



Getting Started

A complete guide to the fostering process

fosteringpeople
let's change lives together

Consistently
Outstanding
since 2013



If you're just starting out in your fostering journey, you might be a little unsure about what's involved in the fostering process, who does what and how long it all takes. In this guide we hope to answer all of those questions so that you're armed with the right information when you decide the time is right to change a child's life.

What is fostering?

Fostering a child is one of the most rewarding jobs you can do. Around 30,000 new children come into the care system every year, but unfortunately there aren't enough foster families to look after them. Foster parents are the rocks we need to keep children in a family environment, giving them stability and emotional support during what is evidently a very distressing time. It goes without saying that every child deserves a safe, loving home, but many children in care will have experienced the opposite of that.

One of the main reasons children are brought into care is due to them being neglected or abused, but there are other reasons too such as parental illness or death, a family breakdown or violence in the home. Whatever the reason is, fostering gives children a secure and loving place to stay while it's not safe for them to live with their birth family. But it's so much more than just providing a roof over heads. **You get to help transform a child's life for the better.**

"These young people will remember you for forevermore, so even if you make just a small impact on their lives now, it will hopefully have a really positive outcome for them in the future."

- Nicola and Richard, Yorkshire

Here are some key reasons for fostering a child:

- All children deserve the safety and comfort of a stable home environment
- You get to be a positive role for young people and help them reach their full potential
- You could influence the lives of many children from many different walks of life
- Children who have been abused or neglected need adults in their lives who they can trust
- All children deserve the opportunity to succeed, and fostering gives them this chance



The role of a foster parent

"It's not a job, it's a way of life! There will be ups and downs but it's the moments where your heart swells through pride and happiness because of the foster children that make it all worth it."

- Angela, Nottingham

As a foster parent, your role is to parent a child just as anybody would a birth child. Feed, care, nurture, teach, support and guide. But, because you are fostering, there are some important differences between parenting a child in care and parenting a birth child.

Meetings

Foster parents attend a lot of meetings, some of these take place in your own home and include supervision visits from your supervising social worker, as well as visits from the child's local authority social worker. You'll also attend review meetings where professionals, including yourself, meet to discuss the child you're caring for and identify their needs and support requirements.

Foster parents are also reviewed annually to ensure they receive acknowledgement for their work and to ensure any training or knowledge gaps are identified.

Training

As a fostering parent you're always learning, which is an incredible opportunity. Each new child you care for will have different needs, so to support you, we offer ongoing training and access to therapeutic support if required.

Education

A key responsibility is ensuring the children in your care attend school, and that you're an advocate for their education. When children have had to move homes, keeping the continuity of school is often important, but it's not always possible. Whether your foster child stays at the same school or needs to move to a new one, you'll both be supported in the process.

Contact with birth family

Taking children to see their birth family is known as contact. Contact can be with parents, grandparents and siblings. It can be supervised or very informal depending on the family circumstances. Contact can be an emotional experience for children in care and any child you look after will need your support, understanding and empathy.



What you need in order to foster

We welcome anybody with a big heart who is committed to making a big difference in children's lives, no matter their race, gender, sexuality or ethnicity. Here's everything you need to know about what you need in order to become a foster parent.



To be considered for fostering:

You must be aged 21 or over

You must have a spare
bedroom that a foster child
can call their own

You must have the legal right
to work in the UK

What matters: the practical stuff

You have a spare bedroom

Foster children must have their own bedroom that can fit a bed, wardrobe or chest of drawers. Having privacy and personal space is something we all need, but it's especially important for children who have been removed from their birth family and placed with people they don't know. They need to be able to relax, undress and sleep in private.

You have a safe, secure home

You don't need to have a palace, just a secure, comfortable environment where a child can safely sleep, eat, bathe and play.

You have the legal right to work in the UK, or indefinite leave to remain

This is a legal requirement for all prospective foster parents who enquire.

