

Private Fostering:

A guide for education staff and volunteers

What is private fostering?

Private fostering is when someone who is not a parent or 'close relative' cares for a child under the age of 16 (18 if disabled) for 28 days or more. A close relative is defined as a parent, step parent, legal guardian, grandparent, sibling or an aunt or uncle.

It is important that the local authority knows about all children who are privately fostered. If you know any children in your setting who are privately fostered or think that a child you know might be, you should report this to your Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

Why does the local authority need to know a child is being privately fostered?

In 2000, a nine year old girl, Victoria Climbié, died while in the care of her Great Aunt. Victoria was privately fostered. The legislation changed after her death so that local authorities have to make sure these children are looked after properly. While many people provide excellent care for children who are part of their extended families or friends, there are other children who don't have anyone to look out for them. The child's parents have a duty to inform the local authority but not all parents know about this or they, or the carer, might not want anyone to know.

How do I know if a child is being privately fostered?

Children can be privately fostered for many reasons:

- They have moved from abroad to live in the UK with extended families or friends;
- Parental ill physical or mental health;
- Host families in language schools;
- Children who attend boarding schools and stay with host families during the school holidays;
- Where parents have moved away but the child stays behind (for example to sit their exams);
- Children of member of the armed forces who are serving abroad;
- Trafficked children;
- Children who are estranged from their families;
- Exchange visits;
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking minors who are living with friends, relatives or strangers;
- Children brought from outside the UK with a view to adoption.

Children who are looked after by the local authority or living with fosters carer are not privately fostered.

You could also consider the following questions:

- Has a child mentioned they are no longer living at home or they are living with someone else?
- Has a child stopped attending your school without giving a reason?
- Is the child brought to and collected from school by someone who is not a parent or close relative?
- Has a child told you their parents have gone away?
- Is parents evening attended by someone who is not a parent or close relative?
- Are you clear about who has parental responsibility for the child?
- Is the child or child's carer vague about their relationship to each other or how often they live together?
- Does the child have difficulty getting parental permission forms signed?
- Is the child new to your school and there are anomalies in their admissions form?

Child trafficking and private fostering

Child trafficking is the movement of children for the purposes of domestic servitude, benefit fraud or for criminal or sexual exploitation. Children can be trafficked into the UK by a person claiming to be a relative or they may enter the UK using another child's passport. Children may also be moved within the UK or even within Surrey.

Private fostering arrangements can often hide child trafficking and it is important to remain vigilant for signs of exploitation. This may include:

- A child that regularly goes missing from home or school or who goes missing for periods that are unexplained;
- Signs of physical or sexual abuse;
- A child who is not registered with the GP;
- A child who has limited freedom of movement;
- A child who seems to work very hard and is regularly tired;
- Explanations about how the child came to be living in the county that lack depth or detail;
- A child who appears malnourished;
- A child who appears not to have any money but has a mobile phone and/or is expensively dressed;

What will the local authority do?

When the local authority is notified about a private fostering arrangement an officer must:

- Visit the premises where the child is being cared for;
- Visit and speak to the private foster carer and to all members of their household;
- Visit and speak to the child alone;
- Speak to and, where practicable, visit the parents, or other person with parental responsibility for the child.

The visits should take place within seven working days to ensure that the arrangement is suitable and meets the needs of the child. If the arrangement is not deemed suitable then the parents have

to make alternative arrangements. In some cases this may mean the child comes into the care of the local authority.

If the local authority is satisfied the needs of the child can be met by the private foster carer the local authority must continue to visit the child throughout the arrangement.

For further advice and guidance please contact the Fostering Service at Quadrant Court, Woking on 01932 794444.