangements are (who with, for what purpose)?
- ✓ Is it clear who the child is living with, and what relation the person is to the child?
- ✓ Has the child been living, or is likely to live, away from home for more than 28 days, or a series of days totalling 28 days or more?
- ✓ Has the child come from overseas? Do you know the reason for the child's entrance to the UK?
- ✓ Is the child in the UK for the purpose of education?
- ✓ Is the child an unaccompanied asylum seeker?
- ✓ Do you think that the child may have been trafficked?

Safeguarding issues

- ✓ Is the child healthy? Consider: physical and mental well-being and development.
- ✓ Is the child safe from harm? Consider whether the child's basic needs are being met: care, safety, warmth, stability, guidance and boundaries
- ✓ Is the child developing well? Consider: development, participation and progress at nursery/school
- ✓ Does the child have a positive relationship with their carer? Consider: attachments, relationships with adults/peers
- ✓ Is poverty impacting negatively on the child? Consider: housing and home conditions, income
- ✓ Is the child a 'child in need'? Any concerns relating to the above may indicate that the child is a 'child in need'. Children's services should be notified of concerns.

Case Examples

Case example 6

A council hosted a one-day conference on the Victoria Climbié Inquiry for a group of 200 delegates including administrative staff, social workers and managers. The conference included a one-hour session on private fostering and its implications. A panel discussion at the close of the day provided an opportunity for staff to learn more about private fostering and to ask questions

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Case example 7

All teams and units dealing with children's services were sent the relevant information on private fostering procedures and processes, by producing comprehensive guidance manuals or 'toolkits', and know where to obtain specialist advice. Information on private fostering was included in induction and other training programmes for children's services staff. Information was communicated to staff in other relevant departments, such as housing officers, adult mental practitioners, community development staff and legal officers.

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Case example 8

A local authority provided an advisory service, whereby a private fostering development officer attended monthly meetings with both social work team managers and social workers. In these meetings, the social workers were able to discuss their cases and flag up or seek clarification on potential or actual private fostering cases. The private fostering officer reported that social workers were busy with other safeguarding work and didn't always initially identify a case as being a private fostering arrangement. It was reported that the monthly meetings had been useful in flagging up potential cases and providing a space for social workers to discuss their private fostering cases with a knowledgeable member of staff.

(NCB/BAAF research, DCSF 2010)

Case example 11

Staff with specific responsibility for private fostering were encouraged to update their understanding of private fostering cases, and to participate in relevant networks and support groups, for example the special interest group on private fostering supported by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering

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