

Start your Journey

**A guide to becoming
a foster parent**

0800 023 4561
www.thefca.co.uk

We're on this journey together



You could be about to start a truly incredible journey. Fostering – whether you're looking at this for the first time or you've fostered before – is one of the most rewarding things you can do. Whatever camp you're in, you've already taken a meaningful step by reading this guide and thinking about becoming a foster parent with us.

If you're completely new to fostering, this booklet will give you an idea about what fostering means and what you can expect next. If you're an experienced foster parent looking for a new agency, it will help you make important decisions about transferring.

Becoming a foster parent is an amazing opportunity to give a child or young person the fresh start they need. When you become a foster parent with us, you're supported every step of the way. You'll always have the help, training and encouragement you need to change a child or young person's life.



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What is fostercare?

Foster parents give a safe, stable family home to children and young people who can't live with their birth families anymore.

What's the difference between fostering and adoption?

When you foster a child or young person, their birth family or the local authority is still legally responsible for them, and the child keeps their surname. This is different to adoption, where the child takes their adoptive family's surname and their new family becomes entirely responsible for them. Sometimes, a child or young person only needs fostering for a few days. Other times, a fostering placement can become what's known as a 'long-term placement' lasting years, or even permanently. Adoption is always permanent. Another difference is that adoptive parents don't get financial support like foster parents do.

What kind of children and young people will I look after?

Children and young people need fostering for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes, it's because someone in their family is too ill to look after them, or there's been a family breakdown. Sometimes, it's because they've been neglected or abused and aren't safe. Children react to being fostered differently. Some settle in with their foster family relatively easily. Others might need extra help with managing how they feel or with their behaviour. But you'll never be on your own. We're always here to help.

Who can become a foster parent?

You don't need any qualifications. To be a great foster parent, you just need to be able to give a vulnerable child or young person a safe and loving home to grow up in. Just as the children we place are all different, so are our foster parents. We work with thousands of amazing foster parents from all walks of life, regardless of their relationship status, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, age, gender, income or number of birth children.





Can I foster?

All kinds of people make great foster parents. The one thing they have in common is the drive to turn a child or young person's life around.

Becoming a foster parent can never be a box-ticking exercise. That's why we work closely with you throughout the application process – so we get to know you as a person. But there are a few areas we have to check first to make sure children and young people grow up in the environment they need.



You have to be over 21 to foster – but there's no upper age limit.



Regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability, you can foster.



You must have a spare bedroom, but you don't have to own your own house.



You don't have to be in work before you foster, you will receive financial support.



You need to have British citizenship or permanent leave to stay in the UK.



You'll need patience, energy, commitment and resilience.



You don't need qualifications or experience in childcare.



You don't need to be married or in a couple, you can be single and foster.



You don't have to be a parent already, we will give you lots of training.



Generally, you need to be able to foster full time, but there are a few exceptions so please talk to us about your situation.



Moving to the FCA family

Transferring from another fostering agency is a big decision, but we'll help you through the whole process.

We'll do our best to make transferring as easy and straightforward as possible – for you and any foster children you want to bring with you. Normally, that means an initial meeting with you, your current agency, the social worker for any child currently placed with you and someone from our team. It makes sure we're all up to date and working together.

If you don't currently have a foster child, you can give your current agency, local authority or trust 28 days' notice in writing and apply to us right away. We will complete the transfer process within 12 weeks.

Switching might seem daunting at first, but once you're with us, we're confident it will be the last time you change fostering agency.

Why transfer to us?

You do your very best for the children and young people in your care. So we believe your fostering provider should do the same for you. When you foster with us, you're joining our family, and we'll look after you as one of our own.

- **Training and career progression.** Get all the training and support you need, whatever your experience.
- **24/7 support.** Access a range of fostering professionals right around the clock.
- **Extended support network.** Team Parenting® is your personal network of childcare experts including therapists, education officers, social workers and support workers.
- **Regular support groups.** Fun social activities for all the family and access to The Exchange, our exclusive online platform.
- **Have your say.** Directly influence how we operate through our national foster parent forum.
- We've been fostering children and supporting foster parents since 1994.
- We were set up by a foster parent and a social worker.

"I found my assessment to panel a fantastic experience. The team has been welcoming, friendly and supportive. In the first month, my young person has attended three events and met other young people, boosting her confidence. I have had a great start!"

FCA Foster Parent



Team Parenting®

When you foster a child with us, you don't raise them alone. You're part of a team of people who are all committed to helping your foster child have the happiest, healthiest future. We call it Team Parenting®.

Team Parenting®

Team Parenting® is the network of childcare experts who may work with you. They may include therapists, education officers, social workers and support workers. They help you look after every area of your foster child or young person's wellbeing. Your foster child's birth family might be involved as well. Together, we can give your foster child a safe, stable home to grow up in. In turn, that gives them the best chance of recovering from their past and becoming a happy, healthy adult.

