

## Help keep children and families safe and support families

If you become aware of a child that is or will be cared for by someone other than a parent or close relative for more than 28 days, tell us.

Please contact:

**Duty and Advice**

T: **01484 456848**

More information on private fostering available at:  
[www.kirkleessafeguardingchildren.co.uk](http://www.kirkleessafeguardingchildren.co.uk)

**Case Study:** Judy had problems at home with her parents so she moved out and was looked after by a family friend.



### Judy's story

Mum was suffering from depression and money worries. This caused a lot of tension and anger at home. After a particularly bad row with Mum, I packed my things and left. I went to stay with my best friend and her family.

**We were worried about telling the local authority but they were great. They offered help and support and advised my friend's family of any benefits they were entitled to claim whilst looking after me.**

Living with another family really changed my opinion of how I should treat people and helped me control my temper. Mum was upset at first but she understood I needed space to calm down.

After a few months, the local authority arranged for me and Mum to meet and supported us at these meetings. After several meetings, I moved back home.

Things are still not perfect between us but we get on much better. I have learnt to control my temper and Mum listens to me now.

# Essential facts about private fostering

Information and advice for professionals



**It is estimated that about 10,000 children in England are privately fostered. In over 50% of cases councils aren't being notified and when they are informed, it is nearly always after the arrangement has started.**

**This is a huge cause for concern, as privately fostered children, without the protection provided by the council, are a particularly vulnerable group.**

**It is a legal requirement that council's are notified of all private fostering arrangements. We will check that the children and young people are kept safe, well cared for in appropriate accommodation and happy.**

## What is private fostering?

Private fostering is very different from the care provided by councils through approved foster carers. If a child lives with someone who is not a parent or close relative for more than 28 days then this is called a private fostering arrangement.

A child is defined as someone aged under 16 (or 18 if they have a disability).

A close relative is defined as a grandparent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle or step-parent.

There lots of reasons why a parent might ask somebody else to look after their child, some examples are:

- children coming from abroad to access the education and health systems
- children living with a friend's family after separation, divorce or arguments at home
- teenagers living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend
- people who come to this country to study or work, but antisocial hours make it difficult for them to care for their own children.

## What professionals must do

Professionals in the education, health and social care fields need to be more aware of private fostering arrangements.

Ideally, notification of a private fostering arrangement should come from the parent or carer, but education, health and social care professionals can also play an important role in identifying these arrangements and advising parents and carers of their responsibilities.

If you know that a child is being privately fostered, and you think that the council is unaware, please notify us or encourage the carer or parent to do so. You will not be breaching confidentiality, and may help secure the welfare of the child concerned. It is good practice to inform the carer and/or parent that you are making a referral, but doing so should not delay your referral to the council.

## What birth parents must do:

- Advise the local council of the private fostering arrangement.
- Retain parental responsibility; initiating and participating in all the decision making processes in the placement.
- Provide the prospective carer with as much information about the child as possible, including health records, dietary preferences, school records, hobbies, religion and ethnicity.

## What private foster carers must do:

- Advise their local council of their intention to foster a child at least six weeks in advance or, where an emergency placement is made, within 48 hours of the child's arrival.
- Notify their local council when a child leaves their care, stating why and giving the name and address of the person into whose care the child has been moved.

## What the council will do

We will arrange to visit the child and check that the private fostering arrangement is suitable. A child can be removed from a private foster placement if there is reasonable cause to suspect that the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm.

We will work with all parties involved and offer support and advice including advice on any benefits that may be available and links to support networks.