

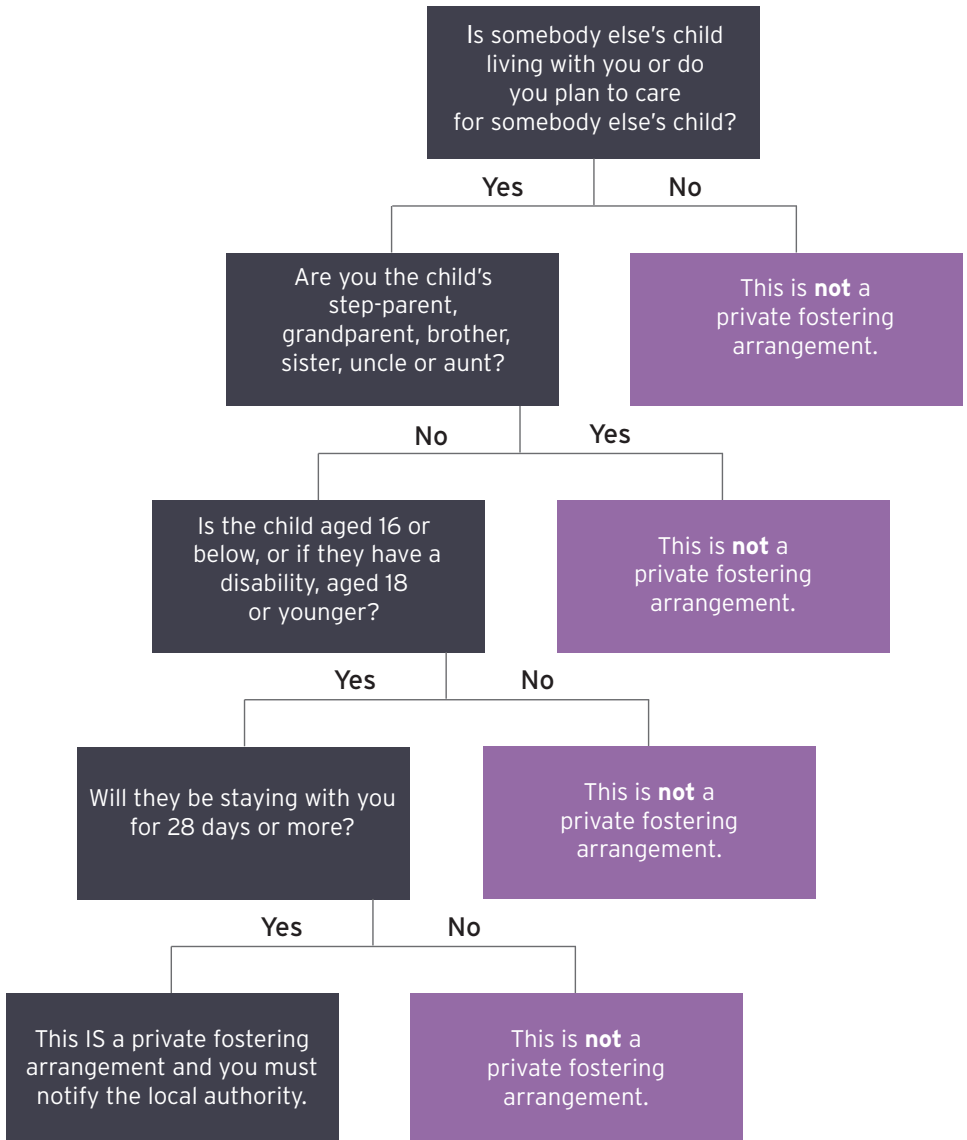


Are you looking after somebody else's child?

Questions frequently asked by carers



What is private fostering?



All arrangements are made privately, without the assistance of the local authority.

Examples of privately fostered children include:

- children with parents and family abroad
- children attending language schools
- children sent to the UK for educational purposes
- children at boarding schools who do not return to the parental home during holidays
- children on holiday exchanges
- local children living apart from their families due to parental problems
- 'sofa-surfers'
- unaccompanied immigrant children
- children who stay in a residential school for more than two weeks of the school holidays

Do I have to notify the local authority?

Yes, the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 place a statutory duty on parents and private foster carers to notify the local authority of any private fostering arrangement that is occurring or due to start. Even if the child's parents or guardians do not want the local authority involved, you have a duty to inform the Council as it is an offence not to do so.

When do I have to inform the local authority?

The proposed private foster carer must notify the local authority of the proposal:

- at least six weeks before the beginning of the private fostering arrangement
- if the private fostering arrangement is to begin within six weeks, immediately

Any person involved in arranging the placement for the child must notify the local authority as soon as possible after the arrangement has been made.

What must I tell the local authority?

