



# Creating continuity for children in care

Your guide to fostering with fosterplus

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# Welcome



Thank you for your interest in fostering with Fosterplus, one of the UK's longest established independent fostering specialists.

We find loving homes for vulnerable children and young people who have experienced upheaval and disruption in their lives, and we're committed to breaking this cycle by providing continuity. By this we mean a stable home life, with caring foster parents who can encourage them to find their feet in what can seem like a shifting world. To achieve this, we connect our foster parents to an exceptionally strong network of people and support. You can find out more about our approach later on in this short guide.

For all of its challenges, fostering is one of the most rewarding careers you can have, and we look forward to helping you on your journey.

**Tracy Livesey,**

Managing Director



# What is foster care?

## Breaking the cycle of disruption

Fostering means looking after another parents' child because it's not possible for them to be with their birth families for a while, perhaps because of abuse, neglect or a sudden change in family circumstances. Each year, as many as 50,000 children need the support of foster parents across the UK. Many of them have had difficult childhoods or distressing experiences, and so can really benefit from having stability in their lives.

Foster parents provide this stability while local authorities and other care professionals work hard to get the children back with their birth families. Sometimes this happens quickly, and sometimes it's not possible at all, and so the length of time a child may be in your care for varies from a day or two, several months, and sometimes many years until they reach independence.

While local authorities have their own fostering teams, they simply don't have enough foster parents to care for all the children they're responsible for. That's when they come to specialist fostering organisations like Fosterplus. We have a large in-house team of social workers and support staff, who provide continuous high-quality support to our foster parents and the children they look after.





## There's more than one type of fostering

As a foster parent, you can choose the type of fostering you'd like to do – and you can change and develop over time.

There's short-term (known as 'interim' in Scotland) which is anything up to 2 years. Long-term (or 'permanent' in Scotland) is over 2 years and often until a child turns eighteen. Then there's emergency and respite, which are often for a night or two, sometimes a little longer.

Beyond that there's specialist fostering, such as looking after teenagers, siblings, children with disabilities or unaccompanied minors, as well as parent and child fostering.

## Fostering is different to adoption

While both fostering and adoption aim to provide a stable, loving home for children who aren't able to live with their birth families, there are some key differences...

- With fostering, the legal responsibility for the child remains with the local authority and the child's birth parents. However, when somebody adopts a child, they become their legal guardian and are fully responsible for their wellbeing on a permanent basis.
- Foster parents receive training and financial rewards to provide care, so it's more like a career with professional support and supervision along the way.
- Children who need fostering are often older than those looking for adoptive parents. We typically care for children aged 7 and over, as well as siblings.

# What are your responsibilities as a foster parent?

## Providing a positive and stable environment

A foster parent's role is to provide continuity to a child by providing a stable and caring home environment that helps them to leave upheaval and disruption behind and get their lives back on track. You'll also always make children feel safe, valued, listened to and welcome. While this sounds quite straightforward, the reality can be challenging.

Quite often, children have had years of bad experiences including neglect and abuse, which means they don't trust adults and find difficulty in forming relationships. Their anger and hurt might make itself known in the form of challenging behaviour or emotional withdrawal for example. As a foster parent, you'll help them understand and manage these feelings, so they can grow into healthy and happy adults - and that's quite a responsibility.

In between this, you'll be there to help them get on with their day to day lives. That means getting them to school, taking

them on holiday and giving them the opportunity to learn, play and enjoy life.

Another important part of the role is taking them to meetings with social workers and therapists (where required) and helping them to maintain positive contact with their birth family. We'll also ask you to keep detailed records of the achievements and behaviours of the children in your care. It's all part of monitoring their development formally.

You'll also attend regular supervision meetings and training throughout the year, so we can be sure that you and the children in your care are receiving all the support you need.

So you'll see that while fostering is richly rewarding, it's also like a challenging full-time career. It's a team effort, and we're with you all the way.



