



Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL



fostering
...is providing a family life for children

What is fostering?

Fostering is a way of providing a family life for children who cannot live with their own parents.

Solihull Council works in a number of ways with families who are experiencing difficulties. Our main aim is to work with families to help them to stay together. However, sometimes children need to be placed in temporary foster care while parents get help sorting out their problems, take a break, or to help children or young people through a difficult period in their lives. Children will often return home once the problems that caused them to come into foster care have been resolved and it is clear that their parents can look after them safely. Others however, may stay in long term foster care until they move onto independence or are adopted.

Solihull Council provides foster care for children and young people from all cultures and backgrounds from birth to independence.

The decision to foster a child should not be taken lightly but it is without doubt a rewarding and valuable experience. The information contained within this booklet is intended to provide background information and a starting point for those considering fostering a child.

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Why become a foster carer?

An experience of a lifetime

By becoming a foster carer you will be supporting a child at a time when they need it most. You will be helping them to build a better life for themselves.

There are support services available to give you help and guidance and you will never be left on your own to deal with difficult situations.

If you have what it takes, fostering can be one of the most rewarding experiences you will have in your lifetime.

Types of fostering

There are different kinds of foster care to meet the different needs of children and families.

If you decide to become a foster carer you will need to think about what sort of fostering you would like to do and are best suited to doing, taking into account your family and lifestyle.

Emergency

Involves being able to look after a child or young person in an emergency on a short term basis, for up to two weeks or longer.

Short-term

Involves looking after a child or young person for a set period of time until the child goes home, moves onto a permanent placement or onto independence.

Long-term/permanent

Involves caring for a young person until they move onto independence. The young person may still have regular contact with their family.

Part-time schemes

Support Breaks

Involves providing regular, short breaks to children and families. Support carers work with social workers to help children and families, who may be experiencing some difficulties, to stay together.

Family Link

Involves providing regular, short breaks to a child or young person with a disability.

Respite

Involves providing regular, short breaks to children or young people to give other foster carers a break.

A child's point of view

“...My foster carer has supported me through difficult situations and I am glad that I made the choice to be put in foster care because it has changed my life for the best.

That's why we need more foster carers to make a difference in other children's lives. Please think about the impact you can have on young people's lives, you can change their lives and make a difference for the best. If you want to make a difference then what are you waiting for? We need you!”

Who can be a foster carer?

Just as there is no typical child in need of fostering, there is no such thing as a typical foster carer.

Good foster carers come from all sorts of social, racial, cultural and family backgrounds. All enquiries will be considered regardless of ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion or relationship status. In every case, the most important thing is that the child receives care, attention and feels secure and valued.

Many people think that you have to be married with a family, have a job and own your own home to be a foster carer, but this isn't true. You may be a man or woman, single, married or divorced, living alone or with someone else. You may or may not have children of your own. You may be a home owner or live in rented accommodation.

What you do need is the skills and experience to care for children separated from their own families. You will need a spare room and your home should be safe and secure (or capable of being made safe) for children of the age you wish to foster.

If you have concerns about your health, it does not necessarily exclude you from fostering but it is as well to raise this with us at an early stage.

You need to be available for foster children;

■ Pre-school children

You should have one carer who is available full time for a pre-school child.

■ School aged children

You should have one carer available for school aged children before and after school and during school holidays. In the event of a child's illness or exclusion from school you will need to be able to make appropriate arrangements for their care.

■ Meetings and emergencies

You should be able to attend meetings and be contactable in an emergency.



Who are we looking for?

Foster carers are ordinary people, but perhaps with a few extraordinary qualities. We are looking for carers who can provide any of the following:

- Carers who reflect a child's cultural, ethnic and religious heritage.
- Carers who can care for brothers and sisters to enable a family group to stay together.
- Carers who have the experience to care for children or young people with a physical or learning disability.
- Carers who have an awareness of children's needs and are comfortable working with professionals and birth families.
- Carers who can show compassion for a child's past or current situation and have an appreciation of the possible effect it may have. Some of the children needing foster care may have experienced neglect, physical, emotional or sexual abuse.
- Carers who can care for teenagers whose behaviour can at times be challenging.
- Carers who can help young people prepare for independence.
- Carers who can help unaccompanied teenagers who have travelled to the UK alone and have no carers or parents here adjust to life in a new country, taking into account their emotional and cultural needs.

qualities

Your role as a carer

In general, foster carers have to be confident, patient and have an understanding of working in partnership with others.

