

# PRIVATE FOSTERING

## INFORMATION & GUIDANCE FOR PROFESSIONALS

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### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FORMAL FOSTER CARE AND PRIVATE FOSTER CARE

Formal Foster Carers are professional foster carers who are formally trained and approved. They care for the children who are looked after by the Local Authority and are placed in their care by Children's Social Care.

Private Foster Carers are carers who care for children in a Private Fostering arrangement, which is an informal and private arrangement made between the child's parents and carers.

### WHAT KINDS OF PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS ARE THERE IN SOUTHWARK?

It is estimated that there could be between 15,000 and 20,000 children being privately fostered in the UK. Some of the common situations where a private fostering arrangement occurs are:

- Children whose parents are unable to care for them for a number of reasons, for example parents may have to work or study long unsociable hours or parents might have more than one job.
- Parents may have drug or mental health issues, which prevent them from caring for their child for periods of time.
- Children and young people whose parents live overseas and have usually been sent to be educated in the UK.
- Children who are seeking asylum and who have arrived in the UK with adults that they are not related to.
- Young people who are estranged from their families. They may have chosen or been forced to leave their parents' home for a number of reasons. The young person may then make their own arrangements such as living with friend's, girlfriend's or boyfriend's family.
- Children who have been brought to the UK to be adopted. Until formal notice of intention to adopt is given these children are considered to be privately fostered.

In some private fostering arrangements, children may be at risk of significant harm. For instance, children who have been trafficked (transported for exploitation) and brought to the UK to work as servants or for prostitution. These are private foster care arrangements even though the adults these children and young people live with are not acting as parents.





## WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

It is a legal requirement for parents and the person intending to privately foster to notify their local authority. The local authority must then ensure that the children in these arrangements are being safeguarded and cared for appropriately. Private foster carers and birth parents should inform us six weeks before a private fostering arrangement is to be made or within 48 hours if the arrangement is made in an emergency.

## YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Many parents and private foster carers are not aware they have to notify local authorities of the arrangements they make. This makes it difficult for us to check if the children are being looked after properly. If you are aware that a child is being privately fostered, you should encourage the parents or private foster carer to notify us about their arrangements, explaining that it is the legal duty of both parents and carers to do this.

They can do this by:

Phoning **020 7525 1921** or emailing  
**MASH@southwark.gov.uk**



We will then arrange for social workers to visit them. Through regular home visits, we will assess the suitability of private fostering arrangements and ensure that there are no causes for concern. We will also provide family support and advice to carers to ensure that they are getting the help they need.

Some people may be wary of notifying us of the private fostering arrangements they make. We do not want to change these arrangements but we are required to check that children are safe and being properly cared for. You can help us by reassuring families and private foster carers that we are here to help them and may be able to offer them support and advice on how to access benefits.

If you are unsure whether they have notified or will notify us, you should let us know. If you have child protection concerns about any child, you should notify us immediately.



## How to NOTIFY

To notify Southwark Children's Social Care about a Private Fostering Arrangement please contact MASH on  
**0207 525 1921** or  
email  
**MASH@southwark.gov.uk.**