“

**Our mission is to provide positive and stable family environments for the children and young people placed with our foster parents and ensure that, with the support of our carers, they can thrive emotionally and academically.**

”





## Fosterplus – 25 years' of successful fostering

### **Continuity and connections – the key to effective fostering**

Continuity is important in most areas of life. It provides reassurance, stability and a solid platform for planning and growth. We've been a specialist independent fostering organisation for 25 years, during which time we've expanded our services to reach even more communities. Today, we have offices across England and Scotland, and are currently supporting around 200 foster parents and the children in their care.

We're known for providing reliable and high-quality care to children and young people, so local authorities trust us to achieve excellent outcomes for children. Our continuing commitment to quality is highlighted by our 'Good' and 'Outstanding' Ofsted and Care Inspectorate reports.

Continuity is also vital for the children and young people we look after, most of whom come from broken homes and have had a troubled childhood. They might even have



experienced a succession of unsuccessful placements with other foster families. By providing stable, loving homes we give them the continuity they've been lacking. We also give them a platform for future growth and development.

For us, continuity comes through the power of connections. We connect the right children to the right people through a highly effective matching process. We connect our foster parents to excellent training and to dedicated professional teams, as well as other local families. And we connect effectively with local authorities, who regularly seek our expertise and support.

All of these connections help ensure longer and more successful placements.



# Why should you choose fosterplus?

## Connecting people to the things that matter

We're committed to making each and every placement an enjoyable experience for the children we care for and our foster parents. Starting with careful and considered matching and the consistent support of a professional, local team, our approach aims to set every family up for success.

**Professional support** – You'll have your own dedicated social worker who'll visit regularly and connect you to our wider team of fostering specialists. There's also an online hub and emergency 24/7 helpline, so support is always available. And if ever you want to speak to one of the senior managers, their doors are always open.

**Expert 'matching'** – Successful placements depend on connecting the right foster parents with the right children, and this is something we do extremely well. You can find out more about this on page 13.

**Ongoing training** – With a wide range of programmes available locally all year round, we'll make sure you learn new skills and develop continuously throughout your fostering career. This includes training in 'Secure Base', which is the fostering model we use to help foster parents support children and young people effectively. See page 12 for more detail.





**Local support groups and events -**

Wherever you're based, there are plenty of opportunities to connect locally with other foster parents. As well as support groups, we also run workshops, trips out, fun activities and more.

**Regular placement opportunities -**

New foster parents often cannot wait to welcome a child into their home, and with strong connections with local authorities across England and Scotland, we're in a good place to match you with a child that's right for you.



# Secure base – an effective fostering model

## Encouraging long-term development for everyone

We train our foster parents using the Secure Base Model - a practical approach that's designed to help children feel confident and secure, and build resilience.

Where children have not experienced a stable and nurturing family environment - like the children and young people in our care - they'll find it difficult to trust and will struggle with managing their thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

For foster parents, it's a really useful framework for understanding and meeting the needs of children in care, and gives them plenty of tools to help them encourage children to grow and develop confidently.



# Our matching process

## Connecting children and young people to the right foster parents

We believe that the best matches make for the best experiences, and that's why we take great care to connect the right children with the right foster parents. We call this 'matching', and it's something we work hard to get right first time, every time.

The matching process involves everyone, including dedicated referrals officers, social workers, managers and most importantly, you.

We receive something called a 'referral' from the local authorities, which has lots of information about a child who needs a foster home, including their background, vulnerabilities and educational needs.

We work tirelessly to match each child with a suitable foster parent who we believe can meet their needs. Once we think we've found a good match, we'll share all the information with you and talk openly about the challenges and the support we'll offer. There's never any pressure to say 'yes' and we always encourage total honesty, especially if there's ever any doubt.

If everybody is happy, we'll work closely with the local authority to make arrangements, including a chance to meet the child before they come to stay with you, wherever possible.

Because we take such care, we have a very low rate of 'unplanned endings' which is where a placement breaks down early because of difficulties in the relationship. This means we provide vital stability and continuity for children and young people in care.







## Who can foster?

### All that matters is an ability to build bonds and relationships

The important thing to know is that almost anyone can be a foster parent.

