



St. Helens
Council

Do you look after someone else's child?

Information for Private Foster Carers



St. Helens Council

Contact Centre

Wesley House
Corporation Street
St. Helens
WA10 1HF

Tel: 01744 676789

Minicom: 01744 671671

Fax: 01744 676895

Email: contactcentre@sthelens.gov.uk

→ www.sthelens.gov.uk



Please contact us to request translation of Council information into Braille, audio tape or a foreign language.



Children who are cared for on a full-time basis by people who are not their parents or a relative* may be in private foster care.

Private foster care occurs when a child under the age of 16 (or 18, if disabled) is cared for, and provided with accommodation, by an adult who is not a relative*, for 28 days or more, by private arrangement between parent and carer.

St.Helens Council's Children's Services have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of privately fostered children.

*The Children Act defines 'relative', in relation to a child, as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt. They could be a full or half relation and could be related by marriage. The term also includes step-parent. A cohabitee of the mother or father of the child would not qualify as a relative, neither would extended family such as great aunt/uncle or parent's cousins.

Are you a Private Foster Carer?

Please answer the questions below:

- Are you looking after someone else's child?
- Are you not the child's parent, or relative*, legal guardian or other person with parental responsibility?
- Are they below the age of 16 (or below 18, if they have a disability)?
- Are they going to live with you for 28 days or more?

If you answered yes to **all** of these questions, then you are a Private Foster Carer regardless of whether or not you receive payment for looking after the child.

If you already have, or are thinking of entering into, a Private Fostering arrangement, you should read this leaflet and then contact St.Helens Council Contact Centre on 01744 676789 and they will be able to give you more information and advice.

What is Private Fostering?

There are many reasons why you might be looking after someone else's child in a Private Fostering arrangement, these could involve:

- Children sent to this country for education or healthcare by birth parents living overseas
- Children living with a friend's family as a result of parental separation, divorce or arguments at home
- Teenagers living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend
- Children whose parents have to be admitted to hospital for a long period

Parents do not usually ask someone to look after their child without a great deal of thought, but it is very important to discuss:

- Why they want you to look after their child?
- Try to obtain as much information as possible about the child's health, eating preferences, school, hobbies, religion and ethnic/cultural background
- Arrangements in case the child is ill or has an accident
- Financial provision for the child

Things you need to consider as a Private Foster Carer

Education

If the child you are fostering is of school age, you will need to discuss plans for their education. It is best if both you and the parents can visit the relevant school before the placement starts so that you can:

- Give the name and address of the child's previous school(s) so that school records can be transferred and the new school will be aware of the child's progress and of any difficulties they have had
- Discuss directly with the school the child's background and educational needs. Racial, cultural and linguistic needs should also be considered
- Discuss how long the child will be at school, admission dates, etc.

It is important that you regularly pass on to parents school reports and information about the child's progress.

Health

- You need to know the GP and dentist for the child or young person
- Any medication or treatment they are receiving
- Any allergies or intolerances to certain foods, etc.

Making the placement work

It is important that you work together with the child's parents, St.Helens Children and Young People's Services and all other childcare professionals involved to ensure that the placement is as successful as possible for the child.

The needs of Black and Minority Ethnic children

Current research clearly suggests that it is best for children to live in a family who have the same racial, ethnic, cultural and religious background. Carers with a similar background to the child are better placed to help the child understand their racial history, provide for their particular needs and help them to develop a positive sense of themselves.

You will need to think very carefully before agreeing to care for a child whose ethnic origin is different from your own. St.Helens Children and Young People's Services, as part of an assessment, will consider if the child's religious, racial, cultural and language needs are being met.



What should I do next?

By law, you are required to advise St.Helens Children and Young People's Services that you are privately fostering a child.

- a) If you are already caring for a child who is privately fostered, or have received a child in an emergency, you must notify St.Helens Children and Young People's Services immediately (within 48 hours) via the Contact Centre on **01744 676789**.
- b) If you have arranged, or are in the process of arranging, to privately foster a child, you must give St.Helens Children and Young People's Services at least 6 weeks' written notice of your intention to privately foster the child.