What are the components of Team Parenting®?

Team Parenting® is guided by our range of therapeutic interventions and our ethos – to establish safety and stability for all children and young people so that they form positive, attached relationships with their foster parents. It doesn't matter if a child's needs are standard, complex or specialist.

Achieving recovery and resilience for young people can sometimes be a complex therapeutic task that takes years. In these cases, we may work with the local authority that placed them to provide therapeutic interventions.

How are we different to fostering with the council?

We're an independent fostering agency, sometimes shortened to IFA. One of the main differences between fostering with us and with your local authority is our Team Parenting® network. Although we work with the government to find foster homes for children, this access to expertise and support that's so focused on you and your foster child often isn't available when you foster directly through your local authority.

We are one of the largest and most established independent fostering agencies in the UK. We've been helping people become extraordinary foster parents since 1994. We know how important it is for foster families to have the right support, training and experience to do the absolute best for the young person in their lives.

Free FosterTalk membership

FosterTalk is an organisation that gives support to foster parents across the UK. They give impartial advice, information and counselling on everything from fostering, to finances, to family. When you foster with us, you can use their services as much as you like for free. Once you're one of our approved foster parents, we'll also give you, your partner, children, parents and any other dependants full legal expenses insurance.

Our standards are high

We're inspected by Ofsted at least every three years and by the Care Inspectorate every four years in Wales. This means you can be confident we do things safely, legally and to a high standard.

Have fun!

It can be hard work being a foster parent, so we want you to have plenty of fun as well. We have a great social calendar, packed with local and national events. You'll be invited to family trips to theme parks, zoos, the seaside, bowling, camping, forest walks and all kinds of other adventures. Children and young people have a blast, and our foster parents really appreciate the chance to catch up with other foster families, too.

You're always supported

We have an excellent foster-parent-to-social worker ratio which is one of the reasons why we're able to give you, your family and your foster child the highest quality of care. But you don't just benefit from help from childcare experts. We also hold regular local support groups for foster parents to talk to each other, share their experiences, and give advice and moral support.

The Exchange

As a foster parent with us you will have access to The Exchange our online platform. You will be able to log on to get everything from regional / national updates, blogs to lots of shopping discounts and great deals too.

“Fostering can be a challenging life to lead.

We feel fortunate to be part of the FCA team as we have never been left feeling alone.”

FCA Foster Parent



Different types of fostering

The range of placement options you can choose from reflects the different reasons why children and young people need fostering. It means each child gets the specific care they need, and you can make the best use of your specific skills.

Emergency foster care

We sometimes need somewhere for a child or young person to stay very quickly for their safety. You'll need to be quite flexible with this sort of placement because you won't get much notice. Usually, emergency foster care is just for a few days.

Short-term foster care

You'll care for a child or young person for anything from one night to a few months. Meanwhile, we'll be helping to resolve issues at home, or finding a more permanent place for them to live.

Long-term foster care

As a long-term foster parent, you'll give a child or young person a stable home for the foreseeable future. Perhaps even until they're an adult and ready to leave home.

Respite foster care

Respite foster parents help give other families some time off to rest by looking after their birth or foster children for a short break.

Parent and child placements

With these placements, you'll give a home to a parent and their child. They'll look to you for advice, guidance and help with being a parent. It's often young parents, but sometimes older parents with their own issues need some extra help from a foster parent.

Sanctuary-seeking foster care

Sometimes, children or young people come to the UK looking for asylum without their family. They've often travelled a long way and been through unbelievable hardship. As a foster parent for sanctuary-seeking children, you'll make them feel safe and help them adapt to a new country.

Foster care for disabled children

As a specialist foster parent, you'll take care of a child or young person who has extra needs. For example, they might have a learning or physical difficulty. You can also give children who aren't fostered a break away from home, giving their family a rest as well.

Step-down foster care

Step-down foster care means helping children and young people move from a residential home and into a family home. They may never have had a stable home life, so you'll help them understand what a safe, loving home means.

Don't worry about choosing what type of placement is best for you now, though. We'll talk you through your options and help you decide.



Training and career

progression

Perhaps you have children of your own, or you've fostered before. Or maybe you've never really worked with children.

Whatever your experience, we'll give you all the training and support you need to be an amazing foster parent.

We hold regular training days and courses at our local offices together with access to online training from your own home.

Training courses

We cover topics like managing difficult behaviour, empowering children and young people, identity and self-esteem, and child protection. The more you learn, the more opportunities you'll get to further your skills through our advanced training.

Therapeutic fostering training

When you live with a foster child or young person, you get to understand them like no one else. You're the person who could help them trust adults again.

We know specialist training and support is really helpful for foster parents in this position. We run a number of courses to teach you therapeutic techniques and theories so you can help your foster child grow more confident.



How will fostering affect my family?

