

Private Fostering

Private fostering is a term used to describe a scenario where a child under the age of 16 (or 18 if they have a disability) is living away from home and being cared for by someone who is not their parent or a close relative. This is an arrangement made between the parent (or persons with parental responsibilities) and the carers, and is planned to last longer than 28 days.

Children become privately fostered for many different reasons, for example parents have ill health, parental custodial sentence, family breakdown or conflict between parents and their children.

Children who are older will sometimes choose to move away from home and make their own private fostering arrangement. Parents do not have to give consent for this arrangement and it will be assessed as a private fostering arrangement in order to safeguard the child.

A private foster carer may be a more distant relative or a family friend such as:

- a great aunt or uncle,
- great grandparents,
- a cousin,
- a friend or the parent of a child's friend,
- godparent or a neighbour,
- Also host families taking in exchange students for more than 28 days need to be assessed as private foster carers if the young person is under 16.

A bit of a Background

Private fostering is not a new concept, however the awareness of private fostering is considered low. Private fostering arrangements can be hidden, as parents and professionals are not aware that the Local Authority need to know about any arrangements that are made. Victoria Climbié was brought to the UK by her Great Aunt, subsequently abused by her aunt and her aunt's partner repeatedly, tragically dying as a result. Victoria Climbié was considered to be privately fostered.

After her death Lord Laming wrote a report recommending that the Local Authority has a duty to promote local awareness around the notification requirements for private fostering, ensuring that children in private fostering arrangements can be safeguarded and supported.

What needs to be done?

It is a legal requirement to notify the local authority about a private fostering arrangement, 6 weeks before the arrangement is due to start or straight away if it is currently happening. It is an offence not to notify the local authority regarding a private fostering arrangement, and if you know that a child is being privately fostered, or you are privately fostering a child, you need to notify the local Authority.

The local authority will assess the arrangement to ensure that it is safe and the child's welfare is being promoted. This is completed by the private fostering social worker, who will

provide ongoing advice and support to the private foster carer while the child remains within the home, ensuring the arrangement remains safe. The private fostering social worker will also visit personally every 6 weeks.

The policy in Portsmouth is that a child will be assessed by the locality team as a Child in Need and will be subject to Child in Need planning. This means that the child will have their own social worker to support them while they are being privately fostered.

How to let us know

If you think a child may be privately fostered and would like any advice please contact the Portsmouth MASH (Multi agency safeguarding Hub) on 0845 671 0271/ 02392 688793, email: pccraduty@portsmouthcc.gcsx.gov.uk or privatefostering@portsmouthcc.gov.uk, or speak to the Private Fostering social worker on tel: 02392 834071.

