

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility
Please speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead: **Hannah Pallôt** or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads: **Matt Collinge** or **Sam Shainberg** immediately with any concerns.
MARU: 0300 1231 116 LADO: 01872 326536

Seven Minute Safeguarding Private Fostering



What do we mean by the term 'Private Fostering'?

Private fostering is when a child or young person under 16 years old (or 18 if they have a disability) is looked after for a period of 28 days or more by someone who is not a close relative, legal guardian or person with parental responsibility. Close relatives include parents, step-parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents. Other people, such as neighbours, friends or more distant relatives need to have an assessment. Following a successful assessment, the child must be visited by the local authority at least every 90 days to ensure they are and remain safe.

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 has reinforced the requirement, laid down in the Children Act 1989, for people who are privately fostering to notify the Local Authority. The Victoria Climbié Inquiry published in 2003 highlighted concerns about these arrangements and subsequent guidance has emphasised the duty of the Local Authority to safeguard children in these circumstances. The Department for Education are concerned that the incidence of Private Fostering arrangements are under reported due to lack of public and professional awareness and that there may be children left vulnerable or at risk

Why might a child be privately fostered?

Unfortunately, when we think of private fostering we often think of Victoria Climbié. However, a private fostering arrangement can be a positive response from friends and the local community to a family in need of support. There are many reasons why a parent may be unable to care for their own child on a short or long-term basis. Regardless of the reason, any child separated from their parents is potentially vulnerable. We all have responsibilities to ensure the alternative care any privately fostered child receives meets their welfare and safety needs. Whilst most private fostering cases are established for good reasons, we must also be open to the possibility that the child may have been a victim of trafficking or is in a home with adults who are unable or unwilling to meet their needs.

We have a duty to report to MARU any child who we believe is living in a situation which puts them in danger. Private fostering can be an incredibly positive experience for a child, but it must be registered with the council to help ensure that there are always the best outcomes for the child.

What does this mean for us in schools?

By law, the local authority where the private foster carer lives must be told about all private fostering situations. The child's parents, private foster carer and anyone else involved in the arrangement are legally required to inform the local authority. Schools should be clear who has parental responsibility for children on their roll, and where they identify a private fostering arrangement, they must report this to the local authority. Follow this link to find out more about what is meant by the term 'Parental Responsibility' as just because someone is identified as a 'parent' of a child does not mean that they have parental responsibility of that child.

Some examples of why private fostering might happen include:

- Children sent to this country, for education or health care, by parents who live overseas,
- A teenager living with a friend's family because they don't get on with their own family
- Younger children living with a friend's family because their parents' study or work involves unsociable hours, which make it difficult to use ordinary day care or after-school care.

Although written in 2005, this article from The Guardian looks at the issue of private fostering from the point of view of a social worker. This leaflet, produced by Cornwall Council, is a guide aimed at children and young people who are privately fostered.