- The name, sex, date and place of birth, religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background of the child
- The name and current address of the person giving the notice and their addresses within the previous five years
- Your name, current address and your addresses over the past five years
- The name and current address of the parents of the child and of any other person who has parental responsibility for the child
- The name and current address of any person, other than those specified above, who is involved in arranging for the child to be privately fostered
- The name and current address of the minor siblings of the child, and details of the arrangements for their care
- The date on which it is intended that the private fostering arrangement will start or the date on which it did start
- The intended duration of the private fostering arrangement
- The reason for the private fostering arrangement
- Any offence of which you have been convicted
- Any disqualification or prohibition imposed on you under Section 68 or 69 of the 1989 Children's Act
- Any such conviction, disqualification or prohibition imposed on any other person living in or employed at the same household

The local authority will assess the arrangements and make recommendations on its suitability.

Why must I tell the local authority?

It is an offence to fail to notify the local authority of a private fostering arrangement, but more importantly, the local authority should be informed so that they can ensure that the child is safe and well looked after. The local authority can also support you and the child throughout the placement to ensure that all parties involved are happy.

Do I need to tell the local authority if my situation changes?

You need to inform the local authority of any noteworthy changes during the private arrangement, within 48 hours of them occurring. This may include, but is not limited to:

- change of address
- someone joining or leaving the household
- if you or a member of your family is convicted in court, disqualified from fostering or limits are placed on how many children you can foster
- if the privately fostered child dies.

What support is available to private foster carers and privately fostered children?

Children's Social Care has a duty to ensure the welfare of privately fostered children and so a social worker will arrange to visit you to ensure the arrangement is suitable. The social worker will be able to give private foster carers guidance and advice, especially if the child has entered a private fostering arrangement because of a traumatic event. The social worker will also regularly visit the child to see how they are feeling and help them tackle any issues they may have.

The local authority can provide training and support to private foster carers, as well as advice on the benefits available to the private foster carer. Dependent on the situation and the child's preferences, we may be able to signpost you to other support agencies.

Do private foster carers receive any financial support?

The financial arrangements for privately fostering a child are to be made directly between the parent and carer. Customarily, the parent will be expected to pay for the child's upkeep and it is advisable that you create a written agreement about how they will do this. The local authority is unable to provide any financial support to private foster carers.

I am the child's private foster carer, what are my responsibilities?

The private foster carer is responsible for the provision of the day-to-day care of the child in a way which will promote and safeguard their welfare, but the parent or the person with parental responsibility maintains their parental responsibility and is primarily responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of their child.

Private foster carers are responsible for ensuring that the privately fostered child:

- attends school
- eats regularly, including breakfast, lunch and dinner
- is clean and healthy, with clean clothes to wear
- visits the doctor, hospital and dentist when needed
- has their own bedroom
- is able to practice their religion and follow its traditions and customs
- has opportunity to make new friends and continue to pursue their hobbies
- is in contact with their family

However, these activities are not the sole responsibility of the private foster carer. They should be discussed with the parent as part of the arrangement.

Is there anything I can do to prepare to privately foster a child?

Firstly, it is important that you notify the local authority that you plan to privately foster a child. Secondly, to help you fully understand the child and their needs, try to obtain as much information from their parent or legal guardian as possible. They should share details of the child's family history, their medical history and agree the arrangements for:

- the child's education
- the child's health; any on-going medical treatment, anticipated treatment, details of their GP and dentist, etc
- the child's hobbies and interests
- meeting the child's religious and cultural needs
- contact between the child and their family and others who are important to them
- acceptable methods of disciplining and rewarding the child
- updating the parent or legal guardian on the child's progress.

The agreed arrangements for the placement should be written down so both you and the parents know what to expect. It is important that you discuss the arrangements with the child so they understand the situation, how long they will be living with you, how to contact their parents what to do if they have a problem, etc.

If you live with other children or adults, you will need to think through how you will introduce the child to your family and ensure they feel settled and comfortable.

What should I do if I am unhappy with the private foster arrangement?

Difficulties may arise for a number of reasons. Common problems include:

- the private foster carer being provided with insufficient information about the child and their needs
- a failure to agree suitable financial support for the child or failure to provide the agreed financial support
- the private foster carer is unable to make decisions about the child but has difficulty discussing these with the parent
- regular contact between the child and parent breaks down.

If the child, parent or private foster carer is unhappy with the arrangement, they should contact the social worker, who will try to help resolve the issue.

Useful links

Coram BAAF

T: 020 3597 6116 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 1pm) **E:** adviceengland@baaf.org.uk

Children's Legal Centre

T: 0845 1202948 **W:** www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Fosterline ... the foster carers' advice line

T: 0800 040 7675

Grandparents' Association

T: 0845 4349585

Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB)

T: 020 7735 8941 **W:** www.cfab.org.uk **E:** info@cfab.uk.net

Prisoners' Families Helpline

T: 0808 8082003 **W:** www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk

Victoria Climbié Foundation

W: www.vcg-uk.org

To provide information of a private fostering arrangement contact the Fostering Team

E: fostering@achievingforchildren.org.uk