

# FCA's Guide to the Fostering Assessment



Supporting you  
through every step of  
your fostering journey

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# The start of your fostering journey with FCA

Becoming a foster parent is a life-changing journey. We're here to support you every step of the way, making the process as smooth and stress-free as possible.

Applying to foster is a big step, and the first in a wonderful journey for you and your family. The process of becoming a foster parent typically takes between 4-6 months. While this may seem like a long time, it's essential to ensure you have all the information and support you need for such an important decision.

From your very first enquiry to your approval at the fostering panel, we'll be by your side every step of the way. Our goal is to make the process as simple and stress-free as possible, keeping you informed and supported so you can feel confident on your journey to changing a child's life.

We hope this guide gives you a clear understanding of the fostering assessment process, including what's involved, what to expect, and how we'll support you every step of the way. Whatever questions you have about the journey ahead, this guide will provide you with the answers and reassurance you need.



# Why foster parents choose FCA

By choosing to foster with FCA, you'll gain the confidence and stability of working with a dedicated, experienced team committed to your success.

At FCA, we've been supporting fostering families since 1994, and we're passionate about helping you to make a positive difference in a child's life. With consistently strong Ofsted ratings of 'Good' or 'Outstanding,' we pride ourselves on offering exceptional support and training.

Fostering is a partnership, and we're here to walk beside you every step of the way. With over 30 years of experience and a strong UK-wide presence, we provide expert training, 24/7 support, fun activities and a close-knit family support network to make sure you never feel alone.

- **Foster care specialist with over 30 years' experience**
- **Over 1,700 children and young people living with our foster families**
- **Over 1300 foster parents accessing our support and training**




At FCA, we proudly welcome people from all backgrounds and walks of life. Anyone can become a foster parent, regardless of your relationship status, sexuality, gender identity, or employment status. What matters most to us is your personal qualities and your commitment to making a difference in a child's life.



# Six steps to becoming a foster parent




Becoming a foster parent involves 6 simple steps, with the whole process typically taking between 4-6 months. While this may seem like a long road, these months will pass quickly as you get ready to open your heart and home - before you know it, you'll be welcoming your first child!



## Enquiry




Once you've decided to start the process of becoming a foster parent, the first thing you'll need to do is give us a call on **0800 023 4561** or fill out our quick and easy online enquiry form. A member of our friendly team will have a chat with you over the phone and share more information about fostering.



## Home visit

Once we've had an initial chat with you over the phone, we will establish if it's the right time for one of our fostering advisors to visit you at your home. This is a great opportunity for us to get to know one another a little better.



## Application

When you're ready to apply, you'll fill out our online application form to become a foster parent. The form covers a range of details, but don't worry - our team is here to support you and will always be happy to help you through every step of the process.



## The fostering assessment

Once your application has been accepted, one of our social workers will be in touch to start your fostering assessment. During this step they'll visit your home approximately 8-10 times to gain a good understanding of your family life as well as the skills and strengths which make you an excellent candidate to foster. This information will be put together in a report called a Form F.


## Panel

The next step in the fostering process is attending a panel meeting. During this meeting, your assessing social worker will present the Form F assessment they've prepared during their visits with you to a panel of experts for review. The Panel will also ask you some questions about your journey to becoming a foster parent. The panel will review your Form F and, based on their discussion, will make a recommendation as to whether you're suitable to be approved as a foster parent.



## Approval

This panel's recommendation will then be shared with our Agency Decision Maker, who will inform you whether you've been approved to foster. Once approved, you'll sign a contract with us confirming your status as a foster parent, and you'll be ready to welcome a child into your home.



Keep reading as we walk you through each step in more detail, giving you a complete guide to the process of becoming a foster parent.







## A warm welcome: your home visit experience

After your initial chat with our friendly team over the phone where we'll confirm your eligibility to foster, the next step is a home visit. We know that many new foster parents feel unsure about what to expect from the first home visit and how to prepare, so here's what it involves.

A member of our team will arrange a visit to your home, or sometimes via video call, to get to know you and your family, learn more about your background and hear what inspires you to foster. They'll provide you with all the information you need to decide if fostering is the right path for you, covering everything from the next steps in the assessment process to the training and support we offer. You'll also learn more about our generous fostering allowance.

