



Private Fostering:

A guide for education Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs)

Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) in education should be familiar with the guidance 'Private fostering: A guide for education staff and volunteers' which outlines the important role schools and colleges play in identifying children who are privately fostered.

This group of children are often 'hidden' and while private fostering arrangements can be very beneficial for children and their families, other children are at risk of abuse and neglect. There is a legal duty for parents and private foster carers to notify the local authority of all private fostering arrangements at least six weeks before the arrangement is due to start. Not to do so is a potential offence.

Education staff and volunteers are advised to report any known or suspected cases of private fostering to the DSL. This guide outlines steps that should be taken by the DSL in response to concerns raised.

What should the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) do?

In the event of a report of a private fostering arrangement the DSL should:

- Discuss the child's care arrangements with the carer and the child's parent (if they are in touch with the setting);
- If the DSL suspects that a private fostering arrangement is in place and neither party has notified the local authority the DSL should encourage the parent and the carer to notify the [Surrey Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub \(MASH\)](#);
- Request permission from the parent to also contact the MASH to notify the local authority about the private fostering arrangement;
- If consent is not obtained, the DSL should assess whether a referral to the MASH is necessary due to safeguarding concerns;
- If the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm (including being trafficked and/or exploited) the DSL should contact the MASH without delay following the setting's existing child protection procedures;
- Where there are concerns a child is being sexually exploited the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Board [CSE risk screening tool](#) should also be completed.

Some parents and carers may be anxious about the local authority being aware of their care arrangements. This may be because they are worried Children's Services will

become involved, they think it is nobody else's business who cares for their child, believe that the local authority won't understand their circumstances or they may be worried about racism. Surrey Safeguarding Children's Board provide a [leaflet for parents and carers](#) which may help explain why the local authority should be informed and what will happen next.

Other parents and carers may have something to hide and it is important for DSLs to carefully consider informing Surrey MASH about private fostering arrangements even when consent is not obtained.

In preparing for a meeting with the child's carer and/or parent the DSL may find it useful to consider the following questions:

- Who is looking after the child and what is their relationship to the child?
- Who has parental responsibility for the child and can they provide evidence?
- Has the person with parental responsibility given their consent to the care arrangements?
- Are there anomalies on school documentation about who the child lives with and who has parental responsibility?

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