

- Provide the prospective carer with as much information about their child as possible, including their health, dietary preferences, school, hobbies, religion and ethnicity
- It is the parents' responsibility to ensure that the proposed private fostering placement is suitable for their child

What the private foster carer must do

- Advise Hounslow's Children's Services of their intention to privately foster a child at **least six weeks** in advance or, where a child is received in an emergency, not more than **48 hours** thereafter
- Advise Hounslow's Children's Services within 48 hours when a child leaves their care, giving the name and address of the person into whose care the child has been discharged to

What Hounslow's Children's Services must do

- Check the suitability of private foster carers through home visits
- Make regular visits to the child and monitor the overall standard of care provided
- Ensure that advice to carers is made available when needed

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Private Fostering

A guide to the law for professionals



London Borough
 of Hounslow

Private fostering information for professionals

Children in foster care fall into two main groups; those looked after by the local authority or independent fostering agencies, and those fostered privately.



Many professionals who work with children will encounter private fostering situations. Professionals in the education, health and social care fields have a shared responsibility to work together to ensure that all privately fostered children are well cared for and are safeguarded from harm.

What is private fostering?

Private fostering is different from local authority fostering where carers are approved as foster carers. Private fostering occurs when a child or young person under 16 (under 18 years if disabled), is cared for, and provided with accommodation for 28 days or more, by an adult who is not a relative, by private arrangement between the parent and carer.



The Children Act 1989 defines 'relative' in relation to a child as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt. They could be a full or half relation, and could be related by marriage. The term also includes a step-parent. A cohabitee of the mother or father would not qualify as a relative; neither would extended family such as a great aunt/uncle or parent's cousin.

Common examples of private fostering arrangements

- Children and young people who are sent to this country for education or health care by their birth parents from overseas
- Children or young people whose parents work or study long and/or antisocial hours
- Children or young people who are living with a friend's family as a result of parental separation, divorce or difficulties at home
- A teenager living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend

Legal requirements

What professionals must do:

- Private foster carers are legally required to notify their local authority but many do not, usually because they do not know that they have to. This means that Children's Services are unable to check whether the child is being properly cared for
- It is essential that Hounslow's Children's Services are made aware of private fostering arrangements so that they can safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people who may be vulnerable
- Ideally, notification should come from the parent or carer, however, education, health, and other social care professionals can also play an important role, as they are often the people who become aware of private fostering situations.

If you know that a child is being privately fostered, encourage the parent or carer of the child to notify Hounslow's Children's Services. You should follow this action up by notifying Children's Services yourself.

What the parent must do

- Advise Hounslow's Children's Services of the private fostering arrangement at **least six weeks** in advance or, where an arrangement is made in an emergency, **within 48 hours**, and at the end of such an arrangement
- Exercise parental responsibility, and participate in all decisions about their child