

Private Fostering



What is private fostering?

Private fostering is when a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative'. This is a private arrangement made between a parent and a carer, for 28 days or more. Close relatives are defined as step-parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts (whether of full blood, half blood or marriage/affinity).

There is a duty on the part of parents and prospective carers entering into private fostering arrangements to notify their local authority. This is in order to safeguard and protect the child's welfare as well as ensuring the child, carer and parent are receiving appropriate support and help.

Local authorities have a legal duty to safeguard the well being of privately fostered children. Once notified Children's Social Care will visit the child and carer and undertake an assessment of the placement and offer support as appropriate.

It is private fostering if:

- a child is under 16 years of age – 18 if they have a disability
- the arrangement is for 28 days or longer
- the child's new carer does not have parental responsibility for the child and is not a close relative as defined above

It is not private fostering if:

- the child is cared for by close relatives
- a social worker arranges the placement
- the child is 16, unless they are disabled

Carers – What do I need to know?

If you are going to become a private foster carer you must inform Wiltshire Children's Social Care at least six weeks before the child comes to live with you. If you are not able to do this, for example because the arrangement happens very quickly, you should tell Wiltshire Children's Social Care within 48 hours of the arrangement beginning. A social worker will visit you at your home and see the child you are caring for. They will discuss with you the legal requirements relating to private fostering and can also offer advice on relevant support.

Parents – What do I need to know?

If you are planning for your child to be privately fostered you must tell Wiltshire Children's Social Care at least six weeks before your child goes to live with the new carer. They will ask you for information including:

- your child's name, sex, date of birth, religion, culture and spoken language
- your name and address
- the name and address of the person caring for your child
- the reasons for private fostering and how long the arrangement is for
- A social worker will then contact you to discuss their role in assessing and supporting the private fostering arrangement

Language schools and settings using host families

Ensure agreements you have with local host families include consideration of private fostering.

Host families should be aware that if they accommodate a child under the age of 16 (or 18 if disabled) for a period of 28 days or more they are entering into a private fostering arrangement. Host families should understand that the local authority has a duty to ascertain whether the arrangement is suitable and to keep in touch with the child and themselves throughout the duration of the child's stay. The host and any member of their household over the age of 16 will have to have enhanced DBS checks.

You should ensure that Wiltshire Children's Social Care is notified of any private fostering arrangement provided by a host family.

Professionals – What do I need to know?

The majority of children who are privately fostered are well cared for. Some children (and their carers) however may be in need of support and for a minority of privately fostered children they may be at risk of or suffering significant harm. Professionals working with children and young people have a key role in identifying privately fostered children. Staff working in education, health, social care, youth work and police community support are often the first people to become aware of these arrangements.

By law parents and carers must notify the local authority of private fostering arrangements, however this rarely happens. If you do become aware that a child or young person is being privately fostered, you should inform the carer/parent of the requirement to notify Wiltshire Children's Social Care. If you are not confident that they will do so, then you should notify Wiltshire Children's Social Care yourself.

If you are unsure whether the person caring for the child is a close relative – **ASK** the carer what their relationship is with the child.

To notify Wiltshire Council of a private fostering arrangement or to discuss a potential private fostering arrangement, please contact Wiltshire Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on 0300 4560108.

More information can be found at www.wiltshire.gov.uk/privatefostering