

# Fostering People's Guide to Short Break Fostering



## What is short break fostering?

Fostering is caring for a child who is unable to live at home with their own family for a wide variety of reasons. Fostering provides a safe and caring home environment as well as compassionate parenting and support from trained foster parents for as long as a child or young person needs it.

Here at Fostering People, alongside our fostering services, we also provide a bespoke short breaks service which is specifically designed for disabled children. Children who receive short break care are not foster children. They live at home with their own families, but due to their complex needs, spend some time with trained and professional foster parents.

**“I am really happy with care that has been provided. My child has known his foster parent for ten years and I am very appreciative of the long standing relationship they have.”**

- Parent of a child who benefits from our short breaks service

## How do short break services help families?

Short breaks provide an essential service for children and their families. Children who receive short break care can benefit from being introduced to new social situations and environments, enabling them to have new experiences and develop new relationships. Short breaks also provide stability and routine, with short break foster parents caring for the same children consistently.

Short breaks also ensures a child's parents or other caregivers can have some time to rest and recharge their batteries so that they are able to provide the best level of care and support to their children. It also means that other children in the home are able to spend some much needed one-on-one time with their parents.

## Our Short Breaks Service in Birmingham

We've been supporting the Birmingham Children's Trust to provide short break care for disabled children, and have worked with children's services in the area for over a decade. Over this time we have developed strong working relationships with care professionals in Birmingham, who really value the flexibility of our service and the ongoing support which we provide.

There is an increasing demand for short breaks care, so we are constantly seeking additional people to help care for local children.

## Understanding children's complex needs

All children who receive short break care have complex needs.

These can include:

### Physical disabilities

This includes a wide range of conditions, such as having a hearing or visual impairment, an acquired brain injury, epilepsy or a disability that requires the use of a wheelchair.

### Learning or developmental needs

This could be autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD/ADD), a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) or Down's Syndrome. Health conditions. Encompassing a wide range of medical conditions, such as diabetes, a heart defect, Chron's disease or cancer.

### Mental Health Needs

If a young person has a serious mental health condition that requires a lot of additional support on a day-to-day basis, this is classed as a complex need. This could be chronic depression, schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder

(OCD) or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is common to have multiple conditions that overlap, creating a unique range of needs. Having multiple conditions of a complex nature can affect a child in many aspects of their life, including:

- Behaviour
- Communication
- Physical health
- Mental health
- Cognitive ability
- Physical appearance

## The role of a short break foster parent

As a short break foster parent, you'll work with the same child or children depending on how much time you'd like to dedicate to fostering. Because children who receive short break foster care live with their own families, short break foster parents build relationships with parents, to help provide consistent routines and reassurance for their families.

You will need to parent them whilst they're in your care, just as you would a child of your own. This will include feeding, caring, nurturing, teaching, supporting and guiding them. You will also need to care for their complex needs. We use a careful and considered matching process to match children with foster parents who will be a great fit for them.



**“I was a little worried [on] his first night as I worried he wouldn't sleep in a new place. However he has slept well and his foster parent is lovely, and this has eased my anxiety.”**

- Parent of a child who benefits from our short breaks service





## Training

Short break foster parents need to have a good understanding of supporting children with disabilities. We provide our foster parents with excellent training to ensure that you have all the knowledge and skills needed to support children with complex needs.

As a foster parent you are always learning, and at Fostering People we provide comprehensive training and therapeutic support. Due to the complexity of needs children receiving short break care have, we can also provide specialist training to meet the needs of child if this is required.

## Attending meetings

Foster parents attend meetings such as care review meetings, meetings with a child's social worker and support groups with other foster parents. Foster parents also have an annual review.

You'll also meet with your supervising social worker to discuss how you and the children in your care are doing, and provide you with a time and space for you to address anything you need to. These meetings take place in your own home. How often these take place will depend on the frequency of your fostering and how many children you care for.

Often when foster parents have been caring for the same child for a long time, these meetings may be reduced. As a foster parent you'll always be able to call your supervising social worker, and you'll have access to 24 hour support from our team whenever you need it.

## What you need to become a short break foster parent

We welcome applications from anyone who wants to make a difference to a child's life, no matter their race, gender, sexuality or ethnicity. To become a short break foster parent with Fostering People there are a few practical requirements:

You must be over the age of 21. As long as you are over 21 years of age, you can foster. There is no upper age limit, as long as you are fit, healthy and able to meet a child's needs.

You must live in Birmingham or the surrounding area. We provide short break care for the Birmingham Children's Trust, so our short break foster parents need to live in Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell or Wolverhampton.

You must have a spare bedroom. Children receiving short break care must have a bedroom of their own which can fit a bed, wardrobe or chest of drawers.

You must have a safe and secure home. You don't need to live in a palace, but every child needs a secure, comfortable environment where they can be safe. Your home doesn't need to be wheelchair accessible, as this will form a part of the matching process. We won't match you with a child who uses a wheelchair if your home cannot accommodate this.

You must have time available to commit to fostering. As a short break foster parent, you may well have other employment that you do alongside fostering. We ask that our short break foster parents are able to commit to 6 days/nights of fostering per month. This ensures that children get to stay with the same foster parent on each break they receive.

You must have the legal right to work in the UK, or indefinite leave to remain. This is a legal requirement for all prospective foster parents.

You must have access to transport. You may have to do school runs, take children to medical appointments or on day trips and activities, so access to a form of transport is essential.



You must have an understanding of disabilities. A good understanding of potential complex needs is essential in this role. This understanding could come from work experience or experience within your family, so you don't need to be currently working with people with disabilities.