You have the time to commit to fostering a child

Being there for your foster child is a main priority, so you need to have the time and availability to fulfil your fostering duties. Many foster parents who work alongside fostering are self-employed or work from home where they have greater flexibility. Many children in care will have lost out on precious parental time, so it's important you're there when they need you.

You have access to transport

From school runs to attending contact meetings, you need to ensure you're able to get your foster child to where they need to be in a safe and reliable manner.

You have a support network that encourages your decision to foster

It's especially important that everyone in the household, including any birth children, are happy with your decision to foster. At Fostering People, we've built up strong local support networks for our foster parents, and we really believe in the power of our community, but it matters to us that you're getting support from loved ones too.



What matters: about you

- **You're empathetic, kind and compassionate** – a lot of foster children will have suffered some form of trauma, so they need someone who is willing to listen and try to understand where they're coming from.
- **You're resilient and don't give up easily** – fostering young people doesn't come without its challenges. They can be withdrawn, attention-seeking, angry or impulsive, but these emotional responses are their way of dealing with their past experiences. You need to have a thick skin and be willing to work with the child to make positive changes.
- **You can stay cool in a heated situation** – losing your temper at a child who is already confused and distrusting of adults isn't going to get you anywhere. Patience is the key to building healthy bonds with children in care.
- **You're in good enough health to look after lively children** – we consider people of all abilities to be foster parents, so you can still foster a young person if you have physical or mental health issues, just as long as it won't be detrimental to your own health.
- **You're inclusive of people from different ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds** – when you foster with Fostering People, you'll be working with people from many different backgrounds, and you'll be joining a culture that celebrates diversity and doesn't tolerate racism in anyway

"You must always listen to their point of view; while they aren't your biological children, they grow to become a part of your family and you learn to be a part of theirs."

– Toni and Graham, Newark



What doesn't matter

- **Your race** – we welcome people from all ethnic backgrounds to apply to be a foster parent.
- **Your gender** – you can be considered for fostering whether you're female, male, non-binary or transgender.
- **Your sexuality** – your sexual orientation will never stop you from being a foster parent.
- **Your experience** – you don't need any experience to be considered for fostering, just a commitment to learn.
- **Your religious beliefs** – as long as you respect other views and cultural practices, you can be considered for fostering.
- **Your marital status** – you can be single, married or divorced, but if you do have a partner, you need to have been in a relationship for two years and living together for one year.
- **Your age** – there is a legal requirement to be over the age of 21, but there is no upper age limit to fostering.

How long does fostering last?



There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to how long a child will be with you.

It could be days, weeks, months, or years – it all depends on the child's needs and the type of fostering placement you're able to offer. Sometimes a short-term placement can turn into long-term foster care because the child is thriving in their environment. Here's an overview of the different types of fostering placements.



Types of fostering

Short-term

This is the most common type of fostering, lasting any number of days, weeks or months up to two years.

Long-term

This involves looking after a child or young person on a permanent basis until they reach adulthood or are ready to live independently.

Emergency

This provides children with urgent temporary foster care at short notice, often with only a few hour's notice.

Respite

This provides other foster families or birth families with a well-deserved break - often over weekends or during school holidays.

Disability

This involves looking after a child with a disability, which could be physical, mental or a child with health needs.

Siblings

Keeping siblings together is of great importance, so we try to find foster families with enough room and resource to take on sibling groups.

Parent and child

This is where a parent - often a mother and their baby - lives with a foster family when they need extra support.

Teenagers

This is where foster families look after children over the age of 10, which can be easier and a lot more fun than people first think.

Step down

This is where children who have lived in residential care, such as a children's home, make the transition to a family environment.

Sanctuary seeking

This involves caring for a young asylum seeker who has been separated from his or her family and is in the UK alone or with just their siblings.





How we work with local authorities

As an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA), we play a vital role in helping to secure much needed placements for children across the country.

Local authorities (LAs) are responsible for all children that come into their care, however they're not always able to place children with their own approved foster parents. That's where we come in. Due to our extensive training, outstanding support package and specialist disability service, we're able to find children with more challenging and complex needs a home.