During the visit, feel free to ask any questions - no question is too small or silly! Our team will also take a look at the bedroom you'd like to use for fostering to make sure it's a suitable space.

By the end of the home visit, you should have a clearer idea of whether fostering is the right fit for you. If it feels like the right step and you're ready to proceed, the next step will be filling out an application form to start the fostering process.

However, if you decide that fostering isn't quite right for you at this time, there's absolutely no obligation to continue. You'll be free to walk away with no pressure or commitment.



# The Fostering Assessment:

Once your home visit is complete and everything looks great, it's time to begin your fostering assessment and take the next exciting step on your journey!

Your fostering assessment is a detailed but supportive process, with approximately 8-10 visits to your family, either face-to-face or virtually, where your assessing social worker will chat with you about a variety of topics, such as:

- Different aspects of fostering, including the role's requirements, your experiences, and the types of placements you might offer.
- Your personal circumstances, like your career, relationships, and family life.
- Your past, including your childhood, relationships and any significant life events that have shaped you.
- Practical details, such as your support network, finances, and overall health.

- As your assessor gets to know you and your family they'll work on creating your assessment document, known as the Form F, and make sure you have all the information you need to feel prepared and confident in your fostering role. During this time they'll also carry out the necessary checks and references, and you'll be invited to our "Prepare to Foster" training to help you become even more prepared for the journey ahead.

## Your Form F Document

A key part of your fostering assessment is the creation of a document called the Form F. This document brings together all the important information needed for our fostering panel to make a decision about your application to foster. Your assessing social worker will write the Form F, and it's a requirement for every foster parent in the UK.

**"When we started the assessment process, we were a bit dubious about it all, but everything seemed to fall into place. We had a fantastic Form F Social Worker who came to speak to us and told us everything we needed to know."**

– Sara, FCA Foster Parent





# Fostering Assessment FAQs:

## Does it cost me anything to apply?

No. It is free to apply to be a foster parent – bags of enthusiasm and dedication are all you need!

## How long does the fostering application take?

The length of the application process can vary, but it normally takes around four to six months. We'll guide you through every step of your journey and keep in regular contact with you throughout the process.

## Can I foster if I have a medical condition?

Having a medical condition doesn't automatically disqualify you from fostering. What matters is how well you manage your condition and if you can still provide the necessary care and attention to a child.

## Will I be asked sensitive questions during my fostering assessment?

Yes, the fostering assessment process is thorough and may include some sensitive topics. You may be asked about your childhood, past challenges, relationships, and other personal experiences. We understand these questions can be uncomfortable, but we'll support you every step of the way.

Asking these questions is crucial because it helps us better understand your personal history and experiences, ensuring you're fully prepared to care for vulnerable children. By learning more about your background, we can assess your ability to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing environment for a child.

This helps us ensure that fostering is the right fit for you and your family, and that children are placed in homes where they will be cared for and supported. Ultimately, it's all about ensuring the children we place are in the best possible hands.





## Get to know your Foster Parent Buddy

During the assessment process we'll allocate you a Foster Parent Buddy so that you can benefit from the advice and guidance of someone who's already experienced the fostering journey. With their first-hand knowledge, they'll provide empathetic and insightful advice to help you navigate the process with confidence. Our buddies are existing foster parents who take on mentoring responsibilities in addition to their own roles, ensuring you have someone to turn to for support. Your Foster Parent Buddy will be there to answer your questions and provide reassurance every step of the way.

**"We were allocated two foster buddies which we found really helpful. It was great to speak to them about their journey to fostering, their own fostering family situation and the positive aspects to fostering through FCA."**

**– Kirsty, FCA Foster Parent**





## What references and checks will be carried out?

As part of the fostering application process, we carry out several important checks and gather references to ensure a safe environment for the children in your care. These include:

### DBS Check

- A DBS check is a requirement for anyone in your home over the age of 18. We may also need to complete a DBS on some adults outside of your household, who may be in regular contact with a child in your care.