We don't ask for experience of looking after children – though if you have it, even as an older sibling or in a voluntary role, it will help you understand what's involved.

As for work experience, our foster parents come from all walks of life and can be aged anywhere between 21 and... well, there's actually no upper limit provided you have the energy and are in good health.

We don't ask for qualification either, so if you left school early or studied at university, you'll be considered equally.

The same applies to race, religious beliefs, sexuality and relationship status too. You can be single – male and female –

married, in a civil partnership or long-term relationship.

In fact, all we really look for are people who are able to care for and support a young person – and that's something that comes naturally.

There are only three 'must haves' if you want to apply.

You must be over 21, have a right to live and work in the UK, and have a spare bedroom that's always available to a child in your care. You don't even need to own your own place.

During the assessment process, we'll get to know you and we'll talk about your background, experiences and your



individual circumstances. We need to make sure that you're fit for fostering, and that fostering won't affect your own health and wellbeing.

We also need to be sure you'll have enough time to give children the attention they need, so we will need to chat about any part or full-time work and make sure that you'll be able to meet the demands of the role.

All we can say is if you're interested in fostering with us, then please do take the next step and apply – because we're interested in you and will do everything we can to help.

### Key qualities:

- Compassion
- Patience
- Warmth
- Tolerance
- Resilience
- Understanding





## What's involved with becoming a foster parent, and how long does it take?

### **The assessment and approval process - careful thought and consideration**

The assessment process is quite detailed, and generally takes between 4-6 months. We both need to be sure it's the right decision, and that means asking lots of questions, taking up references, making background checks and undertaking initial training.

**Home visit** - Everything starts with a home visit (we might also do this on a video call) where we'll speak more about the role, answer questions and get to know each other.



**Fostering assessment** – The fostering assessment is basically a very detailed report which covers everything about you including:

- Childhood experiences, education and work.
- Health, including a medical from your local GP.
- Financial situation, including any significant debt.
- Background checks, including a full DBS and with social services.
- Safety assessments of your home.
- References from people who know you well.



Over a number of visits, your dedicated assessing social worker will ask you a variety of questions and gather all the information they need to complete your assessment. This may seem daunting but we'll be with you every step of the way.

**'Skills to Foster'** – During the assessment, we'll ask you to attend a 3-day training programme where you'll have a chance to talk to current foster parents and learn more about the work.

**Panel** – This is the final step of the process where an independent panel will review your assessment, ask questions and make a recommendation about your approval.

**Welcoming your first child** – If you're approved as a foster parent, it won't be long before you're welcoming the first of many children into your home.

# The rewards of fostering



## Changing and enriching lives

### Emotional rewards

Children in care have often had difficult or challenging childhoods. They find many different ways of dealing with these experiences. Some might withdraw and be reluctant to form relationships. Others might be angry and want to push boundaries. These are just two examples, and every child is completely unique, but they'll all give you something to think about and work on. So yes, fostering can be challenging at times. But there's no doubt that just being there for them provides consistency and stability and makes a difference to their lives. You'll see them respond too, gaining confidence and trust, smiling, showing interest, forming important bonds and reconnecting with their childhood.

It's this that makes fostering such an emotional roller-coaster. The good times far outweigh the tough times however, and our foster parents tell us it's the best thing they've ever done. We know they also appreciate our support and skill in matching them to the right children.



## Financial rewards

People want to foster because of the career satisfaction and the emotional rewards. But the financial side's important too. When you're looking after children the costs soon mount up – clothes, clubs, entertainment, days out, holidays... and that's without all the extra food and electricity!

That's why we offer a generous fostering allowance and benefits package to our foster parents to cover the cost of caring for children and reward you with a professional fee for your hard work and dedication.

The fostering allowance is generally tax-free for most foster parents and shouldn't affect any benefits received.

As well as a generous allowance, our foster parents also receive free membership to FosterTalk, access to our foster parent rewards platform (The Exchange) and an exclusive Refer-a-Friend scheme.







## contact us

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