Matching children with foster parents

Once you've been approved to be a foster parent, our referrals team and social workers will assess your abilities, skills and circumstances and compare this to the needs of children awaiting foster care. Once we think there's a good match, you'll get all the information you need to make an informed decision. If you accept the match, the child's social worker will be notified and a final decision will be made.



The fostering process from start to finish:

What to expect



The fostering process can take between 4 – 6 months to complete, which may seem like a long time but it's essential you've got all the information you need for such a life changing decision. As they say, all good things come to those who wait, and that's no different for welcoming your first foster child into your home.

Step 1: Make an enquiry

Our friendly fostering team will have a chat with you and answer any questions you may have. It's a great chance to find out more about fostering without the obligation to proceed. If you're interested in taking the next step, we can then arrange to have a home visit.

Key things to note

You'll be asked about your interest in fostering, your motivation, your age, whether you have a spare bedroom, if you are applying jointly and how long you have been in a relationship for.

Step 2a: Home visit

The next step will be to arrange a home visit to have a more in-depth conversation. This typically lasts an hour or two. The home visit will enable us to get to know each other and find out if foster care is right for you and your family or if we're the right fostering provider for you.

Key things to note

You'll be asked about your family, any birth children, your job, your health, your experience of caring for children and young people, your reasons for wanting to foster, any ex-partners and we'll also ask to have a look around your home to ensure that it is suitable for fostering with no obvious hazards.

Step 2b: Application form

If we both agree that the time is right for you, we'll invite you to apply to foster with us. We'll give you our application form which isn't very lengthy, but it's still important it's filled out comprehensively so we're able to start the checks and references process with as much information as possible.

Key things to note

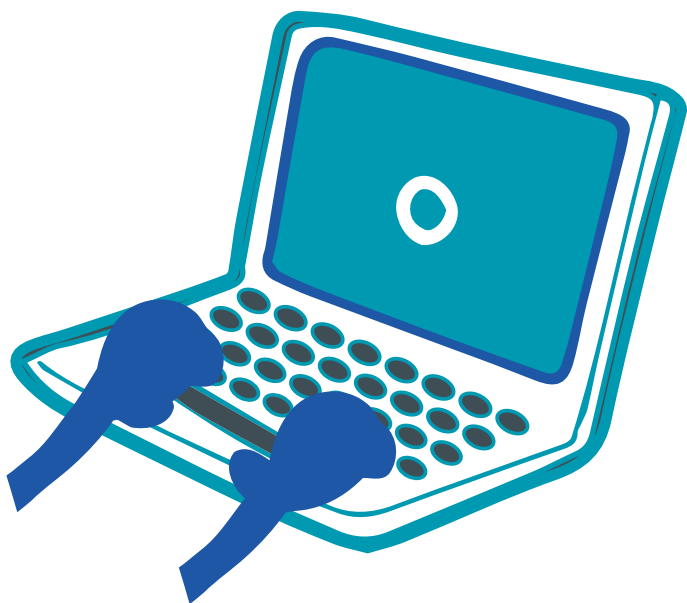
You'll need to sign a form consenting to relevant checks to be undertaken; this is called a Form of Authority. At this point, you'll be allocated a recruitment support officer (RSO) who will oversee all the administrative tasks related to your assessment, including all of the relevant checks and references.

Step 3: Assessment

Once your application has been received, a social worker will be allocated to undertake your assessment. They will visit you at home and will also visit your referees. There are usually between 8 and 10 home visits that last around 2 hours each. It's an important process that helps to paint a picture of how a fostered child would experience living in your family home.

Key things to note

An in-depth report will be prepared by the social worker and will include contributions from you. The completed assessment report is called a 'Form F'.



Step 4: Training

Our preparation training is exactly what it says; a course to prepare you for fostering and caring for a child. You'll also complete our 'Next Steps to Fostering' booklet which your assessing social worker will guide you through.