### Local Authority Check

- As part of the process, we'll carry out residency checks for the past ten years (or longer if needed) to ensure everything is in place for fostering. We'll also check with local authorities regarding child protection records and any previous involvement with services for children or vulnerable adults. This helps us create a safe and supportive environment for both you and the children in your care.

### Medical check from your GP

- As part of the process, your GP will complete a medical assessment to ensure you're in good health to care for children and young people. This report simply highlights any health conditions that might impact your ability to foster. Having a medical condition won't automatically prevent you from fostering—what matters is how you manage it. Our goal is to support you in providing the best possible care.

### Home Safety Check

- A member of our friendly local team will carry out a full safety check on your home to ensure the environment is safe, secure and well maintained for children and young people. We may offer some recommendations to ensure your home will be ready for fostering a child.

## Pet Assessment

- We understand that pets are a cherished part of your family, and they can often provide comfort and companionship to children in care. To ensure a safe environment for everyone, we'll ask you to complete a pet questionnaire to assess whether your pet is suitable to be around foster children. We're unable to accept applications from anyone with a banned breed under the UK's Dangerous Dogs Act, but we're happy to discuss any questions you may have about your pets.

## References

- We'll request a range of references from people in your life. This will include past and current employers, family members, friends and past partners.

## Financial Assessment

- As part of the fostering assessment process, we carry out a financial check to ensure that you are financially stable and able to provide a secure environment for the children in your care.







## Expert ongoing training

Like any career, fostering is a journey of learning. That's why our high-quality, bespoke training programme is designed to give you all the tools you need to foster with confidence and provide the best care for your children and young people. All our courses are flexible and designed to work around your schedule, with opportunities to learn both online and face-to-face.

### Initial training: Prepare to Foster

Our 'Prepare to Foster' course is a warm and welcoming introduction to your journey as a foster parent. This mandatory 2-3 day training takes place during your assessment and is designed to equip you with the knowledge, skills and confidence you'll need to foster.

In this interactive course, you'll explore:

- Your next steps in becoming a foster parent
- What life is like for a young person in foster care
- Essential fostering skills, including caring for children, working as a team, promoting resilience and understanding transitions

There are no exams or written work, just plenty of valuable insights, engaging discussions, and the opportunity to connect with other foster parents as well as our experienced team. It's a fantastic starting point, offering real-world perspectives and practical guidance to help you prepare for your rewarding new role.

# Mandatory training

Once approved you'll have access to a range of ongoing training opportunities, starting with mandatory courses for all foster parents. These include:

- Safeguarding
- Emergency First Aid
- Health and Safety in the home
- Safer Caring

## Complimentary training


We believe in continuous learning and professional development to support you on your fostering journey. That's why we offer a wide range of specialist courses, designed to help you build your skills and confidence while tailoring your training to meet the needs of the children in your care.

### Our courses cover a variety of valuable topics, including:

- Supporting children through challenges such as grief, bullying and eating disorders
- Understanding neurodiversity and the importance of cultural identity
- Working with children with disabilities
- Caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- Supporting children moving from residential care
- Parent and child fostering
- Therapeutic approaches and safeguarding topics like child sexual exploitation, county lines exploitation, online safety and radicalisation

We offer both online and face-to-face training, ensuring flexibility to fit around your life. These courses will be discussed with you as part of your Personal Development Plan, helping you grow your expertise and provide the best possible care. With regularly updated training options, you'll always have the opportunity to deepen your knowledge and enhance your fostering career.





**“There is a wide range of online and face-to-face training available, which we can fit in around caring for our foster children. We’ve also benefitted from FCA’s peer support groups, where we can meet other carers and share experiences. This is great to help us reflect on the care we give, learn from others and develop new strategies and skills.”**

**– Jo & Lisa – Birmingham,  
FCA Foster Parents**



**All our training is mapped to regulations and national minimum standards and is cross-referenced to the Training Support and Development Standards in England and the Induction Framework Outcomes in Wales.**

# The Fostering Panel

If you're preparing for the penultimate stage of fostering, the fostering panel can seem intimidating at first. But remember, your panel day is not an interrogation. It's an opportunity to discuss your application thoroughly with professionals to make sure that you're a good fit for fostering, and for our experienced panel members to get a clear picture of your readiness and unique skills.

