Thinking About Fostering?

The Why Care Guide to Becoming a Foster Carer



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Could you foster?

At the start of 2024-25, about 56,400 children in care in England were living with foster carers. Each of them needed a safe, caring home while their own family couldn't look after them.

Some stay for a night. Some stay for years.

Foster carers aren't perfect people. They're ordinary people with time, space and patience, who can stick with a child through the good days and the hard ones.

If you want to foster, you might already have what matters most: motivation and commitment. Almost everything else can be learned, and you'll be trained. If you're committed to making a difference for children, this guide is for you. It covers who can foster, what the process looks like, what support you get, and exactly how to take the first step.



Could you foster?

You can foster if you're...

- Any ethnicity, religion or background
- LGBTQ+
- Renting — you don't need to own your home
- Single, married, in a civil partnership or living with a partner
- Working — many foster carers work, depending on the child and your fostering service
- New to this — you don't need qualifications or experience; you'll be trained

What you'll usually need

- **To be 21 or over.** The legal minimum is 18, but most fostering services ask for 21. Many councils have no upper age limit.
- **A spare bedroom**
- **The right to work in the UK**
- **Good enough health to care for a child.** A health condition or disability doesn't automatically stop you.
- **To be open about your past.** Every adult in your home will need an enhanced DBS check. A criminal record doesn't always stop you fostering but some offences, particularly against children, will.

Not sure? Ask. Fostering teams would much rather have the conversation than have you rule yourself out.

What happens after you enquire

1

You enquire

You get in touch with your council, by phone, email, or online form.

2

A first conversation

Someone from the fostering team talks to you about your situation and answers your questions. This is often followed by a visit to your home.

3

Preparation training

A short course where you learn what fostering involves and meeting other people thinking about it.

4

Your assessment

A social worker gets to know you and your household over several visits. There are two parts:

Checks

A DBS check for every adult in your home, a medical report from your GP, and at least two references.

Getting to know you

Your life story, relationships, experience with children, and what you'd bring to a child's life.

5

Fostering Panel

Your assessment goes to a panel, which makes a recommendation. The fostering service then makes the final decision.

You're approved

Your fostering team starts matching you with a child whose needs fit your home.

How long does it take?

New guidance says your application should go to panel within 6 months.

Support & Finances

You won't be on your own



Your own supervising social worker, there for you and your household.



Training before you get approved so you're prepared



Other foster carers to talk to and learn from.



Out-of-hours support and short breaks, offered by many Local Authorities

You won't be out of pocket

Every foster carer gets a fostering allowance to cover the cost of caring for a child. How much depends on your Local Authority, the child's age and their needs, and some Local Authorities also pay a fee on top that recognises your skills. Foster carers also get special tax relief, so many pay little or no tax on their fostering income. As your Local Authority exactly what they offer.

FREE, INDEPENDENT ADVICE

Fosterline

Monday to Firday, 9.00 to 17.00

0800 040 7675

Why foster with your Local Authority?

Your Local Authority is responsible for the children in care in your area. Fostering with your Local Authority means a child cna often stay close to their school, their friends, and the people who matter to them.



Landed on a regional hub? That's normal

In many parts of England, Local Authorities now work together in regional fostering hubs. If your link takes to you a hub's website rather than the Local Authority's own, it's the same service. The hub just handles enquiries now.

READY TO START?

How to apply in 3 easy steps

1

Find your Local Authority

Look up the council that covers where you live in the list at the back of this guide. Councils are grouped by region.

2

Click the link

Each council has a link to its fostering website. You'll find more information there, plus the dates of any information events.

3

Make your enquiry

Use the enquiry form, call, or email the address listed. It's an enquiry, not a commitment. Nobody will expect you to have everything worked out.

Not sure which Local Authority covers you? Search "which council am I in" on GOV.uk and enter your postcode.

Questions to ask when you get in touch

What kind of fostering do you need carers for near me?

What allowance would I get?

What support and training would I receive?

When is your next information event?

How long does your assessment usually take?



About Why Care

Why Care helps councils turn people who want to foster into foster carers who stay. We want every child to have the right carers, in the right home, at the right time.

hello@whycare.org.uk

Contact details in this guide were taken from official council and regional hub websites in October 2026. They can change, so if a link doesn't work, search for your council's name and "fostering".

Right carers. Right home. Right time.

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