



# Are you looking after somebody else's child?

A guide for host families  
and agencies



achieving  
for children

## Private fostering is....

when a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if they are disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a close relative for 28 days or more.

Close relatives are defined as step-parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts. To qualify as private fostering, the arrangement has not been made by the local authority, and the child or young person is not being looked after by an approved foster carer.

Some children may come to the United Kingdom to study and are placed with a host family by the school or an agency. Often these children are in private fostering arrangements, and the agency and host family must inform the local authority.

Longer than 14 days in a residential school or hospital is also considered to be private fostering.

## An example

Fourteen year old Rosa is attending a five week English language summer school. She has been living with a host family, arranged by an independent agency, whilst her family are still in Spain. Is this private fostering?

Yes, because the arrangement has been made by an agency, without the involvement of the local authority, and Rosa is under 16 years, living with a host family, who are not close relatives, for more than 28 days.

## Who has parental responsibility?

The private foster carer, in this case the host family, is responsible for the day-to-day care of the child but the parents maintain their parental responsibility and are primarily responsible for promoting the welfare of their child.

## **I am a host family or agency, what do I need to do?**

Everyone working with children and families has an important role to play in safeguarding the welfare of vulnerable children.

Many private foster carers are excellent and safe, but if the local authority is unaware of the arrangement, they are unable to offer any support. Therefore, if you are aware of a private fostering arrangement, you have a duty to notify the local authority, by contacting our Single Point of Access.

- Home stay agencies should ensure that the host families are aware that they are entering into a private fostering arrangement and what this entails.
- Agencies should obtain written consent from the birth parent for their child to live with you, the host family and to attend the language school.
- Be aware of your duty to notify the local authority of a private fostering arrangement as soon as possible after the arrangement has been made.
- If you have any concerns about the child, please contact the local authority who will be able to provide assistance and support.
- You may be anxious about breaching confidentiality, but if you believe that sharing the information with the local authority will ensure the welfare of the child, you are acting responsibly and within the law.
- The intention of the local authority is to support the child and host family, ensuring that the placement meets the child's needs.

## **What does the local authority do?**

A social worker will arrange to visit the child to ensure the private fostering arrangement is suitable. They will also regularly visit the child to see how they are feeling and help them tackle any issues they may have. The local authority will arrange for all members of the host family's household to have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check, if aged over 18.

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To provide information of a private fostering arrangement  
contact:

Kingston or Richmond SPA on **020 8547 5008** (8am to 6pm)  
(020 8770 5000 for out of hours/weekends)