


Fostering 101:

The Beginner's Guide to Fostering a Child



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What is fostering?

Foster care provides vulnerable children and young people with a temporary place to live when they're unable to stay with their birth family. It's not just giving children a roof over their heads though – foster families play a vital role in shaping a child's future. Whether a placement lasts two nights or two years, a foster parent can make a difference that lasts a lifetime.

Why children need to be fostered

Children are only ever removed from their homes if the environment poses a direct threat to their safety or something serious has happened which means the child cannot be looked after. Most children come into care due to neglect or abuse, but there are many other reasons why young people need to be removed from the family home and placed with a foster family.



Abuse

Physical

Physical abuse tends to be easier to spot than other forms of abuse, especially if the child attends school or has frequent contact with people outside the family home. It's likely to be a pattern of injuries that can't be explained, such as regular bruising, welts and sores or even broken bones. In these situations, removing the child from their birth family is the only way to protect them from further harm.

Emotional

Emotional abuse isn't always as easy to notice as physical abuse, and many children aren't actually aware they're being abused. Humiliation, manipulation and deliberately scaring a child are all considered forms of emotional abuse that can lead to a child being removed from their home and placed with a foster family.

Sexual

Sadly, children who are sexually abused are often coerced into keeping it a secret or they're tricked into believing it's normal behaviour, making it less likely to be reported. When a child is recognised as a victim of sexual abuse, it's vital they're placed into a safe environment to prevent any further abuse.



Neglect

Physical

This where a child's primary caregivers haven't met the basic needs such as making sure the child has shelter, food and clothes. It could also mean that the physical surroundings are considered unsafe or a detriment to the child's health, or that the child is left alone for long periods of time. Being denied food, clothes or adequate living conditions can lead to further health issues, so it's important the child receives the necessary care and support from a loving foster home.

Emotional

Many children in care have been emotionally neglected, which means their parents haven't shown them the love and affection they need in order to grow and develop successfully. It's so important for children to feel loved and cared for as this is what helps them build trust and form healthy relationships in the future. Victims of emotional neglect can go on to have attachment issues, so getting them placed into a loving, nurturing foster family is vital.

Educational

If a parent lets their child play truant from school, or actively encourages them not to attend, they can be accused of educational neglect. If this continues over a long period of time, it may be recommended that the child is better placed into a supportive foster family where they have the opportunity to get a good education.

Medical

Medical neglect is when a parent doesn't provide or seek proper health care for their child. This could be failing to treat physical injuries or mental health disorders, or deliberately delaying getting the child help when they're ill, putting them at more risk.





Other reasons

Family breakdown

Children may be placed into foster care after being exposed to domestic violence or being part of a conflict in the home, such as parent-child or sibling conflict.

Family illness

Sometimes, parents can no longer care for a child due to their own illness or disability, or a parent can't meet the care needs of a sick or disabled child.

Family crisis

The death of a family member, financial issues or being evicted can lead to a child needing temporary foster care while longer-term plans are figured out.

The death of a parent

If a child's primary caregiver passes away, they may be taken into foster care if they're unable to stay with relatives or the rest of the household can't provide the necessary care.

Fostering in the UK

Facts and figures

As an independent fostering agency (IFA), we work closely with LAs to find foster families for the children they're unable to place with their own approved carers.

However, some young people are harder to place due to their complex trauma, which means they remain in residential care homes where they don't have the support of a stable, family unit.

Children in the care system can be looked after in a number of ways. Local authorities (LAs) are responsible for finding suitable homes for the children that come into the care system, which could be a foster home, an adoptive home or a children's residential care home. Other places young people in care may live include hostels, mother and baby units, residential schools or young offenders' institutions.

Roughly 30,000 new children come into the care system each year. This is why we always need people who are willing to welcome children into their homes and hearts so they can experience what every child deserves - a stable, loving family.

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**3 in 4 children
in care live with
foster families**

Here are some key statistics about looked-after children in the UK:



England

- There are 80,850 children in care in England
- As of March 2021, 57,380 were living with foster families
- There are approximately 45,370 foster families in England

Northern Ireland

- There are 3,838 children in care in Northern Ireland
- As of March 2021, 2,673 children were living with foster families
- There are approximately 2,800 foster families in Northern Ireland

Scotland

- There are just under 15,000 children in care in Scotland
- As of July 2020, roughly 4,750 children were living with foster families
- There are approximately 3,620 foster families in Scotland

Wales

- There are 7,170 children in care in Wales
- As of March 2020, 4,990 were living with foster families
- There are approximately 3,700 foster families in Wales

Average age of children in care

According to a recent government study, most of the children in care are aged between 10-15 years old.

