

Bolton Safeguarding Children

Do you know if a child you are working with is **privately fostered**?



Identifying and responding to private fostering arrangements for people working with children

Many people working with children don't realise that by law, Bolton Children's Services must be notified by parents and carers about private fostering.

What is private fostering?

If a parent decides that it is best for their child to be cared for by someone who is not the child's:

- parent or step-parent
- grandparent
- brother or sister
- aunt or uncle (by blood or marriage)

and if this is for more than 28 days and the child is under 16 (18 if the child is disabled), it is called a private fostering arrangement and the parent or carer must inform Bolton Children's Services.



How can I identify a private fostering arrangement?

It is important to be alert to the possibility of a private fostering arrangement; some signs and indicators may include:

- a child regularly presenting with a new or unknown carer
- a child mentioning that they are not staying at their usual home or that their parents have been away for a long time
- a carer who seems vague about the child's routines (bedtimes etc), their health history, development checks and immunisation record

When coming into contact with a child for the first time think about private fostering; check what the child's relationship is with the carer, make sure you see copies of key documents, such as birth certificates, when you need to and ask about the home situation.

Why is it important to notify Bolton Children's Services?

Privately fostered children are not the same as fostered children. They are not in the care of the state which means if their carers don't tell the local council they will be without support.

Many privately fostered children experience feelings of loneliness, confusion and anxiety because they are separated from their birth families. It is essential that this vulnerable group of children have access to help and support.

You may feel that by sharing information you are breaking confidentiality or data protection, but it is your responsibility to inform parents/carers to report the arrangement to Bolton's Children's Services. If parents/carers fail to follow your advice you must inform them as part of the Children Act 89/2004. It is a possible criminal offence if you don't report a private fostering arrangement.



What you should do if you become aware of private fostering arrangements

Both the parent and the carer have a duty to notify Bolton Children's Services of their intention to make private fostering arrangements at least six weeks before it begins. If it has already begun or you are aware that a private fostering arrangement is being made, you should:

- check if parents and carers have informed Bolton's Children's Services
- check if your agency has already been notified
- if parents or carers fail to notify Bolton's Children's Services you should make the notification
- you should also notify Bolton Children's Services if you become aware that the arrangement has ended and provide the name and address of the person who will be caring for the child and as much detail about the arrangement as possible.

What will Bolton Children's Services do?

They will:

- put the child first and work in partnership with parents and private foster carers
- notify all agencies working with the child or family about the arrangement
- assess the child's needs and whether the private fostering arrangement is suitable for the child
- assess the carers suitability and involve other support agencies as necessary
- help parents and private foster carers to draw up an agreement that will ensure the child's cultural, educational and learning needs are met
- ensure a social worker visits the child and reviews the arrangement regularly

How to let Children's Services know

If you think a child is being privately fostered please contact Children's Services on:

Tel: 337729 or 337730

Out of hour's service **01204 337777**