Key things to note

The 'Skills to Foster' training course is mandatory for your application to go to Panel. It runs regionally and takes place over 3 days, normally over a weekend, but you may need to miss work if you're in employment.

Step 5: Fostering Panel

You will be invited to a fostering panel where a group of people from the fostering community will go through your Form F and assess your suitability as a foster parent. Your assessing social worker will be there with you and you can also bring a friend or relative for support.

Key things to note

It sounds daunting, but members of the panel will be aware of how you're feeling and will do what they can to help you relax. You'll be asked questions based on your Form F and there will also be two questions prepared by a group of foster children, to get you thinking from their perspective.

The final decision

There will be one of three outcomes:

Recommend approval

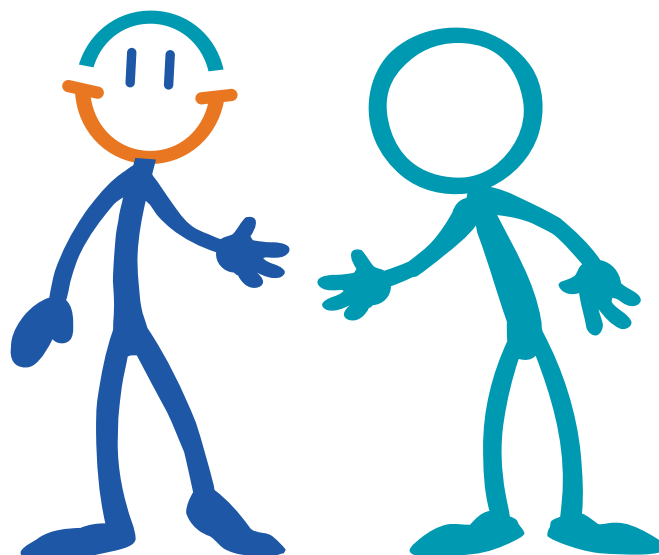
This will include the terms of the approval, e.g., type of placement or what age range you're suitable to foster.

Defer recommendation

This is where the Panel feel they need more information to reach a final decision.

Recommend not to approve

This happens if the Panel feel you're not suitable for fostering.



"The overall process was smooth, and whilst it did involve a lot of initial hard work and training, it prepared you for the road ahead. We went into fostering with an open mind and an open heart and I wish I had done it years before I did!"

- Steve, County Durham

Why foster with Fostering People

Fostering agencies offer many similar things, but they're also a little different in the way they work. What sets us apart is our commitment to building strong local networks of support that you can tap into. We're based around you, in your community. We share your experiences and work alongside you to achieve the very best for children. Combined with a very powerful fostering model and excellent training and benefits, you'll soon realise that quality is at the heart of everything we do.



- **Excellent fostering allowances**
As an IFA, we're able to offer excellent financial allowances to reward our foster parents for their hard work and dedication. The amount you receive varies, but our foster parents currently receive a weekly foster care allowance of between £385 and £700 depending on the child's age, needs and where you're based in the UK.
- **Dedicated professional teams**
You'll have access to social workers and other professionals so that whenever you need it, expert help is always at hand.
- **Regular supervision**
You'll have your own dedicated social worker who'll meet up with you regularly to discuss progress, answer any queries and offer guidance when you need it. They're there for anything you may need.
- **Training**
We provide you with excellent training both to help you prepare to foster as well as ongoing training to support your professional development.
- **24/7 help**
If you need us out of hours, including bank holidays, weekends and nights, we're just a phone call away.
- **Respite care**
When you need a break from the challenges of fostering, we'll arrange for the child or children in your care to be looked after by another trusted family. We allow up to 14 days respite care a year.
- **Fun events for families and children**
There's always something going on locally, including day trips, picnics and other activities, where you can catch up with other families and share good times together.

Take your first step to becoming a foster parent today

If you're interested in
becoming a foster parent and
would like to learn more, then
we'd love to hear from you.

Get in touch

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