- 39% of children between 10 to 15 years
 - 24% of children 16 or over
- 18% of children between 5 to 9 years
- 13% of children between 1 to 4 years
 - 5% of children under 1 year

Types of fostering

Short-term

Short term fostering is for children and young people who need to be looked after temporarily. It's the most common type of fostering and it gives foster parents the opportunity to really make a difference during a time of immense change in a young person's life. Short-term fostering can last any number of days, weeks or months up to two years.

Long-term

Long term foster care means that a child or young person lives with a committed foster parent until they reach adulthood. Being brought up within one family, often over several years, gives young people in foster care more consistency and a greater sense of belonging. It also helps a child to settle within a local community and develop positive relationships.

Respite

Respite foster care provides an essential break to other foster parents or birth families on a short-term basis. As a respite foster carer, you allow a family to benefit from a well-earned rest by caring for their foster children for a short period, usually lasting between a couple of days up to a week - often at weekends or during school holidays.

Emergency

This is when there's an urgent need for a child or young person to be moved to a safe and secure environment at very short notice - often only a few hours warning. This could be due to a severe violent occurrence in the home, a parent being taken to hospital with a sudden illness, the death of a parent or a catastrophic accident.



Parent and child

Parent and child fostering is a specialist type of fostering that sees a parent and their child – often a mother and their baby – live with a foster family when they need extra support. This type of fostering allows them to learn to cope with parenthood with additional support in a secure and safe environment.

Siblings

Keeping brothers and sisters together after being placed in foster care is crucial. This type of fostering focuses on matching sibling groups with foster homes big enough for multiple foster children and foster parents who are capable of meeting the needs of siblings in foster care.





Disability fostering

Caring for a child with disabilities can be very rewarding. It can give them the opportunity to receive the support they need, enjoy new activities, gain new experiences and get to know new people. Children in care with disabilities have a range of medical conditions - this could be developmental disabilities like autism, physical disabilities which limit a child's mobility or learning or sensory disabilities.

Sanctuary seeking

Sanctuary-seeking fostering is when you foster an unaccompanied child who has come from a different country. They are alone and scared, often not able to speak English. We believe that giving these unaccompanied children and young people a stable and secure foster home is a more positive alternative to a residential unit or supported accommodation. Fostering will also give them the best possible opportunity to live within and be part of a new community in the UK.

Step-down

All young people should have a secure family home, that's why we developed a step-down programme to help young people move from a residential unit to a stable and supportive foster home. There are lots of reasons why children may find themselves in residential care; sometimes it's simply because there are no foster placements available at the time when they need it. Our step-down programme helps children make the transition back into a family, with lots of support for both them and you along the way.

What it takes to be a great foster parent



It's safe to say that all children in foster care will have experienced trauma in some way due to their disruptive home life. Even moving around between different foster families can be traumatic for children who crave stability and structure. Trauma has a profound and lasting impact on a young person's brain, which can affect all aspects of their behavioural, emotional, social and physiological development.

This can lead to a wide range of complex needs such as anger, frustration, emotional withdrawal, hyperactivity or a constant demand for attention. That's why foster children need someone who is patient, nurturing and willing to help support them through their struggles.

It doesn't matter if you're female, male, non-binary, straight, gay, single, married, divorced or don't have any experience in working with children. It's the dedication and commitment to transforming vulnerable children's lives is what makes the difference.

To be a foster parent, you must:

Be over 21

Have a spare bedroom

Have the legal right to work in the UK



In our eyes, these are the traits of a great foster parent...

Empathy

Having empathy is an important trait, because children in care need people who are willing to take the time to understand the reasons behind their behaviour, and become a positive influence for change. If a child acts out, you'll see past the initial action and look more deeply into the root cause of it.

Open-minded and accepting

Children in care come from all walks of life, with different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds. Foster parents embrace diversity and ensure their foster children remain part of religious holidays or partake in cultural traditions.

Resilient

Due to the types of abuse, neglect or disruption many children in care have faced, they may have challenging behaviour either at school or in the home. This requires patience and resilience. A great foster parent won't give up the moment times get tough – in fact, they'll feel even more determined to ensure the child gets the help they need to succeed.

Communication

Finding the best way to communicate with a child to help them understand a situation is an important skill, especially if you're trying to explain why certain behaviours are inappropriate. This goes hand in hand with being a good listener. Listening to a child builds trust, which helps to break down communication barriers.

