Fostering Guide

Foster carers are as individual as the children they care for, so it’s important for us to know what skills you possess and where you need further training and development if you want to learn how to foster a child.
CONSIDERING FOSTERING?

There are two routes to go down when applying to foster. The Local Authority has in house carers, but did you know you can apply to a private agency like Next Step Fostering?

Next Step Fostering is an independent fostering agency in Kent founded back in 1988 by Maureen and Alb Ward following their own experiences of fostering and the needs of children and young people.

The business remains family owned and indeed their daughter Lesley Ward is now the Director. This means we have a personal and family centred service where you are fully supported by a team of social workers who really understand what it means to foster children.

HOW DO I BECOME A FOSTER CARER?

When you apply to foster, you will be assigned an experienced social worker who will support you throughout the process and carry out an assessment.
You will be offered training called “Skills to Foster” run by our staff and care eres where you will meet likeminded people on the journey with you. It’s a two day course where you will learn what it means to be a foster carer.

Your social worker will compile a report known as a Form F and present this to a fostering panel. The Form F will be all about you and your family and how your life experiences can be best utilised in fostering.

The assessment, training and approval process should take around takes around 3 - 6 months.

Next Step have been assessing carers for many years, so if you have any questions before, during or after the assessment, you can be assured of an informed response.

**DO I HAVE SPACE TO FOSTER IN MY HOME?**

Most fostering services require you to have a spare bedroom, to ensure the child you foster has the privacy and space they require.

Space is more than just physical, so we also consider is this the right time for you to foster. If you are about to move house, had a recent bereavement or had a major life event, you may need to think about timing of your application.

**WILL MY PAST OR POLICE RECORD STOP ME FROM FOSTERING?**

Not necessarily. We ask you to be open and honest with us throughout the assessment. We need to complete a number of checks including a DBS (police check), Social Services and references.
We are interested in your life story. Many people apply to foster from different backgrounds and pasts. Your personal story is different to everyone else’s, but all children are different too. We want to use what you have learnt in life to help a child understand their past experience.

**WHAT ABOUT MY MARITAL STATUS?**

Anyone can apply to foster regardless of whether they are single, married or living with a partner. Also, regardless of whether you have your own children or not, whether you live in your own home or rent, whatever your race, religion or sexuality.

**HOW OLD DO I HAVE TO BE TO FOSTER A CHILD?**

There is no legal minimum age to become a foster carer although some fostering services have their own minimum age policy such as over 21.

There is an expectation that foster carers will have sufficient life experience to enable them to meet the needs of children placed with them, and age can be a factor in this.

There is also no official upper age limit on foster care and many older people make excellent carers, providing they are able to look after a child or young person. They bring a wealth of skills and experience to the task and many young people find it easier to relate to an older person.

**DO I NEED TO HAVE QUALIFICATIONS TO BE A FOSTER CARER?**

No. Once approved, foster carers are supported to achieve the Training, Standards and Development for all foster carers. These are known as TSD’s. However, alongside this, full training is offered.
As an example, the Next Step Group has a training manager who looks at a range of training throughout the year which includes safeguarding children, first aid and behaviour management as well as bespoke training depending on your needs.

**WHAT IF I HAVE PETS?**

Having pets does not prevent you from fostering; in fact they can be an asset to a foster family. However, every animal is different and your pets will be assessed as part of the process of becoming a foster carer, taking into account factors such as their temperament and behaviour.

**WHAT ABOUT MY HEALTH?**

Your health will be considered when applying to foster and any long-term conditions taken into account. The most important factor is whether you are physically and psychologically fit enough to cope with the demands of caring for a child – this may vary depending on the age of the children that you are approved for.

**WHAT IF ENGLISH IS NOT MY FIRST LANGUAGE?**

A large number of children in foster care do not have English as a first language and being placed in a home where their first language is spoken can be very beneficial for them. You will need an adequate level of spoken and written English to be able to communicate with professionals, support children’s education and to make notes and keep records. If you have any particular communication needs, a fostering service should be willing to discuss this with you.
WHAT ABOUT RELIGION?

It does not matter what your religion is and this should not affect your application to foster. Children should be placed with foster families that can meet their needs, including religious needs. However you would also need to consider, if a child was placed with you that did not share your religion, how you would feel about discussing issues such as alternative religious belief or sexuality, ensuring that you abide by the fostering service’s policies.

WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ADOPTION AND FOSTERING?

It is important to highlight that fostering is very different to adoption and so you will need to think very carefully whether it is fostering a child or adopting a child that you would like to do.

Fostering is a way of offering children and young people a home while their own family is unable to look after them. Fostering is often a temporary arrangement, and many fostered children return to their own families. Children who cannot return home but still want to stay in touch with their families often live in long-term foster care. Foster carers never have parental responsibility for a child that they care for.

Adoption is a way of providing a new family for children who cannot be brought up by their own parents. It’s a legal procedure in which all the parental responsibility is transferred to the adopters. Once an adoption order has been granted it cannot be reversed except in extremely rare circumstances. An adopted child loses all legal ties with their first mother and father (the "birth parents") and becomes a full member of the new family, usually taking the family’s name.