What happens next?

St.Helens Children and Young People's Services have a legal duty to check that the placement, the Private Foster Carers and their premises are all suitable. So once you have told us about the proposed or current fostering arrangement, a worker will arrange to visit you to carry out an assessment of suitability. They will also talk to the child/young person and their parents/those with parental responsibility.

We will ask for your agreement to carry out our standard statutory checks, these include:

- Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau
- Social Services Checks
- Department of Health
- Education

Any other household member over the age of 16 will also have to agree to have these checks performed.

If you do not agree to these checks, or a member of your household does not agree, we will not be able to proceed with your assessment.

What information will I need to tell St.Helens Children and Young People's Services?

- The child's name, date of birth, religion, racial origin and language
- How long you expect the child to stay with you
- The name and address of the child's parents and anyone else who has parental responsibility for them
- The date you expect placement to start (or when the placement started, if the placement has begun)
- Your previous addresses for the last five years
- Any offences of which you have been convicted (if you have committed an offence, this does not mean you cannot privately foster, but the type and time of the offence will need to be carefully considered by the assessing Social Worker)
- If you have applied to privately foster before and been disqualified

Once all the checks are complete, the worker will write a report about you, the suitability of your home, the reasons and intended length of the placement, the involvement of the birth parents and the child's views about the placement.

St.Helens Children and Young People's Services will then make a decision about your suitability to be a Private Foster Carer. Your worker will inform you about the decision. As part of the arrangement, we might need to impose some requirements. For example, this could be asking you to make slight alterations to your home to ensure the child has their own room.

If the placement is agreed

After the placement has been agreed, the worker will continue to support you and the child. St.Helens Children and Young People's Services have a legal requirement to see children in private foster placements regularly, at least once every six weeks during the first year. If the child is old enough, there may be arrangements to see the child on their own.

There will be a review of the arrangements once every twelve months and the statutory checks will be updated every three years.

Will I be offered any support, including financial?

A worker will visit to support yourself and the child. They will continue to assess any support you require to enable you to offer the child in your care the very best care.

Any financial arrangement is made between you as carer and the child's parents. Ideally, these arrangements should be set down in writing.

St.Helens Children and Young People's Services will not become involved in this arrangement.

You may be able to claim tax credits and/or social security benefits such as Child Benefit, Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance. We would advise you to contact your Benefits Office for further advice.

What if the approval of the placement is not agreed?

The worker will discuss with you, the child and the child's parents about the best arrangements for the child. There could be a range of options, including:

- The child returning to live with parents, with support services provided
- The child moving to live with a relative
- The child being looked after by the Local Authority

If approval has been denied and you continue to care for the child, this might be deemed to be an offence.

If you wish to appeal against the decision, you should notify St.Helens Council Children and Young People's Services in writing at the earliest opportunity. You will then be advised of what action the Local Authority will take and any further action you may wish to take.

What changes do I need to inform the Council about?

- You must inform Children and Young People's Services within 48 hours if the child leaves your care, giving the name and address of the person taking over the care of the child
- If a child dies whilst in your care
- If you change address
- If there is a change in your household e.g. if someone begins or ceases to live in your house on a permanent or temporary basis
- If there are any new convictions relating to yourself or anyone living or employed in your household
- This information should be sent in writing to St.Helens Children and Young People's Services

If you have any queries relating to private fostering, please contact:

Cath Ballans/Diane Kelly
Team Managers, Duty Team
St.Helens Council Fostering Service
Call: 01744 671168/673343
Email: privatefostering@sthelens.gov.uk
Visit: www.sthelens.gov.uk/privatefostering

For more general information relating to Private Fostering, please contact:

Department for Children, Schools and Families
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
Tel: 0870 000 2288
www.dfes.gov.uk
www.privatefostering.org.uk

