

What is private fostering?

Private fostering occurs when a child or young person under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) is cared for and provided with accommodation for 28 days or more by an adult who is not a relative,^[1] by private arrangement between the parent and carer.

Usually a birth parent chooses and arranges a private fostering placement and private foster carers do not hold parental responsibility. Private fostering can take many forms, for example:

- Children and young people that have to live away from their family as a result of separation, divorce or disputes at home.
- Children and young people sent to this country for education or health opportunities.
- Cultural exchange students.
- Children and young people from overseas whose parents are studying or working during unsociable hours, which makes it difficult for them to use ordinary child care provisions.
- Any child or young person whose parents have made a private arrangement for them to be looked after by someone else.

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

These are only examples. There may be other arrangements that come to your notice which do not fall into any of these categories. Please contact Sandwell Council's Children's Services if you are in doubt whether it is a private fostering arrangement



Contact Centre:

Monday – Friday, 9am to 5pm

☎ 0121 569 3100

Emergency out-of-hours

☎ 0121 569 2355

Do you know who is looking after me?

Private Fostering in Sandwell A Guide for Professionals

All professionals who work with or have contact with children and young people have a shared responsibility to ensure that privately fostered children are well cared for and are safeguarded from harm. Professionals play an important role by identifying and notifying Sandwell Children's Services of private fostering arrangements and by ensuring parents and carers are aware of their responsibilities. By monitoring and supervising private fostering placements, we can all help to safeguard children who may be at risk of abuse or neglect.

Sandwell Children's Services should be notified of all private fostering arrangements in Sandwell by contacting the **Contact Centre on 0121 569 3100 (Mon – Fri, 9am to 5pm) or emergency out-of-hours: 0121 569 2355.**



What are the rules governing private fostering?

Privately fostered children are safeguarded by legislation set out in Part 9 of the Children Act 1989; the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005; and Section 44 of the Children Act 2004 effective 1 July 2005.

Standards of care and management for private fostering arrangements are set out in the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (2005). You can find out more about the legal basis of private fostering on the Department for Education website at www.education.gov.uk or from the British Association of Adoption and Fostering at www.corambaaf.org.uk

Studies show that local councils are often not notified about private fostering arrangements, despite this being an offence under the Children Act 1989. When they are notified, it is nearly always after the fostering has started.

It is essential that Sandwell Children's Services are aware of such arrangements so that we can safeguard and promote the welfare of potentially vulnerable children. Ideally, notification should come from the carer or parent, although professionals also play an important role as they are often the people who have the first contact – for example children registering with a local GP or moving into a new school.



Professionals

- As a professional you are legally responsible to inform the Local Authority of any private fostering arrangements that you are aware of.
- If you know that a child is being privately fostered, encourage the carer or parent of the child to notify Sandwell Children's Services themselves.
- Always contact Sandwell Children's Services of any arrangement you become aware of, **Contact Centre 0121 569 3100 (Mon – Fri, 9am to 5pm) or emergency out-of-hours: 0121 569 2355**

Sandwell Children's Services

- Assess the suitability of private foster carers.
- Make regular visits to the child or young person and monitor the overall standard of care.
- Ensure the child or young person is well cared for in a safe environment.
- Carry out Disclosure and Barring checks on the private foster carers and any person over the age of 16 in the household.
- Ensure arrangements are in place to keep a record of private foster carers and children who are privately fostered.
- Ensure that advice and support to carers is made available when needed.
- Provide annual statistics of the numbers of privately fostered children in Sandwell to the Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board. If Sandwell Children's Services decide that an arrangement is unsuitable and if the child or young person cannot be returned to their parents, Children's Services will decide what action to take to safeguard the child's welfare.