As a foster carer, you will be responsible for the care of children in your home. You will work with social work staff and all those involved in helping children fulfil their potential. Your responsibilities will include the following:

Helping children to achieve the FIVE outcomes

The government has identified the five outcomes that are most important to children and young people whatever their background or circumstances. You will be expected to work with others to help children achieve these outcomes.

1

Be healthy

- Promote the healthy growth and development of children.
- Encourage healthy lifestyles and promote healthy choices

2

Stay safe

- Provide a safe and caring environment.
- Ensure children are kept safe from harm and abuse and are taught how to get help should anything happen.
- Provide day to day care for children, being mindful of the specific needs of children who are separated from their birth family.
- Promote the secure attachment of children to adults.
- Act as an advocate for each child.

Helping children to achieve the FIVE outcomes continued

3

Enjoy and achieve

- Ensure children attend school and take an active role in a child's education by attending parent's evenings and ensuring that homework is completed.
- Help children to achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation.

4

Make a positive contribution

- Promote positive behaviour and encourage children to support the community and environment.
- Ensure the children you are looking after are encouraged to develop an understanding of their origins, religion and culture.
- Encourage children to develop positive relationships and to have contact with significant family members.
- Help children to develop self confidence and enable the children and young people who are moving on to do so in a positive manner.

5

Achieve economic well-being

- Encourage young people to engage in further education, employment or training after leaving school.
- Ensure children have access to transport and appropriate resources.



Work as part of a team

To appropriately care for children and young people you will;

- Work with social workers and other professionals in line with policies, procedures and guidelines.
- Take part in implementing the plan agreed for the child.
- Actively participate in reviews, case conferences, court hearings and keep written records.
- Further your learning and personal development by completing the Council's post approval induction and training programme and working towards an external qualification (NVQ).
- Deal responsibly with confidential information, in line with the Council's policy.

Extra responsibilities

There may be extra responsibilities depending on the kind of foster placement you provide.

Younger children

- Work with parents, encouraging and supervising regular and frequent contact, where this is seen to be in the child's best interests.
- Prepare children for the move back home.
- Help children to understand their present situation, accepting that they may grieve for the family they have lost.
- Work closely with adoptive parents to ensure a smooth transition for the child from foster care to adoptive home.

Teenagers

- Support young people in further education and/or employment and encourage them in making long term plans.
- Help young people develop their own social networks.
- Help young people develop the skills they need to live independently and assist and support them in their move to adulthood.
- Provide after care support when a young person has moved onto independence.

Unaccompanied teenagers

In Solihull we have an immigration reporting centre and we are responsible for any young person who travels alone to the UK and reports to this office.

The responsibilities for caring for these young people are very much the same as teenagers in the UK, although there are some additional responsibilities due to their cultural and religious requirements.

- Support the young person to adapt to life in the UK and appreciate that they have no carers or parents in the UK.
- Respond positively to the young person's cultural identity; build up an understanding of their culture and accommodate their needs in day to day life.
- Support and encourage the young person in their religious activities and help them develop their own religious networks.
- Support the young person's emotional needs appreciating that they may have suffered trauma in their country of origin and help them come to terms with this.
- Work with a team of interpreters and learn to overcome language barriers in day to day life.

For long-term/permanent foster carers

- Help the child settle into the family and community and form their own social network.
- Encourage the child to fulfil their potential by providing stimulation and activities.
- Help the child to develop a positive identity and awareness of their ethnic origin, religion and culture.
- Encourage the child to sustain memories of their birth family, acknowledging that birth relatives are important to a child, and supporting contact with them, where appropriate.

Part-time fostering

Fostering that can fit around your existing commitments.

Support Breaks

- Offer day or overnight care to a child or young person aged 10-16 years at times which are convenient to you and the child's family.
- Work with the child, family and social workers to help the family resolve their difficulties and stay together.

Family Link

- Offer a child or young person with a disability short breaks away from home for up to a total of 28 days per year. Arrange the times so they are convenient to you and the child's family.
- Care for a child who may have a physical disability (but does not require an adapted environment), a learning disability, a sensory impairment or possibly a range of difficulties.

CHESS fostering

A specialist scheme for children and young people with complex needs.

CHESS is a therapeutic foster care scheme for children and young people with complex and demanding needs. The scheme offers a structured but nurturing family environment for children who are not able to be placed in an ordinary fostering situation.

To become a CHESS carer you will need to have experience of working or caring for children or young people with complex needs. One carer must be able to work for the project on a full-time basis i.e. not have other paid employment.

the process

What happens next?

Step 1

Confirm interest

Please register your interest using the enquiry form on our fostering web pages www.solihull.gov.uk/fostering. We will arrange for a social worker to contact you to discuss your interest in fostering. If you wish to talk to a social worker about any questions you may have please call us on 0121 749 8100.

