



FACT SHEET: Private Fostering

Under the Children Act 1989, there is a legal requirement for local authorities to be notified of any private fostering arrangements. Children's Social Care has a duty to undertake assessments and checks, and to provide support and advice to the child and to the private foster carer. In Sheffield, private fostering work is undertaken by the **Families, Adopters and Carers Team** (FACT), in Children's Specialist Services. Privately fostered children may be particularly vulnerable.

Definition

A private fostering arrangement is one made without the involvement of Children's Social Care for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative for 28 days or more. A close relative is defined as "a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership or step-parent).

The arrangement may include children sent from abroad, asylum seeking and refugee children, teenagers staying in short term arrangements with friends or other non relatives and language students with host families.

Legislation and duties

Under the Children Act 1989 and 2004 private foster carers and anyone with Parental Responsibility are required to notify the local authority of their intention to privately foster or have a child fostered.

The Local Authority must promote awareness in their area of the notification requirements, and monitor their effectiveness in responding to notifications.

The Children Act (1989 and 2004) Section 70 created a number of offences in connection with private fostering, including failure to notify an arrangement or to comply with any requirements or prohibition imposed by the local authority.

Teachers, health and other professionals should notify Children's Social Care of any private fostering arrangements that come to their attention.

The National Minimum Standards 2005 apply.

For further details see **chapter 3.19** in Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board Child Protection Procedures.

Signs to be aware of

- A child not previously known suddenly appears to live in a neighbourhood, attend a facility or join a community group without explanation
- A child suddenly disappears without warning or explanation
- A child says that they are staying with someone other than a parent
- A number of children are staying in a household seemingly not related
- Requests for services to different children referred to as 'nieces' or 'nephews'.

Action to be taken

When a practitioner becomes aware of the possibility of private fostering:

- Talk to the adult/s, unless you think it might expose the child to risk of harm.
- Provide them with a leaflet from FACT.
- If they are not going to make the notification themselves, tell them that you have a duty to do so.
- If in doubt about the wellbeing of the child/ren make a referral to the appropriate Children's Social Care office.

The practitioner has a duty to:

- Check with FACT that the notification has been made.
- Contribute to the assessment of the suitability of the arrangements.
- Monitor the child's welfare and progress and stay involved in the ongoing liaison with FACT
- The FACT team number is (0114) 2734998.