



St. Helens  
Council

# Private fostering

Information for professionals



## What is private fostering?

Private fostering is where an arrangement is made - usually by a parent - for a child aged under 16 (or 18, where the child has disabilities) to be cared for by someone, other than a close relative, for more than 28 days. It does not apply to children who are looked after by the Local Authority.

A 'close relative' is defined by the Children Act 2004 as someone who is a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, or step-parent. The following kinds of arrangements will be classed as private fostering.

- Children sent to this country for education or healthcare by 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 long periods and the children stay with friends

A private fostering arrangement is made directly between the private foster carer and the birth parents, not by the Local Authority.

## Legal implications of private fostering

Parents and carers must let St.Helens Council know about private fostering, even though it is a private arrangement between them. It is against the law not to.

The Children Act 2004 and the associated regulations say that the Local Authority must satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered in their area is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, and that private foster carers must be given any advice that they may need.

St.Helens Council should be informed by anyone who is involved in making a private fostering arrangement at least 6 weeks before the arrangement starts or, if made in an emergency, within 48 hours.

---

## What to do?

Sometimes, families do not know about the regulations or do not think that they apply to them. St.Helens Council, therefore, relies on other professionals telling the family that they need to inform the Council, and encouraging the family - the parents or carers - to do this themselves. Explain to them that this is a legal requirement and, by not doing so, they may be committing an offence.

Although St.Helens Council does not approve private fostering placements, it does have the power to prohibit a person from private fostering if an assessment highlights that the arrangement is not suitable.

By doing this, you may help to ensure that the welfare of the child(ren) is being safeguarded and promoted. If you think, or are aware, that they have not notified us of a private fostering arrangement, then you should contact St.Helens Council, telling the family that you are doing so and providing as much information as possible about the placement to us.

If your concerns about the child are such that you think the child may be at risk of harm, you should follow the local child protection procedures.

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](mailto:privatefostering@sthelens.gov.uk)**  
**Visit: [www.sthelens.gov.uk/privatefostering](http://www.sthelens.gov.uk/privatefostering)**

---



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](mailto:contactcentre@sthelens.gov.uk)

→ [www.sthelens.gov.uk](http://www.sthelens.gov.uk)



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