

Private Fostering

A briefing to all professionals

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Aim of this session

- To understand what private fostering is
- To understand our responsibilities private fostering
- The processes on private fostering
- The support available to private foster carers and the child or young person
- To meet the statutory requirements of the National Minimum Standards of Private Fostering
- To understand how to make a notification
- To share knowledge and resources



What is private fostering?

Definition of Private Fostering

“A private fostering arrangement is essentially one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of a Local Authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous, but that continuity is not broken by the occasional short break.”

[National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, DfES 2005](#)

Private fostering is not the same as fostering

A privately fostered child is a child or young persons looked after by someone other than a parent, stepparent, sibling, aunt, uncle or grandparent who has no parental responsibility for a period of more than 28 days.

A private fostering arrangement is only legitimate if:

- the parent gives informed consent
- South Gloucestershire Council knows about, and agrees with, the arrangement

How to make a notification

Referral from
professional

Professional makes
referral to Access and
Response Team (ART)

ART refers to Fostering
Team within 24 hours

Fostering Team
undertakes assessment,
and statutory checks

Fostering Team
refer to other
agency for service
delivery as required.
Case closure.

A decision can be made to
prohibit the proposed private
foster carer from fostering on the
basis that they are not suitable
and/or the premises are
unsuitable.

Does not meet criteria
for private fostering

Fostering Team works with
child, carer and relevant
others for duration of Private
Fostering Arrangement

Fostering Team works with
child, carer and relevant
others for duration of Private
Fostering Arrangement

Meets criteria for private
fostering

Activity

There are currently 200,000 children and young people under the age of 18 living in South Gloucestershire.

How many children and young people are currently living within private fostering arrangements within South Gloucestershire?



a) 0

b) 7

c) 11



We are not the only Local Authority who are struggling to increase private fostering notifications

Why is private fostering important?

Privately fostered children are often made **more vulnerable** by their living circumstances and by their status, as they are often not identified and made known to the local authority.

“Private fostering is among the least controlled and most open to abuse of all the environments in which children live away from home.”

Lord William Utting

Victoria Climbié



In November 1998, seven-year-old Victoria Climbié left her parents' house in the shanty suburb of Abobo in the Ivory Coast.

She was happy and excited about her new life living with her 'aunt' in Britain.

Her parents hoped she would get a good education. Instead, she was kept prisoner by her aunt and her boyfriend who brutally tortured her.

Victoria Climbié



Sadly, just after 18 months, Victoria died on the 25 February 2000 with 128 separate injuries on her body. The Home Office Pathologist stated 'it was the worse case of child abuse I have encountered.'

She had been burnt with cigarettes, tied up for periods of longer than 24 hours, and hit with bike chains, hammers, and wires.

Victoria's death led to a public enquiry and produced major changes in child protection policies in the UK. Following the inquest, it was later found that Marie-Therese was in actual fact Victoria's great-aunt.

Legal duties of the Local Authority

Subsequent guidance has emphasised the duty of Local Authorities to safeguard privately fostered children.

The 1989 Children Act states “It shall be the duty of every Local Authority to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered in their area is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, and to secure such advice is given to those caring for them as appears to the Authority to be needed.’

What safeguards are in place to protect privately fostered children?

We use [The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering](#).

They say that:

- as a Local Authority we have a duty to assess the suitability of a private fostering arrangement
- all privately fostered children should have a named worker who visits them regularly
- the parent(s) of the privately fostered child retains parental responsibility during the private fostering arrangement
- we have a responsibility to:
 - promote awareness of private fostering
 - actively identify and report private fostered children and young people
 - act to safeguard and support privately fostered children

Whose responsibility is it to report private fostering?

It is the responsibility of **everybody** whose work brings them in contact with children and young people to report private fostering arrangements.

That includes **you!**



Signs to watch out for

- ① Has the child mentioned that they are not staying at their usual home, or their parents are away for a long time?
- ② Does the carer seem vague about the child's routines (bedtimes etc.), their health history, development checks and immunisation records?
- ③ Has the school been informed of a change of address for the child?
- ④ Is someone else collecting the child from school?

Parents and carers role

The Law places a duty on the parents of the child (or those with parental responsibility) and the 'carers' to notify the Local Authority.

This should be done as soon as the arrangement has been made.

Sometimes a placement is unplanned. In such cases, the Access and Response Team should be notified as soon as it becomes apparent.

Families are not always aware of the requirement to notify us, and therefore it is important that you make us aware of the arrangement.