Fostering a child or young person can be an amazing thing for your whole family

That's exciting, but they might also find sharing you with someone new daunting. It's important your whole family talks openly and honestly about how you feel so you can work out if it's the right thing for all of you.

Foster children can make your family stronger

There are so many good things about inviting a foster child into your family. For example, your children will learn about being part of a team, sharing, making friends and relating to someone new. Like in all families, there might be challenging times. But you don't have to solve problems on your own. We'll help you with support and advice along the way.

We keep everyone involved

Your whole family plays an important part in your fostering journey, and they all contribute to making your foster child feel at home. That's why one of our social workers will come and meet children already in your family to talk to them about what they think and feel about fostering.

Special guidance for your children

We have extra support available for children and young people already in your family. For example, they can talk to your social worker any time. We'll put them in touch with other young people in the area who are in a fostering family so they can share their experiences. Young people over 18 can join in with training and support groups. They can also join you and your foster children on activity days away, or get some time just with you when you work with one of our respite foster parents.



Your fostering allowance

Your fostering allowance

Fostering a child or young person isn't something people choose to do for the money. The reward of helping to change someone's life for the better is what motivates our foster parents.

But fostering is hard work and takes a lot of your time, so we give all our foster parents excellent financial support and other benefits.

What you could earn

There's no set allowance when it comes to fostering. Instead, a number of factors influence how much you'll get. We understand that some children have more challenging needs and requirements than others, and that sometimes you'll need a helping hand. The age of the child being placed with you, and the type of placement can also affect the allowances and fostering payments you'll receive.

As a rough guide, we offer allowances of £360 – £650 per week, per child. Plus, additional allowances and tax exemptions.

Will I have to pay tax?

When you become a foster parent, you are classed as self-employed and entitled to significant tax relief. Many foster parents pay no tax at all, but if you have more than one placements or another job alongside fostering, you may need to pay tax.

You will be completing your own tax return but when you foster with us, you get the benefit of a free tax and accountancy helpline, and a discounted tax return service to help you with your paperwork. **For more information, you can contact HM Revenue and Customs.**

You still get your other benefits

You may still be entitled to benefits such as tax credits. For more information, you can contact the Department for Work and Pensions.

You can also get unlimited professional and independent advice, information and support during your assessment and training process.

Our Foster parents

If things get too challenging, we have excellent support from our social worker. She always takes the time to listen and talk through any issues that arise.”



“

I work with social workers a lot in my profession. FCA came highly recommended as an agency with a good reputation nationally.”



“

When we were looking for a school for my seven-year-old foster child, a member of staff from FCA helped me through the entire process. She attended five school visits with me until we found the right fit.” nationally.”



“

I've been an FCA representative for four years now. The love and support among foster parents has been inspirational.”

Ready to start your journey? Please get in touch to talk to one of our team. We're here to help every step of the way.

1

Get in touch

Talk to one of our friendly experts for free by calling 0800 023 4561 or filling in our online form for a call back. Everyone's journey is different, so getting personal advice is really helpful.

2

We'll visit you at home

One of our advisers will come and see you to talk more about fostering and answer your questions. They'll tell you more about what you can expect, how we'll support you, and find out a bit more about you.

3

Start your application

Once you've decided fostering's definitely for you, we'll start your application together. The process involves an application form and giving your consent for us to obtain statutory checks and references.

4

Fostering assessment

Following your application, we'll undertake a fostering assessment. Your assessing social worker will visit you and your family at home a number of times over a few months to speak to you and collect information about you and your life. It helps us understand more about you and what sort of foster placements might suit you best.

The **7** steps to fostering

5

Three-day course

We like to keep things moving. While we look at your application, you'll start your Journey to Foster training. This three-day course to help you learn more about fostering, what to expect and how to handle different situations.

6

Meet the panel

Once your assessment is finished, you'll go to see a fostering panel to answer a few more questions. This group is made up of people with experience in a number of fostering areas. Don't worry. Your social worker will help you prepare and be there for support. At the end, the panel will make their recommendation.

7

Now the real journey starts!

You've made it as an officially approved foster parent and you're ready for your first placement! This is an exciting time, but you'll probably feel a bit nervous too. Our team is still here to help you, from finding the placement that's right for you to helping your first foster child settle in.

Still not sure if fostering is for you? Give us a call anyway and ask us any questions you have. You don't need to commit to anything yet.

You could be about to start an amazing journey.

Fostering a child or young person is one of the most rewarding things you can do. This guide will help you think about if it's right for you and your family, and see how we support you – every step of the way.



Got a question about fostering?

Call our friendly advisers for free on **0800 023 4561**, or email startyourjourney@thefca.co.uk.



Learn more about fostering, find events and meet-ups near you, read real foster parents' stories and more at www.thefca.co.uk



Join our friendly community of foster parents and experts at [facebook.com/fcafostering](https://www.facebook.com/fcafostering) or follow us @[FCAFostering](https://www.instagram.com/FCAFostering).

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