Fostering
Transform the life of a child or young person
What is fostering?

Fostering is a way of providing a family life to 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 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.
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 is support available to give you help and guidance; 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.
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, and 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.

What young people want from their foster carers?

Here is a summary of responses form young people in care talking about what they need from their foster carer(s)

- An ‘ordinary’ family life, and not to feel ‘different’
- To maintain relations with their birth families
- To understand why they’re in care, and to have an explanation ready
- To be listened to about where they want to be, and to have an element of control
- To be valued, respected, encouraged (for example, at school) and to be appreciated for themselves.

“Many young people come into care with a lot of emotional baggage, it up to us to not only provide a bed and a roof over their head; we also need to help them through the challenges that have brought them into our care”.

—Mark O’Connor, current carer.

“Looking after teenagers can be difficult but you can talk through their issues in a way that you can’t with babies and young children. It’s rewarding to see these young people become well rounded active members of the community and it’s fulfilling to see them achieve success and progress into adulthood.”

—Jan Sheldon, foster carer of over 30 years

“I knew I had the ability to do well and, because my foster carers believed in me, they gave me support through college. I’m now in University...training to be a social worker. I wouldn’t be here without them”.

—Jan Sheldon, foster carer of over 30 years
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 can care for brothers and sisters to enable a family group to stay together.
- 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.
- 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 reflect a child’s cultural, ethnic and religious heritage.
- 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 live in Solihull or nearby who will keep children close to home, so they can maintain contact with their family, friends, pets and attend their local school.
**Types of fostering**

There are different kinds of foster care to meet the 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.

**Short-term**

Short-term care involves looking after a child or young person for a set period of time until the child goes home, moves onto a permanent home, or moves on to independence.

**Long-term/permanent**

Long-term/permanent care involves supporting a young person until they are old enough to move on to independent living. The young person may still have regular contact with their family.

**Connected Persons**

A Connected Person can be a relative, friend or any other person with a prior connection with a child/young person who is looked after by the local authority. This includes grandparents, aunts and uncles, adult siblings, family friends, or someone who has known the child in a professional capacity such as a teacher or youth worker.

**Specialist Fostering**

This type of fostering provides a child who has experienced significant neglect and trauma with foster carers who can provide therapeutic parenting on a full time basis for a child under 12 years old and move them on to a permanent family setting.

**Part-time schemes**

**Support Breaks**

Support breaks involve 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. One carer must be a full time foster carer able and willing to provide 24/7 therapeutic care.

**Family Link**

Family link care involves providing regular, short term care to a child or young person with a disability.
Work as part of a team

To appropriately care for children and young people you will;

- 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 through a personal development plan (PDP) and attending foster carer training
- Have the opportunity to work towards an external qualification Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).
- Deal responsibly with confidential information, in line with the Council’s policy.
- OVOS (Our Voice Our Service), the Children In Care Council for young OVOS gives children and young people the chance to shape and influence the services that they receive, they meet regularly throughout the year and host events for young people.
**Extra responsibilities**

There may be extra responsibilities depending on the kind of foster care 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 or a move to a long term foster 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 their 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.
- Consider becoming a “Stay put” carer where a young person over the age of 18 remains with their previous carer on a lodgings basis.

**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.
- 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 and build their resilience by promoting education, hobbies and positive leisure 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 at times that suits you and the child’s family.
- Work with the child’s birth family and social workers to help the family resolve their difficulties and stay together.

Family Link

- Experience of looking after children with disabilities

Specialist Fostering

- Be able to deliver therapeutic parenting to a child who has been through abuse and trauma.
- To work closely with therapeutic services and engage in individual sessions for both yourselves as carers as well as supporting the child’s therapy.
- Attend Fostering Resilience training and support groups
- To be a full time carer
What happens next?

Step 1

**Confirm interest**

Please register your interest using the enquiry form on our fostering web pages [https://socialsolihull.org.uk/fosteringandadoption/](https://socialsolihull.org.uk/fosteringandadoption/). We will arrange for a fostering duty 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 **0800 073 0769** or phone fostering duty on **0121 788 4253**.

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 areas 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 five sessions held over three consecutive weeks.

During the groups we will be asking you to think about the reasons you wish to foster, 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 abuse and trauma. 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 Disclosure Barring Checks (DBS). We also need to complete checks on any other adults in the household aged eighteen 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 to six months but this will depend on your needs and availability.

We will interview three non-related referees that you have nominated (out of a possible five) 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 care themselves and education and child health professionals.