Some of the professional roles our current short break foster parents have include Occupational therapists, teaching assistants, teachers, NHS workers (including support and admin staff) and retail staff. If you're worried you may not have enough knowledge to get started, don't worry — here at Fostering People you will be provided with training to help you meet the needs of the children in your care.





# The fostering process in 7 simple steps

The fostering assessment process can take between 4- 6 months to complete. This may seem like a long time, but it's essential that you are given all the information and training you need before welcoming a child into your home. We also need to carry out a full assessment of you as a potential foster parent and of your home to ensure children are completely safe in your care.

## 1. Make an Enquiry

Once you get in touch, 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 short break fostering without any obligation to proceed. We'll also ask you a few questions to help us best advise you on your potential path towards fostering.

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.



## 2. Home Visit

If you're interested in progressing further, we will arrange a visit at your home with our specialist disability social worker who manages our short break service. The visit is a chance for us to get to know each other a little more and to see if fostering is right for you and your family.

You'll be asked a range of questions including questions about your family, your experience with disabilities, your health, and your reasons for wanting to foster. You will also be asked some potentially sensitive questions, which may include asking about your ex-partners and if you have a criminal record. Your answer will not stop you from fostering, but we ask you to be open and honest as any failure to disclose important information will preclude you when we are later informed via mandatory government checks.

## 3. Application Form

If we agree that the time is right for you to foster, we'll invite you to complete an application form. It's really easy to complete and provides us with all the information we need to carry out necessary statutory checks.

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



## 4. Step 4: 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 child would experience staying at your family home.

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'.

## 6. Step 6: Fostering Panel

You will be invited to an independent 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.

It sounds daunting, but don't worry. Members of the panel 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.

## 5. Step 5: Training

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

Our 'Preparing to Foster' training course is mandatory. It runs regionally and takes place over 3 days, normally over a weekend. You may need to make arrangements to book time off work to attend this course.

## 7. The ADM Decision

The Fostering Panel make one of three recommendations to our Agency Decision Maker, who has the final say in approving new foster parents. There are three potential outcomes at the end of a panel:

1. Recommend Approval. This will include the terms of approval such as the numbers of children and the ages of children you can foster.
2. Defer recommendation. This is where the Panel feel they need more information to reach a final decision and ask our team at Fostering People to do some more work.
3. Recommend not to approve. This happens if the Panel feel you're not currently suitable for fostering.

This may sound daunting, but be assured that our team at Fostering People work very comprehensively during the assessment process to ensure that our applicants are ready to foster. Because of this is it very rare that any applicant that comes to our fostering panel receives anything other than a recommendation to approve.





## Why choose Fostering People?

Fostering agencies each have their own strengths. Here at Fostering People we have our dedicated Disability Service which Short Breaks is part of. This service is headed up by an experienced Disability Social Work Manager.

Another thing which sets us apart is our commitment to building strong local networks of support which you can tap into. 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, quality is at the heart of everything we do.

Fostering People has been rated as Outstanding across all areas of our service since 2013, so you can expect the very best support and training available.

## When you join Fostering People, you'll benefit from:

- Excellent fostering allowances. As one of our Short Break foster parents you'll receive £117.09 for each night a child is in your care.
- Dedicated professional teams. You'll have access to your own supervising social worker and other professionals so that whenever you need it, expert help is always at hand, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day.
- Regular supervision. You'll have your own dedicated social worker who'll meet with you regularly to discuss progress, answer any queries and offer guidance when you need it.
- Expert training. We provide you with excellent training both to help you prepare to foster as well as ongoing training to support your professional development.
- Foster parent support groups. Each month we hold local support groups locally, so you can get together with other foster parents and our team of local social workers. Additionally we also hold support groups for our short break foster parents and disability foster parents.
- Fun events for families and children. There's always something going on locally during school holidays, including day trips, picnics and other activities, where you can catch up with other families and share good times together. These activities are open to all your family, including your own children.







## Shanice's Story

Foster mum Shanice is a single short breaks foster parent from Dudley who has been providing short break care to children in her community for six years. From her first taste of fostering at twelve years old, when her mother became a foster parent, Shanice was set on becoming a foster parent herself.

She has been caring for two sibling girls who have global development delay for almost three years with Fostering People and wants to share her experience to raise awareness of this unusual but wonderfully rewarding type of fostering.

As a short break foster parent, you choose your availability, enabling you to easily work alongside fostering. Shanice works full-time at her local hospital, but once a month looks after the two girls over a weekend. Looking after the two girls consistently enables Shanice to directly see the benefit her care has on the family.

## Shanice says,

"I have a great bond with the girls I look after, I've known them for 6 years now. Putting a smile on the girls' faces and opening up their eyes to different experiences has definitely been the most rewarding part so far... It's really rewarding when I drop the girls back and their parents are really appreciative and say things such as, 'thanks so much, we've had a really good night's sleep,' or 'I've managed to go food shopping.' Being a parent myself I appreciate the help and understand how a couple of hours to yourself can make such a difference, so I'm glad I can bring that sort of joy to their lives."

For those considering becoming a short break parent, Shanice shares this piece of advice:

**"Ease yourself in slowly, but go for it and have fun! You can make an incredible difference to young people and their families."**



## Become a short break foster parent

If you're interested in joining us in our mission to help families and children, take your first step today by enquiring with our team. Give us a call on 0800 077 8159 for a friendly introductory chat, or fill in our online enquiry form and a member of our team will be in touch shortly to help you get started on your fostering journey.





**T:** 0800 077 8159

**W:** [www.fosteringpeople.co.uk](http://www.fosteringpeople.co.uk)

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let's change lives together