



# Private Fostering

## A guide for children

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Important information about your rights and the support available to you while you live away from your family in private foster care.



**Reading**  
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# What is Private Fostering?

If you are under 16 years old (or under 18 years old if you have a disability) and your parent(s) or the person who you usually live with have arranged for you to live with someone who is not related to you for more than 28 days, you are living in private foster care.

You are in private foster care if you live with a neighbour, a family friend or someone your mum and dad pay to look after you.

You are not in private foster care if you live with/are looked after by a grandparent, an uncle or aunt, a brother or sister, half-relatives, step-relatives and people who are related to you by marriage.

The people who look after you are called private foster carers.

The law says that your parent(s) and your private foster carer(s) **MUST** tell Social Services about your private fostering arrangement. The law also says that, once we have been told about you living in private foster care we, Social Services, **MUST** check on you regularly to make sure that you are safe and that your private foster carer(s) are looking after you properly.

This booklet aims to answer some of your questions about what you can expect from us and how to get help if you are unhappy with your private fostering arrangement.



# Why are children privately fostered?

Lots of children live away from their families in private foster care for a variety of reasons - you may go to live with a private foster carer because:

- your mum and/or dad are ill or they have to be away for a while so they can't look after you or
- your parents came to this country to study or work but couldn't find somewhere for everyone in your family to live together or
- your parents live abroad but have sent you to this country to go to school or college or for special medical care or
- you are having problems at home and are not getting on with your family or
- for other reasons

# What should my private foster carer do?

Your private foster carer is responsible for your day-to-day care. This means they should:

- give you regular meals (like breakfast, lunch and supper)
- make sure you have a comfortable bed of your own and that you get enough sleep
- make sure you are clean (you should have regular baths/showers) and that you have warm, clean clothes appropriate to your activities and age
- make sure you clean your teeth and visit a dentist regularly
- help you stay healthy and make sure you have any medical help you need if you are ill or injured
- make sure you go to school and do your homework

- make sure you have a chance to make friends and to enjoy sports and hobbies that you like
- make sure you are able to keep in touch with your family and friends who are important to you

Your health is very important and your parent(s), your private foster carer(s), your teacher(s) and your social worker should all help you to look after yourself.

Before you move to live with your private foster carer(s), your parent(s) should tell them about:

- your health history (any illnesses or medical issues you have had in the past or if you have been in hospital)
- any health problems that you currently have
- any special medicines or vaccinations that you need to have to keep healthy
- any allergies you have (an allergy is where your body reacts badly to something like a bee sting or to particular foods such as milk, nuts etc)

When you start to live with your private foster carer(s), they should register you with a doctor and dentist and make sure you have any medicine or vaccinations you need.

## Can my private foster carer make changes to my life?

No - unless your parents give permission. Even though you live with a private foster carer your parents **MUST** still make all the important decisions about your life. However, your foster carer may make day-to-day decisions about your routines and activities.

For example, your private foster carer(s) **MUST NOT** ask you to change your name, make you change schools, send you to live with another family or arrange for you to have medical treatment without asking your parent(s) for permission.

## Can I stay in touch with my family?

Yes - it is important that you stay in touch with your family. You can stay in contact with your parents and other relatives through visits, phone calls, letters, emails or texts and they **MUST** check to make sure you are being well looked after.

Your private foster carer(s) **MUST** also help you to stay in touch with any other relatives and friends - they can help you write letters or use the phone.

## Can I still follow my faith and family customs?

Yes - your private foster carer **MUST** respect the things that are important to you and your family and help you follow religious customs like special prayer times or eating special foods. They should also help you learn about your culture and meet people from your community who speak your language. If English is not your first language, your private foster carer should support you to have contact with people who speak your language of birth (however it may be up to your parents to identify who these people should be)

## Do I have to go to school?

If you are under 16 years old you must go to school - this is the law. Your private foster carer(s) **MUST** make sure that you go to school every day unless you are too ill to do so.