It's important to approach the meeting with confidence, honesty, and an open mind. During the meeting the panel will review your Form F to discuss the type of fostering placement that suits you and make recommendations on your suitability. They might ask questions about your experiences, how you handle challenges, and how you plan to support

the child in your care. They may also be interested in your support network, your unique understanding of the fostering role and how your loved ones feel about fostering.

Near the end of the meeting, the panel will ask you to step out temporarily while they discuss your assessment and reach a decision. Once you're invited back in, they will share their recommendation, which could be approval as a foster parent, a deferral to gather more information, or, in very rare cases, the decision that you're not yet ready to foster.

Don't worry – the majority of recommendations are positive, and you'll only ever be put forward to attend panel when your supervising social worker believes that you are ready.

**“Looking back, I felt the process was straight forward, we were supported throughout, the panel were nice people, and they did their best to ensure that I was not nervous”.**

– Liz, FCA Foster Parent



# Fostering Panel FAQs:

## How long does foster panel take?

Panel meetings are usually about an hour. You won't be alone—your assessing social worker will be there to support you on the day, and you have the option to bring along a loved one for support.

## Who sits on the panel?

The panel typically consists of five to seven members outside of our organisation, including social workers, professionals from health or education, and maybe even a foster parent or someone who was previously in foster care. This ensures that their recommendations are impartial and that a wide range of perspectives are considered.

## What questions will I be asked?

People are often concerned about the types of questions the fostering panel will ask, but don't worry - panel isn't an interview. In fact, many foster parents describe it as more like a friendly discussion.

The panel may ask standard questions, such as how you found the assessment and training. They may also ask questions inspired by children in foster care to help you consider things from their perspective. If you are fostering with children, they may inquire about how fostering could impact your family dynamics. These questions not only guide the panel in making their recommendation but also offer you a chance to reflect on the potential challenges of fostering, and how you'll navigate these.

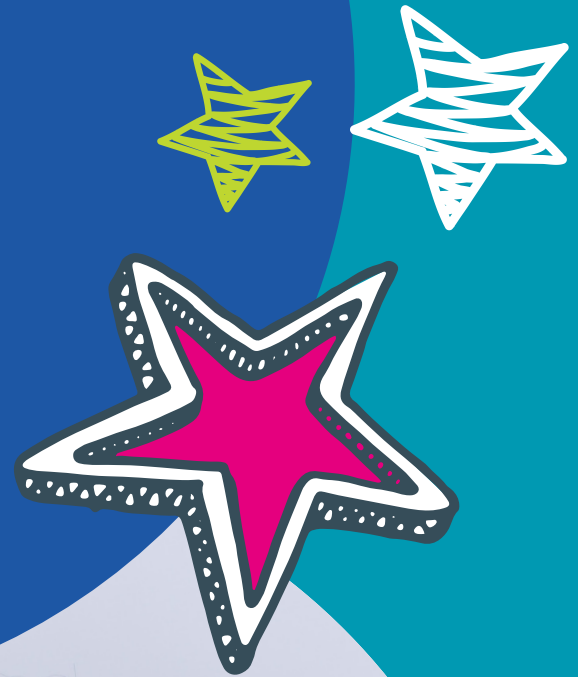
## What to wear to foster panel

The fostering panel aren't there to judge your choice of clothing - they're there to understand who you are, why you want to foster and whether you can provide young people with a safe, stable, and nurturing environment to thrive.

However, you'll be meeting various professionals, and wearing smart-casual clothing will not only create a good impression but will also help you feel more confident.

## How is a recommendation made?

Once the panel have made their recommendation, the Panel Chair will sign off the meeting minutes before referring them to the Agency Decision Maker. They'll have seven days to finalise their decision and confirm your approval. Let's learn more about this on the next page.







## The Agency Decision

The final step in the fostering assessment process is for the panel's decision to be reviewed by our Agency Decision Maker here at FCA. The Agency Decision Maker will have the final say on whether you are officially approved as a foster parent.

If you are approved, congratulations! You will be notified of the decision as soon as possible and invited to sign a Foster Carer Agreement with us. Once that's complete, you'll officially be approved to foster a child!