Step 2

Home visit by social worker

If you are to proceed to the next stage a social worker will come and see you at home. The purpose of this visit is to give you an overview of what is involved in fostering and ask you some questions based on what we need from our carers. You will be able to ask questions and we can check out with you whether you would like to proceed with an application to foster. The social worker will be able to identify any issues or concerns that may need further clarification before you proceed further.

Step 3

Attend 'skills to foster' training

You will be invited to attend the next set of training groups. These are run by social workers and foster carers and follow the 'skills to foster' course, produced by The Fostering Network. There are eight sessions that are held either in the evenings or at weekends. There are usually no more than sixteen participants.

During the groups we will be asking you to think about your motives, ideas and feelings about fostering and what you are able to offer as individuals and families. We will ask you to consider the needs of children who experience prejudice and discrimination in our society as a result of racism or because of a disability, gender, sexual orientation, class or religion. You will be given information about fostering so that you can explore the possible impact on you and your family.



Step 4

Complete application form

If you are to proceed to the next stage you will be asked to complete an application form. The form you sign will give permission for us to carry out checks with local government and the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). We also need to complete checks on any other adults in the household aged sixteen or over. You will also be asked to consent to have a medical, which we will pay for.

Step 5

Detailed home study

After the 'skills to foster' training course you will be allocated a social worker. The worker's role is to get to know you and your family, to have further discussions with you about fostering and for you to explore the type of fostering you would like to be considered for. All members of your household will be involved in the assessment process. We aim to complete the home study in four months but this will depend on your needs and availability.

We will interview two non-related referees that you have nominated and a family member chosen by us following discussion with yourself. We will also require a written employer reference and may need to speak to former long-term partners.

Your social worker will then produce a report which will be presented to the fostering panel.

Step 6

Fostering panel

The panel will consider your application and make a recommendation on your suitability to become a foster carer. The panel is made up of a councillor, social workers and independent members. Independent members include foster carers from other fostering agencies, adults that have been in the 'looked after' system and education and child health professionals. Your social worker will be there and you will also have the opportunity of attending.

You will be informed of the fostering panel's recommendations on the day the panel meets. This recommendation will go to the agency decision-maker and they will decide whether you will be approved. You will receive a letter informing you of this decision. If you are not approved, you have the right to appeal.

How long the process takes

It will take approximately six to nine months for you to become an approved foster carer.

After you are approved

Once you are approved you will be available to foster children. How quickly you have a placement will depend on the category of children you are approved to care for. However, it is likely that in the near future you will be asked to consider a child or young person. Before a child or young person is placed with you, we will check that you have all the necessary equipment.



support and finance

What support do we offer?

Fostering team social workers

In order to ensure you have all the support you need, you will be allocated your own fostering team social worker. These workers are sometimes called link workers. Workers are available Monday to Friday during office hours. Their role includes:

- Offering you supervision and support with regard to ongoing placements.
- Offering advice, for example with financial matters.
- Reviewing with you on an annual basis your fostering career and exploring with you whether the type of fostering you offer needs to be changed.
- Identifying with you your training needs and considering how these can be met.
- Updating you on policies and procedures.

Additional support

We provide additional support for carers. This includes:

- 24 hour support – we have an ‘out of hours’ phone line where you can get support and advice from a member of the fostering team.
- Educational support for children in foster care including those who have been excluded from school.
- Health support from the Children’s Looked After Nurse and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team.
- A quarterly newsletter with information about events, group meetings, training and related articles.
- Social events so that you can meet and get to know other carers, workers of the fostering team and other workers from Education and Children’s Services.
- Activity projects where support workers involve children in foster care in local activities.

Training and qualifications

There is a regular and varied training programme provided both internally and externally for foster carers. The fostering team expects and encourages all foster carers to participate in the training programme and to maintain a portfolio of training and personal development. Newly approved carers will receive the training and support necessary for them to be able to complete the nationally approved foster care induction standards within 12 months. All carers are offered the opportunity to gain an NVQ level 3 in ‘Caring for Children and Young People’.

Solihull Foster Care Association (SFCA)

You will be invited to join the Solihull Foster Care Association (SFCA). The SFCA is a group run by carers for carers. The group considers issues common to all carers and meets to enable carers to provide support for each other.

What do foster carers get paid?

You will receive a weekly allowance for each child in your care. This varies according to the age of the child or young person and is intended to cover the costs of food and clothing, household items, personal care, pocket money and travel costs. This allowance does not usually affect any benefits you receive or tax you pay. On top of the allowance you will also receive additional payments which reflect your circumstances, experience and any extra training you have completed. The social worker who visits you at home will be able to give you a copy of our payments or alternatively you can call the fostering team on 0121 749 8100 for more information.