Professionals role

Ideally, notification should come from the parent or private foster carer. However, anyone who comes into contact with children and families can also play an important role.

If you know that a child or young person is being privately fostered, support the parent or private foster carer of the child to notify children's services by calling 01454 866000.

If a private foster carer or parent, once aware of their legal obligation to notify children's services fails to do so, please notify the Access and Response Team yourself on 01454 866000.

Children Service's role

When notification or information is received by Access and Response Team, we will undertake checks and enquiries to ensure that the carers are suitable as private foster carers.

Our assessment will include:

- Visiting the proposed premises where the child or young person will be living
- Speaking to all members of the household
- Visiting the child or young person concerned
- Making arrangements to support the child and placement

We have a duty to investigate and support private fostering arrangements.

Knowledge check



Jess is 12.

She has been spending a lot of time with her friend Laura's family because her mum and dad are going through an unpleasant divorce, and she finds the arguments unsettling.

Jess has asked her parents if she can live permanently with Laura's family. Jess' mum and dad think this is a good idea as the disruption is starting to affect her schoolwork.

Would this be a private fostering arrangement?





Sam is 9.

His dad has gone into hospital for an operation and the doctor's have advised him that he will not be able to look after Sam for up to two months whilst he is recovering.

Sam will stay with his grandparents until his dad is well.

Would this be a private fostering arrangement?





Emiko is 16.

She has come to the UK to study and learn English. Her parents have arranged for her to live with an English host family for the duration of her schooling.

Emiko plans to visit her family every three weeks.

Would this be a private fostering arrangement?



Foreign Exchange Visits

Where an international student aged under 16 years (18 if disabled) is staying in a exchange visit, for 28 consecutive days or longer, would fall under a private fostering arrangement.

Schools and guardians are obliged to report arrangements to the Local Authority where the student is staying.

Children and young people on foreign exchange visits or attending schools or language colleges are very vulnerable by the fact they are away from home, have little or no established support network and are placed with families that they do not really know.

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Jayden is 17 and has a disability.

He moves in with his girlfriend and starts living at her parents house.

Would this be a private fostering arrangement?



Frequently asked questions



You have concerns about the status of a child, but you are not sure if it is a private fostering arrangement, what should you do?

If you become aware of any private fostering arrangements, or an arrangement that you think may be private fostering, you should tell South Gloucestershire Council's **Access and Response Team** on



01454 866 000



accessandresponse@southglos.gov.uk

If you are not sure and would like to discuss the situation with our Private Fostering Champion, Lou Thomas, please call 07767 818 663.



I work in a primary school, isn't it the responsibility of South Gloucestershire Council's children's services to gather this information?

It is **everyone's responsibility** to **report** any circumstances which may be private fostering.

Victoria Climbié died because individuals, teams, agencies and systems failed to gather and share information.

South Gloucestershire Council's Children Services is responsible for following up reports and assessing the suitability of the arrangement and visiting the child regularly.



You know of a child being privately fostered, but they seem fine, should you inform South Gloucestershire Council?

Yes, you do.

We cannot assume that everything is fine without checking.

South Gloucestershire Council has a duty to assess the suitability of the arrangement to ensure that the child's welfare and safety is being promoted and that the child's needs are being met.

The death of Victoria Climbié while being privately fostered shows that if situations are not checked children may be at risk of harm.



I know a young person who is returning to live with their mum, do I need to inform South Gloucestershire Council?

Yes, you do.

The Local Authority should be notified about any significant changes to a private fostering arrangement within 48 hours.

Significant changes include:

- change of address
- someone joining or leaving the household
- any household member having a court conviction, a disqualification from fostering or any limits on how many children they can foster
- the child leaving the private foster carer's address
- the death of a child



I know about a young person in a private fostering arrangement – will telling South Gloucestershire Council breach their confidentiality?

No, you won't be.

You will not be breaching confidentiality by notifying the Local Authority, you will be ensuring that the child or young person is safe. If you believe a child is in a private fostering arrangement you **must** tell South Gloucestershire Council's Access and Response Team on

 **01454 866 000**

If it is appropriate you should tell the child or young person that you are contacting us.



Where do I get more information?



[South Gloucestershire Children's Partnership](#)



[Somebody Else's Child](#)



[British Association for Adoption and Fostering \(BAAF\)](#)



[Children Act 1989: Private Fostering \(Government\)](#)



[Working together to safeguard children](#)



[Keeping children safe in education](#)