Calm and patient

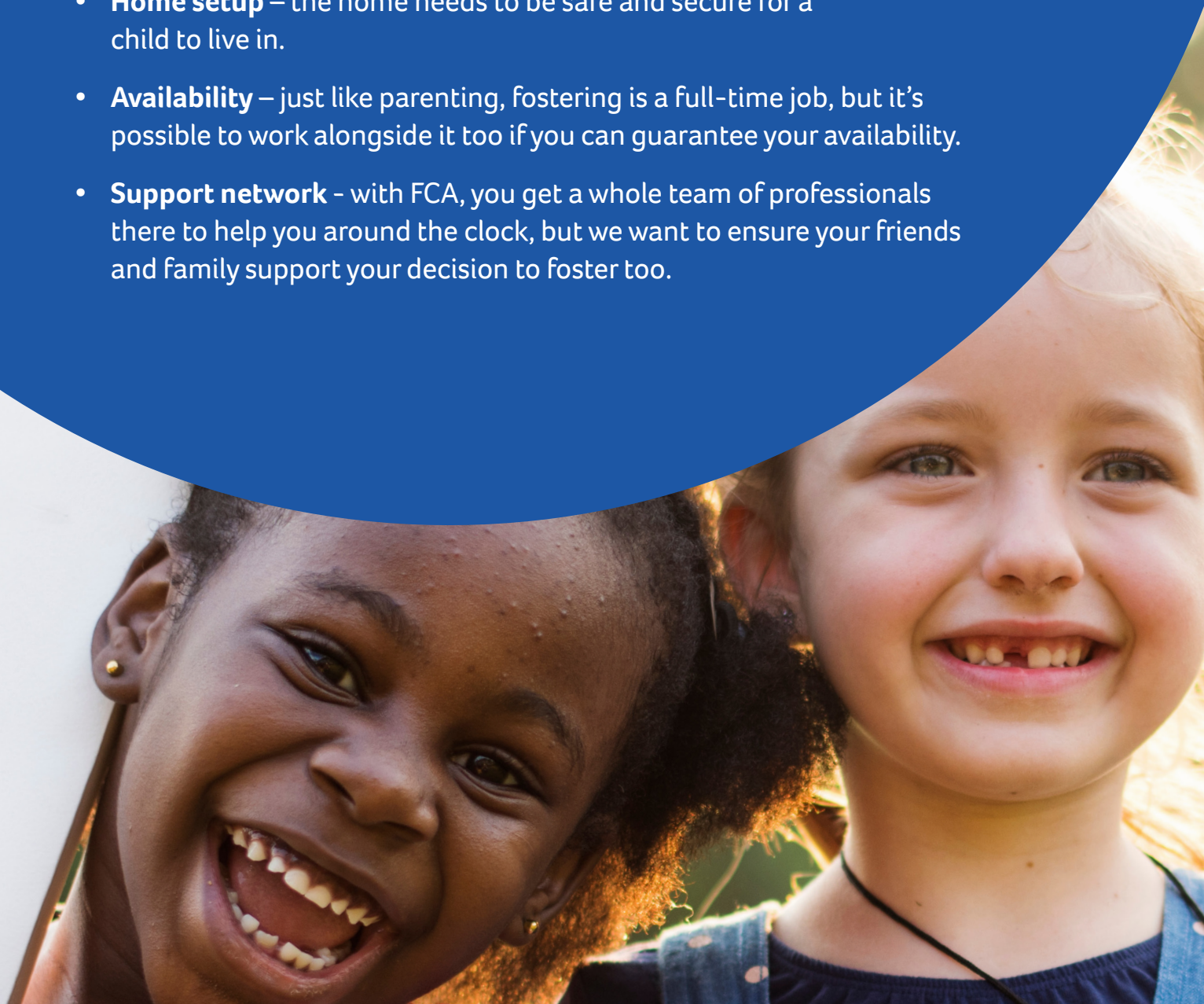
Being able to stand back and reflect rather than react is such an important skill of a great foster parent. Each child will respond differently to their new surroundings, so it can take a while to adjust. Giving them time and space to heal while still encouraging them to make positive changes will go a long way in transforming their lives for the better.

A big heart

Most importantly, foster parents need to have a whole lot of love to give! Being passionate about transforming the livelihoods of young people is a must, as that's what it's all about – making a difference that lasts a lifetime.

When deciding whether being a foster parent is right for you, there are also some practical things that'll need to be considered. Aside from being over 21, having a spare bedroom and the legal right to work in the UK, we'll also look at your:

- **Health and wellbeing** – children and young people can be energetic and demanding, so you need to be able to meet their needs. You can still foster if you have mental or physical health conditions though, just as long as you're not putting yourself at risk.
- **Financial stability** – we pay a generous fostering allowance to all our hardworking foster parents, so it's important you can manage your finances to ensure the children get what they need.
- **Home setup** – the home needs to be safe and secure for a child to live in.
- **Availability** – just like parenting, fostering is a full-time job, but it's possible to work alongside it too if you can guarantee your availability.
- **Support network** - with FCA, you get a whole team of professionals there to help you around the clock, but we want to ensure your friends and family support your decision to foster too.



The benefits of fostering



Becoming a foster parent is an amazing opportunity to give a child or young person the fresh start they need. It takes a huge amount of courage to start your fostering journey, but caring for a child is one of the most rewarding things you can do.

