

# Messages for practice:

## Private Fostering

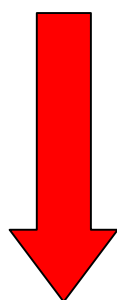
Private Fostering is **under-reported**. There is a lack of awareness amongst education, health and social care professionals of the requirement to notify social services if they become aware of private fostering arrangements.

Research into the profile of privately fostered children in Wales reveals a range of **specific needs and vulnerabilities**. These can largely go unrecognised and remain invisible to agencies through lack of understanding and lack of reporting.



There are a range of situations where private fostering may be a positive option for a child. However, it is a legal requirement for both **parents and private foster carers** to notify their local social services department of their intention to enter into such arrangements.

The **specific steps** that social services must take once a notification has been received are clearly set out in regulation and guidance. Social services have a duty to ensure that the child is well cared for in a safe and suitable environment and that the private fostering arrangements are in their **best interests**.



Local Authorities have a duty to publicise the PRIVATE FOSTERING NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

More information about private fostering and the relevant legislation can be found at <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dhss/publications/100303privatefosteringen.pdf> or via your local Children's Services department.

### **Under Reporting Amongst Professionals**

Private fostering is defined under Section 66 of the Children Act 1989 as an arrangement that is made privately (without the involvement of the local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if the child is disabled) by someone other than a parent, a person with parental responsibility or close relative with the intention that it should last for **28 days or more**. A close relative is specifically defined as a grandparent, brother, sister, aunt or uncle or step parent.

There are many and varied reasons why a child may become privately fostered. Some common reasons include:

- Parents being chronically ill, in prison, or working away from home and unable to provide day to day care;
- Children sent from abroad to stay with relatives
- Teenagers who have broken ties with their parents
- Children living with host families whilst taking courses of study.

Whatever the reasons behind the arrangement, the apparent well-being of the child, or the social and economic status of those involved it remains a statutory duty to report every instance where private fostering is known or suspected. **All professionals working with children, young people and their families should be aware of private fostering; be proactive in identifying privately fostered children and have systems in place to ensure that such cases are reported to Children's Services.**

Although nobody knows how many children are privately fostered in Wales it is estimated that the degree of **under-reporting is significant**.

### **Profile and vulnerabilities of Privately Fostered Children**

Research conducted by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) in 2008 identified that privately fostered children are:

- More likely than children in local authority care to display aggression, anxiety and difficulties in making relationships;
- Have below average educational attainment and poor levels of attendance at school; and
- Have an inadequate understanding of who their parents are and why they are living in private fostering arrangements.

Research has also shown that private fostering arrangements appear to be largely unplanned and that carers generally receive very little information about the child. The level of under reporting means that these children frequently remain "invisible" to statutory and other support services and increases their potential vulnerability.

### **Responsibilities of Parents and Private Foster Parents**

Parents and the private fosters carer have a duty to notify the Local Authority of private fostering arrangements and are breaking the law if they do not do so. The parent retains full financial responsibility for the child and must continue to exercise their parental responsibility and participate in all decision making with respect of the placement and the child's wider needs.

### **Duties and responsibilities of Local Authority and Children's Services**

Statutory regulations are in place to help protect privately fostered children and to ensure that their safety, welfare and well-being are not compromised. Once a notification is received Children's Services must visit within 7 days and check on the suitability of the carer. A full assessment into the suitability of the placement based on a full assessment of the child's needs and circumstances must be completed within 42 days. During the first year Children's Services are required to visit at least every 6 weeks and thereafter at least every 12 weeks.

If there is cause to suspect that a privately fostered child is at risk of significant harm then Child Protection procedures will be followed.