



Private Fostering

A guide for children

This guide contains information about your rights and the support available to you while you live away from your family in private foster care



West Berkshire
COUNCIL

Private Fostering - A guide for children

Contents

About Private Fostering

Why are children privately fostered?

Can my foster carer make changes to my life?

Can I stay in touch with my family?

Can I still follow my religion and family customs?

Do I have to go to school?

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

Will I be kept safe?

What will my Social Worker do?

What if I am not happy living with my Private Foster Carer?

Contacting your Social Worker

Other people you can talk to

About Private Fostering

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

If you are in private foster care you may live with a distant relative, a neighbour, a family friend or someone who your mum and/or dad pays to look after you.

You are not in private foster care if you live with and are looked after by a grandparent, an uncle or aunt, a brother or sister, a half-relative, a step-relative or a person who is closely related to you by marriage. If you are in private foster care the person who is looking after you is called a private foster carer.

The law says that your parents and your private foster carer must tell Social Services about the arrangements that they have made for your care. The law also says that once Social Services have been told that you are living with a private foster carer we must make regular checks to make sure that you are safe and that your private foster carer is looking after you well.

If you live with a private foster carer in West Berkshire a social worker will be responsible for this.

In this booklet we will try to answer some of the questions that you might have about what you can expect, and how you can get help, if you are living with a private foster carer and you are not happy with how you are being treated, or about anything else to do with the arrangements that have been agreed for your care.

Why are children privately fostered?

Children will usually live with private foster carers because their parents or the person who they usually live with cannot look after them for a while. Often children in private foster care are able to live with a relative or friend who they already know.

Your parents or the person who you usually live with will tell you why you are going to live with a private foster carer and how long you will be there.

What should my private foster carer do?

Your private foster carer is responsible for your day-to-day care. This means that he or she should:

- give you regular meals (like breakfast, lunch and supper)
- make sure that you have a comfortable bed of your own and that you get enough sleep
- make sure that you are clean (you should have regular baths/showers) and that you have clean clothes appropriate to your activities
- help you to stay healthy and make sure that you receive the medical treatment that you need if you are ill or get injured
- make sure that you look after your teeth and visit a dentist regularly
- make sure that you go to school and do any homework that you are set
- make sure that you have a chance to make friends and to enjoy sports and or hobbies that interest you
- make sure that 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, your teacher(s) and your social worker should all help you to look after it.

Before you move to live with your private foster carer your parent(s) should tell him/her about:

- your health history (any illnesses or medical issues that you have had in the past or any experience that you have had of being in hospital)
- any health problems that you have currently
- any special medicines or vaccinations that you need to have to keep you healthy
- any allergies that 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 he/she should register you with a local doctor and dentist and make sure that you have any medical care that you need.



Can my foster carer make changes to my life?

While you are living with your private foster carer your parent(s) should still make all the important decisions about your life. However your foster carer may make day-to-day decisions about your routines and activities.

Your private foster carer will not be able to change your name or to make you change school or have any significant medical treatment without asking your parent(s)' permission.

Can I stay in touch with my family?

Yes — it is important that you stay in contact with your family while you are living away from home.

Your parent(s) and other relatives may maintain contact with you through:

- visits
- telephone contact
- letters
- email
- texts

Your private foster carer should help you to stay in touch with your different relatives by helping you to write letters or use the phone.

Can I still follow my religion and family customs?

Yes — your private foster carer must respect the things that are important to you and your family and he/she should help you to follow any customs that are related to your religion like special prayer times or eating special foods. Your private foster carer should also help you to learn about your culture and to meet people who share your cultural background. If English is not your first language, your foster carer should support you to have contact with people who speak your language of birth (however it may be up to your parent(s) 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 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 you may need to go to a new school, near to your new home, but your parent(s) must agree to this change.

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

Yes — in most families children and young people help with small jobs around the home like setting the table for meals, washing dishes, putting clothes in the washing machine, feeding pets or keeping their bedrooms clean and tidy.

Your private foster carer cannot make you do jobs that are inappropriate for a child of your age to do, such as making you clean the house from top to bottom every day or expecting you to stay at home to look after an old or sick person instead of going to school.

Will I be kept safe?

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 that 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 or any member of his/her 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 who you trust, about it.



What will my Social Worker do?

The law says that while you are living with a private foster carer the Social Services must check on you regularly to make sure that you are safe and being looked after properly.

As soon as we know that you are going to live with a private foster carer a social worker will arrange to visit you. This social worker will talk to you to find out how you are feeling about your situation and if there is anything that you are worried or unhappy about.

If you want, you can talk to your social worker on your own without your parent(s), your foster carer, or any other grown up being around. This means that if you feel worried or frightened about anything you can tell your social worker and no one else will be listening.

Your social worker's job is to ensure that you are safe and being well looked after. A social worker must come to see you at least every 6 weeks for the first year that you are living with your private foster carer. After this he/she may visit you less often.

If you are worried about anything or you just want to talk to your social worker you can contact him/her at anytime — you don't have to wait until the next time he or she comes to see you.

You should also feel that you can talk to your teacher at school or another adult who you can trust if you have a problem.

What if I am not happy living with my Private Foster Carer?

Most children and young people living in private foster care are very happy and are well looked after. If there are problems they are usually small and can be sorted out easily.

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.

If things are really bad and can't be sorted out, we may arrange for you to live with other carers until you can go home.

Contacting your Social Worker

Your social worker is:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:

Other people you can talk to

West Berkshire's Children's Services also has a Children's Right Officer. Part of her job is to support children who are living with Private Foster Carers in the West Berkshire area, particularly if they are unhappy, worried or scared about anything.

Her name is: xxxxx

You can contact her at: Children's Rights Service
West Berkshire Council
xxx
xxx

Telephone No: xxx

Email: xxx

There are also a number of national organisations that 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 at 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 0800 800 5000 or visit their website at www.nspcc.org.uk

Children's Legal Centre — call on 0845 120 3747 or visit their website at www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Children's Rights Director — call on 0191 233 3502 or visit the website at www.rights4me.org

For Further Advice and Information

If you require more general advice or information about private fostering please contact the Family Placement Team and we will endeavour to help you.

Family Placement Team

West Street House
West Street
Newbury
Berkshire
RG14 1BZ

Telephone: **01635 503155**

Email: **familyplacementduty@westberks.gov.uk**

Alternatively visit our website at:

www.westberks.gov.uk

This publication was produced with the permission of Wokingham Borough Council.