That's why when you foster with us, you're supported every step of the way. You will always have the help, training and encouragement you need to help change a child's life. Like anything in life, there are challenges in fostering too, but when you look at the rewards, it's easy to understand why many of our foster parents continue to foster for years and years.

Highly rewarding

We've said it once (or maybe twice already) but fostering is one of the most rewarding jobs around. The children that come our way have already experienced so much at such young ages; all they need is someone to give them a chance. With your guidance, love, care and support, you can help vulnerable children reach their full potential, which let's be honest, doesn't happen with a regular day job.

Flexibility

Say goodbye to a rigid work week. Fostering gives you flexibility, and no day is ever the same. Your home is essentially the office and your job is to give every child in your care the love and attention they deserve.

Self-employment

Becoming a foster parent means you become self-employed, so you're your own boss. This also entitles you to significant tax-relief.

Skills and training

Fostering gives you the opportunity to learn new specialist skills such as safeguarding, emergency first aid, medication and health care, health and safety in the home and how to manage challenging behaviour.

Loyalty bonuses

When you foster with FCA, not only do you get a competitive fostering allowance, but you also become part of our Stars scheme - one of the most generous reward and loyalty schemes out there. It's designed to reward and recognise all the incredible work our foster parents do in changing the life of a child or young person in their care.



Pay for foster parents

Providing a safe, secure family home is the most important gift you can give a child. That's why foster parents are rewarded for their hard work for competitive pay allowances and other financial rewards.

As a foster parent, you will be classed as self-employed and earn a weekly payment for each child you look after. On average, our foster parents can receive approximately £487 per

child, per week. On top of this allowance, you will receive access to our reward platform where you can take advantage of great discounts from popular high street retailers.

Don't let finances be the barrier in providing children and young people a happy, nurturing home. Our generous foster care pay helps to eliminate your money worries, leaving you free to focus on the things that matter – those precious family moments with the children and young people in your care.

How to become a foster parent



Making the decision to become a foster parent doesn't happen overnight, but when you do choose to foster with us, you can rely on our support throughout the process.

You'll complete six stages in your journey to becoming a foster parent. Depending on your circumstances, the process can take between four and six months. Although this may sound like a long time, it's crucial that you're given all the information you need, know exactly what to expect and understand what fostering means for your family.

Step 1: Enquire

The first step is to get in touch! It'll just be a friendly chat with one of our dedicated fostering advisors to answer any questions you might have and also to find out more about you, your current situation and plans for fostering. You can give us a call on 0800 023 4561 or fill out an enquiry form online.

Step 2: Home visit

A fostering advisor will visit your home or we can arrange a virtual home visit via video call if you'd prefer. At the home visit we will give you more information, answer your questions, explain how we work, what we do to support our foster parents and have a look around your home. Hopefully, by the end of the home visit, you should have good idea if you think fostering is right for you.

Step 3: Assessment

Once you've formally applied and your application is been accepted, one of our social workers will be in touch to start your fostering assessment. They'll visit your home between eight and ten times to collect information about you, your family, any skills and experience you have that will help you with fostering. This information will be put together in a report called a Form F.

Step 4: Pre-approval training

You'll be invited to attend our fostering pre-paratory training course that will give you a full understanding of the fostering role and get you thinking about how you would react to some of the situations you may find yourself in when you become a foster parent and are caring for a child.

Step 5: Foster Panel

After your assessment has been completed, we'll present your information to a fostering panel. The panel will then make a recommendation to a Foster Care Associates manager, who will make the final decision about whether or not you can be approved as a foster parent for children and young people.

Step 6: Your first foster child

Once you have been approved, your fostering journey with us will begin! We'll actively promote your skills to the local authority and match a foster child to both your experience and any preferences you have. We aim to get you fostering a child or young person as soon as possible and we'll be there to support you every step of the way!



How FCA support Foster Parents

When you're a foster parent with FCA, you have an entire network of support at your fingertips, around the clock. We believe that everybody in the child's life plays an active role in their care, so you're never left alone. We call this **Team Parenting®**. It's a partnership that puts the child at the very centre, surrounded by a team of professionals who are all dedicated to help them have the happiest, healthiest future. Our unrivalled support package includes:

- A packed calendar of events and activities: we hold regular events throughout the year to help foster parents, children and young people bond and have fun together.
- Therapy Groups: whether a foster parent is new or experienced, they can come to our carer therapy groups to learn new skills. Together, carers share experiences, help each other solve difficulties and find new ways to think about problems.
- First-class training programme: all our carers have access to a comprehensive training programme including mandatory classroom training on child development and attachment, promoting positive behaviour, and communication and teamwork. There is also a library of complimentary e-learning modules that carers can do in their own time.
- 24/7 Support: our out of hours support is there for you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Start your journey with FCA

Whether you're new to fostering or thinking of transferring, we'd love to answer any questions you might have.

Get in touch