

# Private Fostering

A Guide for Parents & Carers

**Are you looking after someone else's child or do you know someone who is?  
Or is someone looking after your child?**

If the answer is yes to either of these questions then this leaflet will provide you with important information.



## Responsibility of the Council

There have been a few high profile cases in recent years of children cared for out of the family home, who have been harmed or neglected in some way.

The Government believes that there could be more children than we currently know about who are living in private fostering arrangements, with carers who should have the advice and support of their Local Authority. It is the Council's responsibility to make sure that parents and private foster carers know they have the responsibility to inform us of the private fostering arrangement and we have to visit and see where the child or children are living, speak to the carer and child and make sure it is a safe and secure home.

### What is private fostering

Private fostering occurs when a parent (or someone with parental responsibility) makes an arrangement for their child or children to be cared for by someone else, who is not a close relative. This means anyone who is not a parent, grandparent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, or a step-parent.

The person looking after their child or children is known as the private foster carer.

A private fostering arrangement occurs when:

- Care of the child has already been longer than 28 consecutive days OR:
- Care of the child is planned to be for 28 consecutive days or more
- The child or young person is younger than 16 (or 18 in the case of a child with disabilities)
- The person is not a close relative (listed above) or approved foster carer

## Why children are privately fostered

Children and young people may have to live with other families for many different reasons:

- A child could be living with a friend's family because of separation, divorce or arguments at home
- A teenager could be living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend, or with a school friend's family
- A parent has a long-term illness and cannot look after their child
- Children have been sent to the UK by parents living overseas for education or health care reasons

## Is private fostering the same as fostering?

No.

Foster carers are people who have been formally assessed and approved by a Local Authority or Independent Fostering Agency to look after other people's children.

Private foster carers are people who have agreed with the parents/carers to look after a child. The Council is not involved in making the arrangements and the child or children are still the responsibility of their parents.



## Is private fostering legal?

Yes.

Although you do have a duty to inform the Council of any private fostering arrangement taking place.

## What should you do?

### What the Council needs to know

You need to get in touch with the Children and Families Service at Redbridge Council if you:

- Are thinking about placing your child or children with friends or another family as a private fostering arrangement
- Have already placed your child or children with friends or another family as a private fostering arrangement
- Have found out that a child or children you know are living in a private fostering arrangement or are planning to live in a private fostering arrangement
- Are looking after someone else's child or children and you are NOT a close relative

## If you are the parent (s) ...

You should let the Redbridge Children and Families Service know:

- At least 6 weeks before the arrangement begins
- And provide the name and address of the person who will be looking after your child at least 48 hours before the child goes to live with them

## If you are the private foster carer ...

Then you should tell the Redbridge Children and Families Service:

- At least 6 weeks before the arrangement begins.  
A private foster carer should also always contact us within 48 hours:
- If the child arrives to stay with you in an emergency
- If the child leaves
- If anyone in your home is convicted of a criminal offence
- If the child has a serious accident or dies

If you did not realise this until now, then do not worry – please just let us know now using the contact details on page 6.

## If you are from a professional agency or voluntary organisation

Professionals working in child care, schools, health services, voluntary agencies and organisations, or for the Council, should also let the Redbridge Children and Families Service know if they become aware of a private fostering arrangement.

There is a specific guidance available for professionals via the LSCB website: [www.redbridgelscb.org.uk/professionals/private-fostering](http://www.redbridgelscb.org.uk/professionals/private-fostering)

## Who should you contact?

For information and queries about private fostering please contact: Children and Families Service on 020 8708 3885 (9.00am to 5.00pm) or Out of hours number 020 8708 5897 (after 5.00pm and at weekends)

See more at:

[www.redbridge.gov.uk/adult-and-childrens-services/fostering](http://www.redbridge.gov.uk/adult-and-childrens-services/fostering)

[www.redbridge.gov.uk/adult-and-childrens-services/child-protection](http://www.redbridge.gov.uk/adult-and-childrens-services/child-protection)



## **What will happen next?**

A social worker from the Children and Families Service will arrange to visit/contact the parents and visit the private foster carers. The child or children will be seen and spoken to by the Social Worker. The Local Authority has a duty to make sure the private fostering arrangement is safe and suitable for the child. We will make regular visits to ensure the child's needs are being met and to provide advice and support. You can also ask to see the social worker at any time if you need help and advice.

A Local Authority has the power to stop a person from private fostering if the arrangement is found unsuitable. The Local Authority can also make requests or requirements about improving specific areas of concern. We will assist with matters which we believe are in a child's best interests.

## **What help will I get from the Council?**

The child or children in your care are still the responsibility of their parents, and the Children and Families Service will only be providing you with help and advice about caring for the children in your care.

## **Information and Guidance**

We will help you if you need access to information or resources you might need to make sure that the child is brought up safely and that his or her needs are fully met.

Where necessary, training can also be provided.

## **Financial Support**

It is the child or children's parents' responsibility to provide for them financially whilst they are being privately fostered. In some circumstances, financial support may be available for children with disabilities or complex health needs. Before any decision is made, a detailed assessment will be made to see if financial support is needed.

## What help will I get from the Government?

You may be able to claim tax credits or Child Benefit and possibly Income Support. Visit: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) where you can contact the following organisations for more help and information on this:

The Department for Work and Pensions

[www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)

HM revenue & Customs (administers Child Benefit)

[www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk)

Job Centre Plus (who look after Income Support)

[www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

## Will the child be taken away from me?

Parents are unlikely to leave their children in the care of people they do not trust, so it is not likely that a child will be taken away from you unless the child is at risk of significant harm.

It is important that you contact the Redbridge Children and Families Service as it is our job to help you create a safe and happy home for children in your care, and to identify what information and resources might be available to you.



## How to get in contact

To notify us of a private fostering arrangement or to gather more information contact:

### Children and Families Service

Lynton House  
255-259 High Road  
Ilford  
IG1 1NN

Phone no: 020 8708 3885

Emergency and out of office hours no: 020 8708 5897

Email: [cpat.referrals@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:cpat.referrals@redbridge.gov.uk)

