

## What should YOU, the professional do?

Professionals working with children have a shared responsibility to work together to ensure that all privately fostered children are well cared for and safeguarded from harm.

It is vital that the local authority is made aware of all private fostering arrangements so that they can safeguard and promote the welfare of potentially vulnerable children.

Private foster carers are legally required to notify their council but many do not as they are often unaware of this requirement.

Education, health and social care professionals are often the people who are in contact with these children and can play a vital role in explaining to private foster carers and parents their duty to notify the local authority of their private fostering arrangement.

If you know a child is being privately fostered, encourage the parent or carer to notify Bexley's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on 020 3045 5440.

In addition, you should give the parent or carer the leaflet: 'Private Fostering in Bexley - A Guide for Parents and Carers'. You may need to follow this up and notify Bexley's MASH yourself if you feel that Bexley's Children's Social Care hasn't been informed.

If you have concerns about a child's welfare, you should contact Bexley's MASH on 020 3045 5440



## How private foster carers can get support

Private foster carers may approach Bexley's Children's Social Care for advice on caring for the children they are privately fostering and they can also approach organisations such as those listed in this leaflet for advice and support.

There may, in certain cases, be help available under the Children Act for children deemed to be "in need of services".

Private fostering is a private arrangement between parents and someone who is willing to look after their child. Parents usually pay the private foster carers for looking after their child and financial arrangements should be agreed before the child is privately fostered. Sometimes parents do not make financial contributions and in such cases the private foster carer is able to claim benefits on behalf of the child and apply for other benefits.

## Further sources of information and advice

Children Act 1989

Children Act 2004

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

National Minimum Standards (NMS – DfES 2005)

Practice Guide

London Child Protection Procedures, Fourth edition, 2010

Information on benefits and support: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

Helpful organisations:

Bexley's Children's Social Care: 020 3045 5440

Bexley SHIELD -Safeguarding partnership: 0203 045 4320 Email: [shield@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:shield@bexley.gov.uk)

Somebody Else's Child: [www.privatefostering.org.uk](http://www.privatefostering.org.uk)

Details of all London Borough of Bexley services can be found at [www.bexley.gov.uk](http://www.bexley.gov.uk)



# Private Fostering in Bexley

## A guide for professionals

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## What is private fostering?

Private fostering is very different from the care of children provided by local councils through approved foster carers. It occurs when a child under 16 years old (under 18 if the child has a disability) is cared for by an adult who is not a relative\* on a full-time basis, and provided with accommodation for more than 28 days.

Usually, a birth parent chooses and arranges for private fostering to take place.

## What are common private fostering situations?

- ▶ Children living with a friend's family as a result of parental separation, divorce or arguments at home.
- ▶ Children whose parents' study or work involves unsuitable hours that make it difficult for them to use ordinary day-care or after-school care.
- ▶ Teenagers living with the family of a friend, boyfriend or girlfriend
- ▶ Children sent to the UK for education or health care by birth parents from overseas.
- ▶ Asylum seeking and refugee children.
- ▶ Children living with host families for a variety of reasons.

\*The Children Act defines a relative 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 a stepparent. The cohabitee of the mother or father would not qualify as a relative, nor would extended family such as great aunts, great uncles or parent's cousins.



## What are the rules governing private fostering?

Privately fostered children are safeguarded by the Children's Act 1989 as amended by the Children Act 2004 and associated regulations. Local Authorities have a legal requirement to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered in their area is being safeguarded.

There are national minimum standards for private fostering which came into force in 2005. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) reviews the way in which a local authority discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

A child can be removed from a private foster placement if there is reasonable cause to suspect that they are suffering or could be harmed.

## Birth parents must:

- ▶ ensure that the proposed fostering placement is suitable for their child and the person who will have responsibility for their child's welfare is someone who they trust;
- ▶ inform Bexley's Children's Social Care at least six weeks before the arrangement begins, unless the arrangement is made in an emergency, in which case, they must tell Bexley's Children's Social Care within 48 hours;
- ▶ retain parental responsibility and participate in all decisions about their child;
- ▶ provide the prospective carer with as much information as possible to help them care for the child; this might include information about the child's health, eating preferences, school activities, hobbies and religious beliefs;
- ▶ inform Bexley's Children's Social Care immediately if there are any changes to the arrangements, for example, if the carer moves address or the household composition changes. This is very important because if they do not inform the Council, it may not be in a position to protect the child from harm or neglect.

## Private foster carers must:

- ▶ inform Bexley's Children's Social Care at least six weeks before the arrangement begins, unless the arrangement is made in an emergency, in which case, they must tell social care within 48 hours of the child's arrival;
- ▶ notify Bexley's Children's Social Care of any change in circumstance relating to the care of the child - for example, a change of address, a change in household composition or if the child leaves their care (the child's new address must be given to the local authority). Again this is important so that the Council is in a position to protect the child.

## The London Borough of Bexley must:

- ▶ check on the suitability of the private foster carer through home visits as outlined in The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (DfES 2005);
- ▶ undertake relevant assessments and checks, make regular visits to the child and monitor the overall standard of care;
- ▶ will ensure that the child's wishes and feelings are considered.
- ▶ ensure arrangements are in place to keep a record of private foster carers and children who are privately fostered;
- ▶ ensure that appropriate advice and support to carers is made available when needed;
- ▶ provide annual statistics of the numbers of privately fostered children within Bexley to central Government.