When you start living with your private



foster carer(s) you may need to go to a new school near to your new home, but your parents must agree to this change.

If you find it hard to settle into your new school you should tell your teacher - they will understand and support you.

## Can my private foster carer make me do jobs around the house?

Yes - but only small jobs. In most families children and young people help with small jobs around the home like washing dishes, setting the table for meals, putting clothes in the washing machine or keeping their bedroom clean and tidy.

Your private foster carer CAN ask you to do some jobs around the house, but they MUST NOT make you clean the house from top to bottom every day or ask you to stay at home to look after someone else instead of going to school.

## Will I be kept safe?

Yes. No child should be bullied or abused either by other children or by adults. If you are bullied or hurt either at school or at home you should tell an adult who you trust.

If you are called names or bullied because of the colour of your skin or the language you speak, the food that you eat or the clothes that you wear you should talk to someone about this.

If your private foster carer(s) or any member of their family makes you eat something or do something that is against your religion



or that makes you feel uncomfortable you should tell your social worker or an adult you trust about it.

Because you live with private foster carers the law says that Social Services **MUST** check on you regularly to make sure you are safe and being looked after properly.

As soon as we know that you live with a private foster carer a social worker will arrange to visit you at your private foster home (this first visit will happen within a week). Your social worker will talk to you to find out how you feel and if there is anything you are worried or unhappy about or you want to change.

If you want you can talk to your social worker on your own without your private foster carer(s) or other grown up around. This means that if you feel worried or frightened about anything you can tell your social worker and no one else will listen. You don't always have to see your social worker at your private foster carer's home. You can see each other in the community too.

It is important for us to know that you are safe and happy.

Your social worker must come to see you every 6 weeks for the first year. After this they may visit you less often.

## **What if I need to talk to my social worker in between visits?**

If you have questions or you are worried about anything or you just want to talk you can contact your social worker anytime - you don't have to wait for your next visit as we want to make sure that everything is OK and we can support you at any given time.

# What if I am not happy with my private foster carer?

Most children and young people living in private foster care are very happy and looked after well. However if you are unhappy or if your social worker thinks that you aren't being looked after properly, we will make sure that something is done about it.

## Contacting your social worker

Your social worker is:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:

Sometimes it can be easier to talk to someone you see every day - like your teacher at school or someone else you trust.

Other people to contact are:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Telephone number</b>

## Other organisations and people who can help

Reading Borough Council's Children's Services does not have a Children's Rights Officer, but you can contact NYAS to talk about anything that is worrying you:

### The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)

NYAS offer information, advice, advocacy and legal representation to children and young people through a network of advocates throughout England and Wales.

Freephone: 0300 330 3131

E: [help@nyas.net](mailto:help@nyas.net)

W: [www.nyas.net](http://www.nyas.net) NYAS

There are also a number of national organisations who can give you support and advice:

**ChildLine** - a 24-hour helpline for children who are in trouble or at risk of being hurt or abused. Call free on 0800 1111 or visit their website [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

**NSPCC** - (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) - If you are having a bad time at home, or being bullied at school, or are worried or scared about something call free on 0808 800 5000 or visit their website [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

### Coram Voice

Helps young people in care have their voice heard. Call free on 0808 800 5792, email [help@coramvoice.org.uk](mailto:help@coramvoice.org.uk) or visit their website [www.coramvoice.org.uk](http://www.coramvoice.org.uk)



# Contacting Children & Family Services

To tell Reading Borough Council's Children's Services about a private fostering arrangement or if you have concerns about a privately fostered child please contact the Children's Single Point of Access on 0118 937 3641.

[www.reading.gov.uk/privatefostering](http://www.reading.gov.uk/privatefostering)

Information about private fostering can be made available in other languages or in a non-written format on request. We can also help with a translation service. For information please contact the Family and Friends Team, in our Fostering Service on 0118 937 3740.