

Be safe, be sure

Private Fostering – Information
for parents or carers



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Are you a private foster carer?

Private fostering is the term used when a parent places a child under school leaving age in the care of someone else who is not a close relative or officially approved foster carer for a period of more than 28 days.

You might be a private foster carer without realising it.

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For example, are you looking after a friend's child while they work away from home? Has your neighbour had trouble coping with a new baby and asked you to look after it for a few weeks? Have friends from abroad asked you to let their child stay with you while they attend school here? If so, this is private fostering and you have a legal responsibility to inform your local authority. There are many more examples and your Children's Services department will be able to advise you if you are unsure.

“This leaflet only deals briefly with some of the duties of carers and parents”

The local authority has a responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of all privately fostered children so they need to carry out a number of checks.

The most important aspect of private fostering is the wellbeing of the child and these reports and checks are there so that the Children's Services department can provide you with any advice and support you might need.

This leaflet only deals briefly with some of the duties of carers and parents. There are other duties in relation to care and education and other aspects of the child's wellbeing. This leaflet is intended as guidance - it is not an authoritative statement of the law. The courts ultimately decide how the law should be interpreted.

So, if you think that you might be, or are soon to be, a private foster carer, or if you are a parent who intends to place your child in someone else's care, please read the guidelines in this brochure.

Your local authority can then support you to ensure that the child is safe, happy and secure, no matter what their circumstances.

“The most important aspect of private fostering is the safety and wellbeing of the child...”



Responsibilities of Parents

If you are a parent and you intend placing a child under school leaving age in someone else's care, who is not a close relative or an approved foster carer, for more than 28 days, this is what you should do:

- **At least two weeks** before the placement begins, you should contact your local authority Children's Services department and let them know what you intend to do.
- If the child has been placed in someone else's care in an emergency, you should contact the Children's Services department **within seven days** of the emergency.
- You should give the Children's Services department certain information in writing; this will include where the child will be placed, who will be responsible for their care and any other information which the Children's Services department requires from you.

Responsibilities of Carers

If you are planning to take someone else's child into your care for more than 28 days who is under school leaving age and not closely related to you, this is what you should do:

- **At least two weeks** before the placement begins, you should contact your local authority Children's Services department **in writing** and explain what you intend to do.
- If the child is placed with you in an emergency, you must let the Children's Services department know within seven days of the placement.
- If you change address while caring for the child, you must inform the Children's Services departments in the area you are moving from and the area you are moving to.
- If the child dies, or is removed from your care, you should inform the local authority Children's Services department within 48 hours.

Private Fostering – Frequently Asked Questions

If private fostering is a private arrangement, why is there legislation?

The legislation governing the care of children in private fostering arrangements is there to protect the wellbeing of the child. This is the most important aspect of any private fostering arrangement. Local authorities have an obligation to secure the wellbeing of every privately fostered child under the Foster Children (Scotland) Act 1984.

What will the Children’s Services department do when I contact them?

The Children’s Services department is there to provide any advice or support you or the child might need while in your care. They will require certain details such as who will be the main carer, where the child will be living, their health and school history, their interests, religion, dietary needs, etc. The Children’s Services department will also need to be assured that the child is safe and well cared for and someone may come and talk to you about this.

What will happen if I fail to notify the Children’s Services department?

Failure to notify the local Children’s Services department is an offence punishable by fine or imprisonment or both. Remember, the local authority is there to help and support you and to ensure the wellbeing of the child.

The care of children in private fostering arrangements is addressed in the following legislation which includes responsibilities for birth parents, private foster carers and local authorities.

- **Foster Children (Scotland) Act 1984**
- **Foster Children (Private Fostering) (Scotland) Regulations 1985**

The contact for making a notification in your area can be found at:

www.scotland.gov.uk/privatefostering

The Care Inspectorate has a duty to inspect how the local authority responds to private fostering in its area. The Care Inspectorate can be contacted on: **0845 600 9527** or e-mail them at **enquiries@careinspectorate.com**