Your social worker will be there with you. 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.

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“*My foster carer helped me to get an education and job opportunities...*”

-Solihull Care leaver

“*Being with my foster family has helped me express my opinions, which is something I couldn’t do when I lived at home*”

- Young person living with their foster family

“*My foster parents have helped me understand why I was fostered, that has helped me not be so angry anymore*”

-Young person living with their foster family
What support we offer?

Fostering team social workers

In order to ensure you have all the support you need, you will be allocated your own supervising social worker. Workers are available Monday to Friday during office hours (Monday to Thursday from 8:45am to 5:20pm and Friday 8:45am to 4:30pm). Their role includes:

- Offering you supervision and support with regards to day-by-day care.
- Offering advice for example with financial matters.
- Reviewing what has gone well and any areas with which you may need support and development.
- Identifying your training needs and putting together a personal development plan
- 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.
- The Looked After Children Education Service (LACES) who work to ensure that looked after children in Solihull can reach their full educational potential.
- The Health support from the Children’s Looked After Nurse.
- Solihull’s Emotional, Health and Wellbeing Service, SOLAR
- A quarterly newsletter with information about events, training and views from existing carers and young people.
- Foster carer support groups that meet each quarter.
- A website with all the latest news and training for carers and prospective carers, https://socialsolihull.org.uk/fosteringandadoption/
- Text messages to remind you of upcoming events and training.
- We provide additional support to foster carers this includes a buddying scheme with a carer with more experience.
- Mentoring for carers undertaking their QCF.
- A support worker for the child when needed
- Your membership to the Fostering Network will be paid on an annual basis.

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. The SFCA has a consultation role and advises the Fostering Team on any issues of concern to foster carers. For more information view their website www.solihullfca.co.uk/

What do foster carers get paid?

Foster carers are self employed. 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 see our payment structure online https://socialsolihull.org.uk/fosteringandadoption/solihull-foster-carers/financial-information/ or call us on 0800 073 0769.
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 a QCF in ‘Caring for Children and Young People.

A priority for your first year of fostering is the completion of the Training Development Services portfolio. You will be invited to an induction session for new Foster Carers that will introduce the ‘Training, Support and Development Standards’ you will need to complete within the first year as well as information about the training dates and content. You also may be given a buddy or a mentor who will provide some additional help and support.

Go to https://socialsolihull.org.uk/fosteringandadoption/events/ for the most up to date training calendar or speak to a member of staff who can provide you with the most recent hard copy.

“I’ve been a foster carer for over a decade and I still learn new things when I go to training, I believe its such an invaluable resource to Solihull foster carers”.

Foster carers receiving awards at the annual foster carer award event hosted by the Mayor
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 0800 073 0769.

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 is where a temporary home is offered to children, until they can return to their 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 discusses the qualities and skills needed in fostering to help you decide whether fostering is right for you. Once you are approved you will continue to receive training as a foster carer.

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 supervising social worker. The final decision whether or not to look after any child is yours.

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. Foster carers are expected to bring children to and from contact venues and will meet family members then. The child’s social worker will supervise contact without the carer needing to stay. Sometimes contact may be in the foster home. Support and training prepares you for this.

Contact can also take place by phone or letter.

“I have made some great friends through fostering with Solihull, I am going on holiday with them, one of my best friends cares for children in a similar age category as me so it’s nice to be able to bounce ideas of one another”.

‘Helping a child find their way in this world is one the greatest gifts you can ever give to them.’
Q. What effect will fostering have on my own family?

A. It is important that you talk to everyone in the family about fostering as fostering affects everyone. Ask your children how they may feel about sharing you and your time with other children, space in the house and possibly toys as well. Foster carers children have a lot to offer looked after children and we recognise they need support as well as the adults. Think about your wider support networks and who will be about to help you.

Q. Can I cope emotionally?

A. Fostering has many rewards but also many challenges. There will be times when you will be upset, perhaps when a child you become fond of moves on. Your supervising 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 living with you long-term may transfer to a school within your community. Children with you for a short time 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. 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.

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.

Now that you’ve read through our information pack you might feel like talking to us about becoming a foster carer.

We can arrange for you to talk to foster carers who already foster for Solihull.

Either way if you have any more questions about becoming a foster carer in Solihull you can call us on 0800 073 0769 or email us via our webpage at https://socialsolihull.org.uk/fosteringandadoption/fostering/

@FosterSolihull