

What is Private Fostering?

Private fostering is when a child under 16 years of age (or under 18 if they have a disability) looked after by someone who is not a close relative for more than 28 days. A close relative is:-

- A parent
- A close relative i.e. grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt or step-parent
- A person with parental responsibility for the child

Why might a child be privately fostered?

A child may be privately fostered for a variety of reasons for example:-

- They may be sent here from overseas for educational or medical reasons
- May go to live with a friend's family because their parents have separated or divorced or because of difficulties at home
- A parent might be studying or working long and/or unsociable hours which makes caring for their child difficult
- They may come here on holiday exchanges.

A person privately fostering a child may not be aware that they are a private foster carer as the arrangement has been made with a friend. Equally parents may not be aware of this either.

Parents and carers are required by law to inform their local Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust).

Why must parents and carers inform their local Health and Social Care Trust?

While the majority of children will be well cared for, there may be those who are not. Some child/ren may have been brought here illegally and may be vulnerable to harm or exploitation.

Notifying the Trust is about helping to keep children safe and supporting private foster carers.

What will the Trust Do?

The Trust will work with the child, the parents and private foster carers to ensure that the best possible arrangements are in place for the child. A social worker will assess the suitability of the carer and other adults living in the home and carry out a police and criminal records checks, they will also assess the suitability and safety of the home.

If the arrangement is not suitable and the Trust believes that the child is or may be at risk of significant harm they will act to safeguard the child's welfare.

What to do if you think:-

- your child might be privately fostered or if you are thinking about this for your child/ren
- you are or may be a private foster carer or are thinking about privately fostering a child
- know someone who may be a private foster care.

If any of the above applies or you simply wish to have a discussion with someone about private fostering please contact your local Trust's Gateway Team.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: 028 9050 7000

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: 0300 1234 333

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: 0300 100 0300

Southern Health and Social Care Trust: 0800 783 7745

Western Health and Social Care Trust: 028 7131 4090

An emergency social work service is available outside office hours on 028 9504 9999

Additional Information may also be found on:

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

www.adoptionandfostering.hscni.net

