

1**Background**

A Private Fostering (PF) arrangement is where a parent, or primary carer, places a child under the age of 16 (18 if disabled) in the care of someone else who is not a close relative, or an officially approved foster carer, for a period intended to be 28 days or more (the 28 days do not have to be consecutive). A close relative is defined as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt, whether full or half relation, by marriage or civil partnership, or step-parent. However, extended family such as a great aunt and uncle, or cousins do not count.

2**Why it matters**

The Children Act 2004 requires local authorities (LA) to recognise, monitor and support any child in their area who is being privately fostered. PF is known underreported and many parents and PF carers may not know of this requirement. Parents should contact the LA prior to the placement of a child in a PF arrangement, however this rarely happens. This is concerning as privately fostered children, without the support of the LA, are a particularly vulnerable group.

3**Information**

A PF arrangement is only legitimate if the parent gives informed consent and the LA knows about, and is in agreement with, it. It is a legal requirement that the LA is notified of all PF arrangements. Once a referral is made, the LA will arrange for a social worker to visit the child, their parents and the private foster carer to assess the situation.

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The social worker will check that the child is safe and well cared for. The parents will still hold parental responsibility and will still need to be consulted when decisions are made about the privately fostered child's care. The social worker will regularly visit the child and support them as needed.

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Where the LA is not satisfied that the child is safe or well cared for the social worker will work with the parents to find a solution. Some examples of PF arrangements include overseas children that are sent to this country for education or health care reasons, teenagers who are living with family friends due to a breakdown of relationships within the home or host families providing accommodation for children associated with local theatres or sports clubs.

6**What to do**

A PF notification should come from the parent or carer but professionals can help in identifying these arrangements and advise parents/carers of their responsibilities. If you know a PF arrangement or you are unsure and need advice, please contact the Blackpool Families Rock Request for Support Hub on 01253 477299

7**Questions to consider**

Are you aware of children who do not live with their parents or a close relative?

Do you routinely check who children are living with?

What can I do to support children who are being privately fostered and their carers?

Have you checked whether the LA is aware of the PF arrangement?

