

Private Fostering: A Guide for Carers

This information has been produced for people who are privately fostering or planning to privately foster a child within Oxfordshire. Please take the time to read this document fully as it gives details of your responsibilities and our involvement with Privately Fostered children.



What is Private Fostering?

If you are looking after a child who is:

- under the age of 16, or 18 if disabled
- for more than 28 days

AND that child is:

- Not your own child or a child for whom you have a legal order (Adoption, Child Arrangements Order, Special Guardianship Order)
- Not closely related to you

Close relatives are:

- Parents
- Step-Parents by Marriage or Civil Partnership
- Grandparents,
- Adult brother or sister of full or half blood
- Aunt, Uncle or step-parent whether of full blood/biological, half blood or by marriage or civil partnership.

This is legally defined as “Private Fostering” and the child is classed as “Privately Fostered”.

What happens if I am Privately Fostering a Child?

Oxfordshire County Council has a legal duty to do the following:

- To visit the child and assess the placement within 7 days
- To see the child alone
- To complete Criminal Record checks on all members of the household over the age of 16.
- To visit the child every 6 weeks to check on their safety and welfare.

We realise it can be both challenging and rewarding to look after someone else’s child. We are also available to offer advice and support to yourselves and we can refer you to other agencies for further support if required.

Your responsibilities:

As the carer of somebody else’s child you will need to make sure that their basic needs are being met (food, warmth, affection) and you will also need to ensure that they are registered with a doctor and attending school.

Whilst a child is living with you in a private fostering arrangement their parents retain parental responsibility and need to be consulted about the child’s care. The child also needs to be encouraged to maintain contact with their parents. If you have any concerns about this please discuss with the Private Fostering Social Worker.

Money:

As a Private Foster Carer you do not receive any payment for this but you are entitled to claim Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits (if eligible) for the child. The child’s parents retain financial responsibility so if the child needs any additional money then we would ask you to contact their parents.

You are responsible for informing your landlord that you have another child living in your household.

Police Checks:

Our role is to check that all privately fostered children within Oxfordshire are being well cared for and are living in appropriate placements. It is therefore necessary for us to have full details about any person in your household who may have been involved in any criminal activities.

When we complete the initial assessment, we will ask all members of your household over 16 years of age to complete Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. We pay for these checks and when they are processed you will receive a copy of the Certificate of Disclosure which is valid for 3 years. Please show this document to the parents of the child you are caring for to enable them to make a full assessment of the arrangement.

We will ask anyone who has a criminal record to let us know details of the offence(s) they have been convicted of. We will ask the person concerned to give us details of the offence(s) so that we can complete a risk assessment. **Having a criminal record does not automatically prevent you from privately fostering but we need to complete an assessment based upon what the offence was, when it happened and the circumstances at the time.**

Whilst we are waiting for the DBS checks to be processed we will ask all members of your household over the age of 16 to sign a "Declaration of Suitability form" which asks you a series of questions about whether you have ever had a child removed from your care or whether you have been prevented from fostering a child previously. We will also contact your GP to ask if they believe you to be a suitable carer for a child under 16. This procedure applies to all families who are privately fostering. We hope you will understand why such rigorous checks are necessary.

Ongoing Support:

If we think that the private fostering arrangement is unsuitable, we will ask the child's parents to find a suitable alternative placement for their child. If we think that some changes are needed to make it suitable for the child to stay with you we will let you know.

If we feel that the arrangement is suitable and is meeting the child's needs, we will visit the child at least once every 6 weeks for the first year and once every 12 weeks after that if appropriate. During this visit the Social Worker will need to see the child alone but after this time we are also available to offer advice and assistance to you in relation to the child, their legal status, behavioural issues, family dynamics etc. If you require any additional support, you can contact the Social Worker to arrange additional visits. We can also offer you free training and access to support groups, if you are interested in this please speak to the Social Worker.

You will provide a lot of information at our first visit but whilst the child is living with you we need you to inform us if anything changes within your household, including:

- If you move home (you will need to let us know your new address).
- If anyone moves into or moves out of your home.
- If any other person starts spending time a lot of time within the home (i.e. a new partner, a relative, close friend).
- The name and contact details for anyone who is employed or starts employment within your home whilst you are privately fostering a child (i.e. nanny, cleaner, etc).
- Any further criminal offences or police cautions received by anyone in your household.
- If a child is removed from your care or you are involved in any child protection procedures (for children who live outside of the family home as well as those within the home).
- If you become aware of any person(s) that may present a risk to your child or the child you are privately fostering.

If you know of a child who is being privately fostered, please contact Oxfordshire's Multi-agency safeguarding hub on 0345 050 7666 or online at

mash-children@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

For more information, please email the private fostering team at Private.Fostering@Oxfordshire.gov.uk or call 01865 323126