



St. Helens
Council

Is someone else looking after your child?

Information for birth parents
on Private Fostering



St. Helens Council

Contact Centre

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into Braille, audio tape or a foreign language.



Children who are cared for on a full-time basis by people who are not their parents or a relative* may be in private foster care.

Private foster care occurs when a child under the age of 16 (or 18, if disabled) is cared for, and provided with accommodation, by an adult who is not a relative*, for 28 days or more, by private arrangement between parent and carer.

We, as a Local Authority, have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of privately fostered children.

*The Children Act defines 'relative', in relation to a child, as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt. They could be a full or half relation and could be related by marriage. The term also includes step-parent. A cohabitee of the mother or father of the child would not qualify as a relative, neither would extended family such as great aunt/uncle or parent's cousins.

This leaflet is for parents who will be placing their children, or have placed their children, with Private Foster Carers.

The aim of this leaflet is to help you to understand more about the law on Private Fostering and the role of the Children's Services Department.

Do you mean me?

Read the following 3 questions and answer yes or no:

- Is your child living with and being looked after by someone else?
- Is your child below the age of 16 (or 18, if disabled)?
- Is your child being cared for by someone who is not a 'relative' - as described above?

If you have answered yes to **all** of these questions, then your child is being privately fostered.

What is Private Fostering?

Private Fostering is an option sometimes used by parents who cannot provide full-time care for their children. There may be all kinds of reasons for this, some examples are:

- Children sent to this country for education or healthcare by parents living overseas

- Children living with a friend's family as a result of parental separation, divorce or arguments at home
- Teenagers living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend
- Children whose parents have to be admitted to hospital for long periods

If your child is living with someone who is not related to them, they are being privately fostered (unless the child has been placed by the Local Authority or voluntary organisation or they will not be staying for more than 27 days).

Things you need to consider when placing your child with a Private Foster Carer

Education

If your child is of school age, you will need to discuss plans for their education with the Private Foster Carer before the placement starts. It is best if both you and the Private Foster Carer can arrange to visit the relevant school before the placement starts so that you can:

- Give the name and address of your child's previous school(s) so that school records can be transferred and the new school will be aware of your child's progress and of any difficulties they have had
- Discuss directly with the school your child's background and educational needs. Racial, cultural and linguistic needs should also be considered
- Discuss how long your child will be at school, admission dates, etc.

Health

You need to inform the carer of:

- Your child's GP, dentist, etc.
- Any medication or treatment they are receiving
- Any allergies or intolerances to certain foods, etc.

Making the placement work

It is important that you work together with the Private Foster Carers, Children and Young People's Services and all other childcare professionals involved to ensure that the placement is as successful as possible for your child.

The needs of Black and Minority Ethnic children

Current research clearly suggests that it is best for children to live in a family who have the same racial, ethnic, cultural and religious background. Carers with a similar background to your child are better placed to help your child understand their racial history, provide for their particular needs and help them to develop a positive sense of themselves.

You will need to think very carefully before placing your child with a foster carer whose ethnic origin is different from that of your child. St.Helens Children and Young People's Services have to consider if your child's religious, racial, cultural and language needs are being met. This will be an important part of the assessment.

What should I do next?

By law, you are required to advise St.Helens Council about any Private Fostering arrangement:

- a) If you have already placed your child with private carers, you must notify St.Helens Children and Young People's Services immediately (within 48 hours) on telephone number **01744 676789**.
- b) If you have arranged, or are in the process of arranging, to place your child with private carers, you must give Children and Young People's Services at least 6 weeks' written notice of your intentions.

What happens next?

St.Helens Children and Young People's Services have a legal duty to check that the placement, the Private Foster Carers and their premises are all suitable. So once you have told us about the proposed or current fostering arrangement, the assessing Social

Worker will ask the Private Foster Carer for their permission to carry out our standard statutory checks. These include:

- Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau
- Social Services Checks
- Department of Health

Any other household member over the age of 16 will also have to agree to have these checks performed.

If they do not agree to these checks, or a member of their household does not agree, we will not be able to proceed with the assessment and you will have to arrange for alternative care to be provided.

What information will I need to tell St.Helens Children and Young People's Services?

- Your child's name, date of birth, religion, racial origin and language
- How long you expect the child to stay with the carers
- Why the placement is needed
- Your name and address, and the details of anyone else who has parental responsibility for them
- The date you expect placement to start (or when the placement started, if the placement has begun)
- The carers' previous addresses for the last five years
- If you are aware of any criminal convictions of the carers
- If the carers have applied to privately foster before and been disqualified

Once all the checks are complete, the worker will write a report about the carers, the suitability of their home, the reasons and intended length of the placement, your involvement in the placement and your child's views about the placement.

St.Helens Children and Young People's Services will then make a decision about the carer's suitability to become a Private Foster Carer. The worker will inform you about the decision and, as part of

the arrangement, they may need to impose some requirements; for example, limiting the number of children a Private Foster Carer may have living with them.

If the placement is agreed

After the placement has been agreed, a worker will continue to support the Private Foster Carer and your child. St.Helens have a legal requirement to see children in private foster placements regularly, at least once every six weeks during the first year. If the child is old enough, there may be arrangements to see the child on their own.

There will be a review of the arrangements every twelve months.

Finance

Any financial arrangement is made between you and the Private Foster Carer. As the child's parent, you retain financial responsibility for them. Ideally, these arrangements should be set down in writing. St.Helens Children and Young People's Services will not become involved in these arrangements.

If you have any queries relating to private fostering, please contact:

Cath Ballans/Diane Kelly
Team Managers, Duty Team
St.Helens Council Fostering Service
Call: 01744 671168/673343
Email: privatefostering@sthelens.gov.uk
Visit: www.sthelens.gov.uk/privatefostering

For more general information relating to Private Fostering, please contact:

Department for Children, Schools and Families
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
Tel: 0870 000 2288
www.dfes.gov.uk