

Around 10,000 children in Britain live in informal fostering arrangements unknown to local authorities. This can make them vulnerable to abuse.

The Children Act 1989 requires parents, professionals & anyone proposing to privately foster a child under 16, to notify the local authority of the arrangement immediately or within 6 weeks.

A private fostering arrangement applies to a child under 16 (or 18 if disabled) who is cared for by someone other than a parent, a person with parental responsibility or close relative, for 28 days or more (including occasional short breaks).

A 'close relative' is a grandparent, brother, sister, aunt or uncle, step-parent, whether of 'full blood' or 'half-blood' or by marriage or civil partnership.

A 'private' foster carer can be:

- Extended family e.g. a cousin or great aunt
- A friend of the family
- The parent of a friend of the child
- Someone unknown to child/young person's family

How is responsibility shared?

- The private foster carer is responsible for providing daily care & promoting/safeguarding their welfare
- Private foster carer's rights come from the voluntary agreement made with the parent
- Responsibility for the child's welfare remains with the person with parental responsibility

Private foster carers may be entitled to support and financial help.

The Sheffield Connected Persons Team will assess the arrangement to see what is in the best interests of the child, including:

- listening to what the child wants
- arranging support for the child and the carer
- helping carer to apply to be a private foster carer
- ensuring cultural, linguistic, religious needs met
- undertake regular visits to see the child & carer
- signpost to other agencies as necessary

If the arrangement is deemed unsuitable, decisions will be made to safeguard the child's welfare.

Why are children in private foster care?

- children from abroad living with extended family
- host families for language schools
- parental ill-health
- parents have moved but student e.g. stays at school to finish their exams
- teenagers estranged from their families
- children brought to the UK for adoption
- children at independent boarding schools placed with host families for holidays
- trafficked children

Host families & 'homestay':

If a parent or student arranges the homestay, this is a separate (not fostering) private arrangement.

If your setting arranges exchange visits in the UK or abroad you must consider the safety of yours & visiting pupils if they are in the home of a family to whom they are not related, even if you engage a company to make those arrangements.

Adults providing the care are engaged in regulated activity and your setting is the regulated activity provider.

UK homestays - you should:

- obtain a DBS enhanced certificate with barred list information for all for students under 16
- consider obtaining a DBS enhanced certificate for students over 16, and
- use professional judgement to assess the suitability of the adults in those families who will care for the student
- A UK homestay of 28 days or more (child under 16, or 18 if disabled) may be a private fostering arrangement & you should notify the local authority.

Homestay abroad - you should:

- liaise with partner schools to agree arrangements to effectively safeguard all students taking part in the exchange
- make parents aware of the arrangement
- consider contacting the foreign embassy or High Commission in the country to discuss what checks are possible
- Provide pupils with contact details for emergencies or if they feel uncomfortable

Useful web links/resources:

- [Private Fostering, Sheffield City Council](#)
- [The Children \(Private Arrangements for Fostering\) Regulations 2005](#)
- www.privatefostering.org.uk
- [Private fostering: better information, better understanding, Ofsted 2014](#)
- [Children Act 1989 Private Fostering, DfE](#)

To notify the **Sheffield Safeguarding Hub** about a possible private fostering arrangement ring:

0114 2734855

For advice about private fostering, ring the:

Connected Persons Team, tel.: 0114 2736489