# Meet your supervising social worker

Once you're approved at panel, you'll be allocated a dedicated Supervising Social Worker who will be your main source of support throughout your fostering journey. They'll be there to guide you, answer your questions and ensure that you have everything you need to provide the best possible care for the child in your home. From training and professional development to emotional support and advocacy, your social worker will work closely with you to help you feel confident and supported every step of the way.

## Here's how they'll help you:

- Regular contact and supervision sessions – Monthly check-ins, phone calls, and face-to-face visits.
- Training and development – Access to classroom sessions, e-learning, webinars, and peer learning.
- Record-keeping assistance – Support with maintaining records through the CHARMS system.
- Access to resources – Helping you find the right support services for the child in your care.
- Building a support network – Connecting you with other foster parents and flexible support options.
- Respite and additional support – Reviewing your needs and arranging respite if required.
- Buddy System – Pairing you with experienced foster parents for guidance and encouragement.
- Community and activities – Encouraging participation in FCA events and opportunities.

**"I think for me, what's important is a good social worker, and mine is fantastic. She gets me and can relate to my family dynamic; I can call her whenever needed."**

– Julie, FCA Foster Parent

**"Support has been amazing. My supervising social worker is so lovely – the job wouldn't be half as easy if I didn't have someone like her in my corner."**

– Alice, FCA Foster Parent





## Matching the right child with your family



Once you're approved at panel, our dedicated referrals team will start working behind the scenes to find a child whose needs align with your unique skills and experience, ensuring the best possible match for your family.

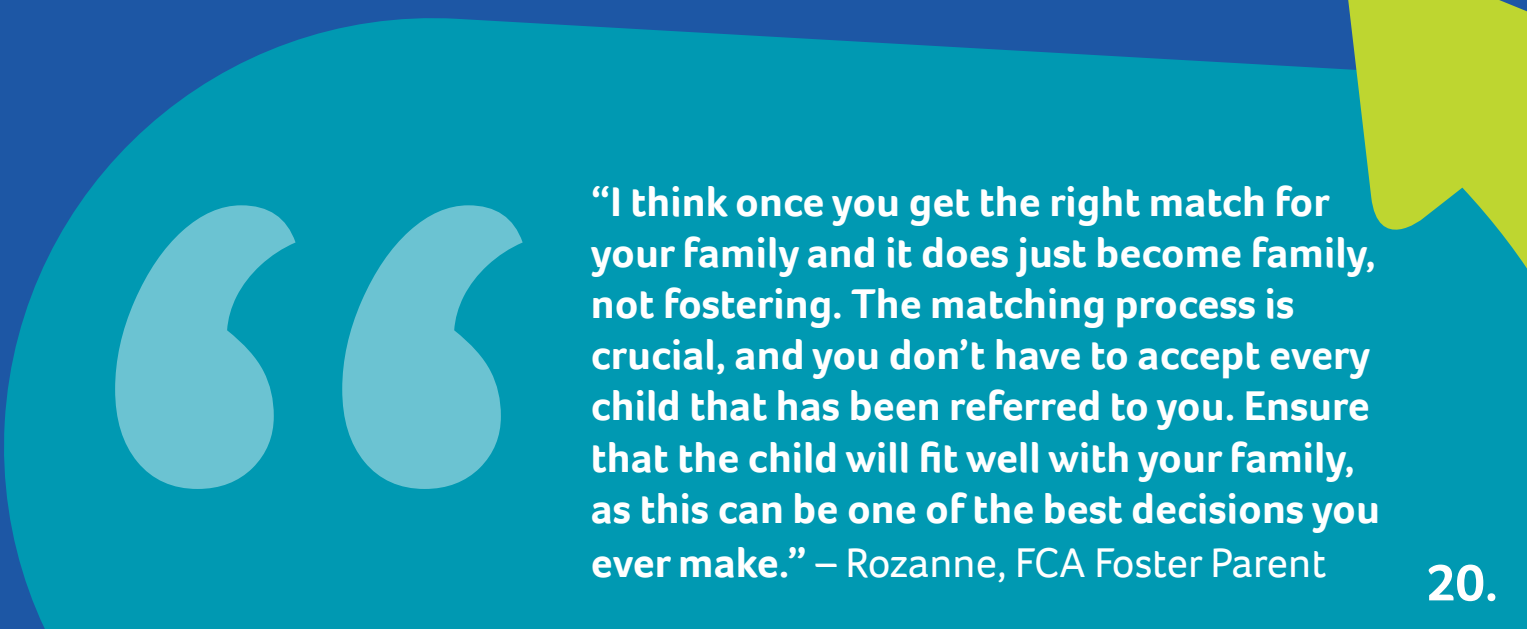
With frequent referrals from local authorities and a highly personalised matching process, we're dedicated to finding the right fit for your family. Our Referrals Team takes the time to truly get to know our foster families, which allows us to highlight their strengths to local authorities - leading to better matches and, most importantly, better outcomes for both the child and the foster family.

