



Could you become a foster carer?











Becoming a foster carer can be both a momentous step and the start of something life changing.


It is not always easy but it is very rewarding.

Fostering Steps work with foster care providers all over the UK and have wide experience in helping interested people become foster carers.

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This fostering information pack aims to give you the information you need to decide if fostering is the right step for you and your family.

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What is foster care?

Foster care is the temporary care of children and young people when they are not able to live with their birth family.

Why do children need foster care?

This could be for a number of reasons: abusive or absent parents, parents who have difficulty coping, parents who are suffering from health problems that prevent them from being able to care properly for their children, or as a result of neglect. Whatever the cause, the result is an inability to provide a stable home. A lack of stable environment can lead to children and young people being placed in the care of the local authority.

Foster care provides stability

Foster care provides children and young people with a safe and nurturing environment. Children may return home after foster care or they may stay in long-term foster care and go on to live independently.

There are around **70,000** children and young people in foster care in the UK, with a further **10,000** new foster carers needed. This shortage means that children and young people are often move home, and have to frequently change schools. They could also be split up from their siblings. This lack of stability doesn't give children the support they need to grow and recover.

What do foster carers do?

Foster carers provide a safe and nurturing environment for children and young people who have been placed in the care of the local authority, by letting them stay in their home and looking after them during the period of the foster care placement.

Do I need qualifications?

You don't need any formal qualifications to become a foster carer, and your local authority or agency will train you in the specific skills required to provide excellent foster care.

What skills do I need?

Experience shows us that people who thrive as foster carers tend to have certain qualities: they have positive, resilient personalities, tend to lead active lives in the community and are often guided by a desire to give something back.

Types of foster care

Short term/Assessment placements

Short term placements can range from one night to several months until the child or young person until they are able to return to their birth family or a more long term arrangement can be made.

Emergency & Crisis placements

This is a short placement, of a night or a few days, and will be required at very short notice.

Respite placements

Foster carers who specialise in respite care take a child or young person for a few hours a week, or a few days a month to give the full time foster carer and their family a break.

Long term placements

A long term placement is needed if a child or young person can't return to their family home for a few years, or if they are not able to return at all.

Sibling/Parent & baby

Foster carers with more space are very much in demand, as are foster carers who have the skills to teach a young parent care for their new baby.

Who can foster?

Foster carers come from many different backgrounds. Whatever your age, race, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability, you will be able to apply to become a foster carer. It does not matter if you own your own home or rent. Children will be placed with foster carers who can best meet their needs.

However fostering teams will look at:

- Your ability to work with the local authority or agency
- Your lifestyle
- Whether you are able to work as part of a team
- What space you have in your home
- Your health
- Your background
- Your experience looking after children, including your parenting skills and attitude
- Whether you can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child or young person
- Your employment circumstances, to ensure you can balance the demands of fostering

Could you foster?

Do you have the following qualities?

Commitment

As a foster carer you will need to commit your time, energy and make room in your life and home to look after a child or young person.

The ability to provide support

Foster carers must ensure that they do everything in their power to support the children or young people, in their health, their social wellbeing and their education.

The ability to manage behaviour

Foster carers must work with both the child or young person and their fostering team to help manage their feelings and difficult behaviour.

The ability to work with your agency or local authority










You will be required to attend meetings about the young person in your care, with your agency or local authority, and other parties.

The ability to communicate

Foster carers must be able to communicate well, both with the person in your care, their social workers and, in some cases, the young person's birth family.

Can you say yes?

Some questions you may want to consider before applying to become a foster carer.

-  Are you patient, resilient, with a sense of humour?
-  Are you nurturing?
-  Can you provide a safe environment for a child or young person?
-  Do you enjoy spending time with children and young people?
-  Are you able to find support in your local area, such as nurseries and youth clubs?
-  Are you a good listener?
-  Are you flexible?
-  Do you have the ability to set clear boundaries?
-  Would you welcome support and guidance from a fostering team and other professionals?

Support

Once approved, your local authority or agency will provide you with comprehensive training. The main support you will receive will be from the social worker who has been allocated to you by the local authority or agency.

Your supervising social worker

Your supervising social worker will support and guide you while you are looking after children or young people. You will have frequent contact with them, whether it be a home visit or via telephone.

You will also get support from the child's social worker, and any other professionals concerned.

Family support

It is important to note that, in addition to the support you receive from your social worker and fostering team, the support of your family, friends and neighbours is vital. To be a successful foster carer it is very important to have a strong support network around you and within your community.

Allowances

A variety of practical and financial support will be made available to you if you become a foster carer.

Payments for fostering





For those thinking about taking that step and starting their journey towards becoming a foster carer, it is important to consider the allowances you will receive. All foster carers are entitled to financial support, which you will receive in the form of a weekly or fortnightly payment, to cover the costs of caring for a child or young person.

Fostering Fees

The fee will be paid directly to you by your local authority, or by your foster care agency.

Fostering Allowance

The fostering allowance will cover the everyday costs of looking after a child or young person. This may include:

-  Travel
-  Clothing
-  Food
-  Extra household expenses

The Process

Once you send your initial enquiry, your local authority or fostering agency will be in touch to discuss you becoming a foster carer. If they believe you have the qualities of a potential foster carer, they will arrange to visit you in your home.

The Assessment

If the initial home visit is successful, the foster care assessment will then start. This will involve a thorough look at your life. Home interviews will be conducted with you and your family, conducted by your Supervising Social Worker.

Your local authority or agency will ask for your permission to undertake police checks and will arrange for you to have a full medical check. They will also assess your employment history and, if you have children, will conduct education checks.

Your Supervising Social Worker will then submit a written report to the fostering panel, who may then recommend it for approval.

How long will this take?

The assessment process can take up to six months, and you can withdraw from the process at any time if you decide fostering is not the right decision for you.

The next step...

If you believe you have the qualities to become a foster carer, and can support and nurture a child or young person, please get in touch.

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