Frequently asked questions

Here are some of the questions about fostering we get asked most often. If there's something in particular you would like to know please call the fostering team on 0121 749 8100

Q. What is the difference between adoption and fostering?

A. Adoption means taking a child into your home permanently and legally as part of your family. Fostering usually means offering a temporary home to children until they either return to the family home or move on to live with a relative, adopter or long term foster carer. There are many similarities between adoption and long-term fostering. In both cases you will look after a child as if he or she is your own son or daughter. The differences are mainly to do with the legal status of the child.

Q. Is my house or flat suitable?

A. The most important ingredient in fostering is YOU. So long as you have a spare room and your home is welcoming and safe, children won't care whether you own it or rent it. It needs to be clean, but it needn't be spotless or freshly decorated.

Q. Am I too old?

A. As long as you are fit enough to look after a child or children then you can become a foster carer whatever your age. Some of our best carers didn't start fostering until they were in their 50's.

Q. Do I have all the abilities needed?

A. Few foster carers would claim to start out with all the abilities needed in the job. Our 'skills to foster' course equips you with most of the skills you need to start with and you will continue to receive training throughout the time you foster.

Q. Am I too overweight?

A. There is no weight limit. If your doctor thinks your fit enough to foster so do we.

Q. Can I foster if I smoke?

A. Children under five years of age, disabled children who are physically unable to play outside and children with respiratory problems such as asthma or heart disease will not be placed with carers who smoke. We expect all of our carers homes to be smoke free, smokers will need to smoke outside the home and not in the presence of fostered children. All of our carers are offered appropriate professional advice and support to help them give up smoking.

A foster carers point of view

“Now is a good time to start fostering because there is so much to achieve. Foster carers are now seen as professional people doing a professional job.”



Q. Can I foster if I have a criminal record?

A. We try to get a balanced picture of where people are now in their lives. Minor offences committed some time ago needn't exclude you from fostering. Although serious offences like violence or offences against children will. Talk in confidence to a member of the fostering team if you have any concerns about this.

Q. Will I be told everything about a child who comes to stay with me?

A. You will not be asked to look after a child without first being given all the appropriate information about the child's history and behaviour. You will have every opportunity to discuss any doubts you have with your fostering team social worker. The final decision whether or not to look after any child lies with you.

Q. Will I meet the child's parents or other family members?

A. Most children benefit from contact with their parents or other family members. Sometimes carers allow family visits by appointment to the foster home, or they may go with the child to meet their family elsewhere. Support and training prepares you for this. Sometimes a child's social worker will supervise meetings without the carer needing to be present. Contact can also take place by phone or letter.

Q. What's the difference between a carer's responsibility and a parent's?

A. A foster carer has no legal rights over a child in her/his care, but has responsibility for the day to day care of the child. Parents will usually keep full parental responsibility.

Q. Can I cope with a child who behaves badly?

A. You may be amazed at what you can do. Your 'skills to foster' course should equip you to deal with most things. There are practical ways that we can help, by offering the child day care services or short breaks with another carer (respite) and by providing individual support.

Q. What effect will fostering have on my own family?

A. It is important that you talk to any children living with you about how they feel about fostering. Fostering will affect them as much as it will affect you. Ask them how they might feel about sharing you and your time with other children. Ask how they might feel about sharing space in the house and possibly toys as well. Ring us for information to help you to explain fostering to young children. We'll need to assess your partner as well as you. What about your wider family? Will they be around to help you? Will they baby-sit?

Q. Can I cope emotionally?

A. You will learn to cope as you go on. There will be times when you will be upset, perhaps when a child you become fond of moves on. Your fostering team social worker and other foster carers will help to support you, but remember there will be plenty of times when fostering is fun and personally rewarding.

Q. Will the child continue to go to their own school or attend a school within my community?

A. Children placed long-term may transfer to a school within your community. Children placed short-term may continue going to their regular school with their friends. The child's individual circumstances will be taken into account when deciding what schooling is best for them.

Q. What happens if the child does not get along with my family?

A. Your fostering team social worker will be available for you to talk to in order to find possible solutions. If necessary, a child may have to be found a more suitable placement for their needs.

Q. Can a foster child come on holiday with us?

A. Children are encouraged to experience as many things as possible and to participate in everyday family routines. Expenses are available towards children's holidays. If it is not possible for children to come on holiday with you, respite can be arranged with another carer.



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