Matching is at the heart of fostering success, and we take it very seriously. When we get it right, children, young people and foster carers all experience a more positive and rewarding journey together. That's why we focus on building strong relationships with our foster parents - so we can understand what makes your family special and ensure the best possible placement.

Throughout the process, we keep everything open and transparent. We'll always let you know when you're being considered for a match and provide detailed information about the child. If you feel a particular placement isn't the right fit, that's completely okay - there's no pressure or judgment. It's all about making the right decision for everyone involved.

If you're happy to move forward, we'll work together to ensure a smooth transition. Wherever possible, we arrange informal meetings between the child and foster carers before the placement begins. And if that's not an option, we encourage foster carers to create a welcome booklet or video to help the child feel prepared and supported from the very start.

Your journey as a foster parent is one of the most meaningful and life-changing experiences you can have, and we'll be there every step of the way to help you make a lasting difference in a child's life.



**“I think once you get the right match for your family and it does just become family, not fostering. The matching process is crucial, and you don't have to accept every child that has been referred to you. Ensure that the child will fit well with your family, as this can be one of the best decisions you ever make.” – Rozanne, FCA Foster Parent**



## How soon can I welcome my first foster child?

This depends on many factors, such as your personal circumstances, how soon we can find a child or young person that's right for you and vice versa, making sure that each match is right for everyone involved. We get new referrals from local authorities every day, so you won't have to wait long.

You'll be in regular contact with your supervising social worker. They'll discuss the needs of the young person before they're placed with you, and you'll have the opportunity to ask any questions. Your supervising social worker will organise wherever possible for you to meet the child before. We'll do all we can to make this exciting transition as comfortable and as smooth as possible for you and your family.



# Ongoing wrap-around support

Once you're approved, the support doesn't stop there. As a foster parent with FCA, you'll have access to one of the most caring and supportive packages available. You'll be part of a team of dedicated childcare experts, all working together with you to support every part of a child's wellbeing. This collaborative, nurturing approach includes therapists, education specialists, social workers and support workers. When you foster with us, you'll never be alone - you'll be embraced by a wonderful community that's committed to helping children and young people of all backgrounds to thrive.

Some of the ways we support our children and foster parents:

- Out-of-hours support that is there for you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year
- Regular foster parent support groups
- Access therapists who work with foster parents and staff so that we help our foster parents care therapeutically
- Generous fostering allowances, with additional bonuses and rewards
- A foster family appreciation day each year
- Access to our exclusive rewards platform for discounted holidays, days out and high street retailers
- Regular free family days out and activities
- Enrichment opportunities for all the children in your care

**"I would absolutely recommend FCA to anyone thinking of fostering, the support and training is brilliant. FCA really get to know us properly, they invest in us, and we feel valued and celebrated. Whether it be staff, other foster parents, social workers, there's always somebody there. It's like a big extended family!"**

– Alison, FCA Foster Parent





# We're here for you every step of the way

We understand there's a lot to take in in this guide, so if you have any questions big or small, our friendly team is here to support you every step of the way. Feel free to give us a call at **0800 023 4561** or fill out the easy enquiry form on our website. We're always happy to help with anything you're unsure about.

If you're ready to become a part of a fostering agency which provides full support to every member of your fostering family, we'd love to welcome you here at FCA - contact us today to get started!



**0800 023 4561**  
**[www.thefca.co.uk](http://www.thefca.co.uk)**