

# Your gateway to local council fostering

**Information pack for  
prospective foster  
carers**



**Foster with a south west local council and  
make a real difference to a child in care**  
**[www.fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk](http://www.fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk)**

**Fostering**  
SOUTH WEST

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# What is fostering?

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**Fostering provides an alternative family environment for children and young people who can't live at home or with family. Foster carers open their homes to these children, providing them with a safe, stable and nurturing environment where they can thrive.**

Foster carers look after children in their home and take care of their practical day-to-day needs. This may include school drop-offs and pick-ups, making meals, working with schools to support their learning and offering emotional support and guidance as they grow. Foster carers nurture trusting relationships with the children they foster and provide a family environment filled with love, support and patience.

As our foster carers will tell you, fostering is not always plain sailing – there are good days and bad days for every family. However, fostering is extremely rewarding, and our foster carers know that every day they are making a difference in a child's life.

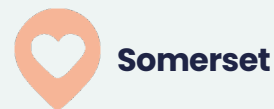
Whether you just want a bit more information about fostering or you have decided this is a journey you would like to take, our team is here to support you every step of the way.

# What is Fostering South West?

**Fostering South West represents a partnership between the 15 local councils across the south west of England. For the first time, fostering services in the region are collaborating to recruit essential new foster carers and improve retention via the Mockingbird programme.**

Local council fostering services are collaborating to bring together their experience and knowledge of our communities, the needs of families, children and the young people in our care. Our commitment is to work together and share resources to give foster carers and children in care the best possible experiences of fostering with their local councils.

Fostering South West partners include:



# Why foster with a south west local council?

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**We're working together to change the lives of children and young people in care across the south west. Fostering South West represents local council fostering across the whole region, joined together for the first time to recruit more foster carers and improve your journey and the outcomes for the children you care for.**



## **Our mission**

There are babies, toddlers, teenagers, siblings and young parents all across our region who need us, and need you too.

Their stories are unique, but for every single child our mission is the same: to create a better future and help shape positive outcomes.



## **Our community**

Foster carers support our communities by helping children to stay closer to home when it is safe for them to do so. With the recruitment of more foster carers, children will be able to remain in the south west, nearer to familiar surroundings.

Children and young people won't need to wait as long for the right home to meet their needs or a place where they can stay without being separated from their brothers and sisters.

# Why foster with a south west local council?



## Our support

We are the complete local support network around you, supporting you and the children in the care of our local councils. As part of our collaboration, we've stepped up support for all foster carers – from first enquiry through to overcoming challenges and developing your skills for progression.

Wherever your fostering future takes you, we'll be beside you every step of the way with all the dedicated expertise, advice and training you'll need on your fostering journey.

Right across the south west, foster carers now have the chance to extend their network of support and build friendships for children and adults alike through the Mockingbird programme.



# Why do children need your support?

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**Social workers try extremely hard to keep families together. When this is not possible, for reasons including family problems, a parent's ill health or because the child has been neglected or abused, the child comes into the care of a local authority. These children may be babies, toddlers, teenagers, or sibling groups.**

All children need food, clothing, shelter, love and safety, but children in foster care may have additional needs because of their life experiences.

Whatever the individual circumstances, these children have often experienced trauma and will be experiencing grief and mixed emotions about not living with their parents. Foster carers need to be sensitive, empathetic, and resilient in their approach to supporting the child they care for.

Since 2008, the number of children in care in England has increased every year, while the number of registered foster carers has declined. This leaves us with not enough homes for children that need them. We desperately need more foster carers to offer help and support to children in our communities.



# Who can be a foster carer?

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**Age:** You must be over 18 years old to foster, although most local councils require you to be at least 21 years old.



**Relationship Status:** As long as you can support a child in your care, your relationship status, whether married, in a civil partnership, divorced, or single, does not matter. If you are in a relationship, it should be stable to provide a supportive environment for the child.



**Sexuality and Gender:** Fostering is open to individuals of all sexual orientations and genders. The most important factor is your ability to meet the needs of the child and provide a caring environment.



**Ethnicity:** Fostering is open to individuals from any cultural background. You must have a good understanding of English to communicate effectively and collaborate with professionals.



**Having Children:** You can be a foster carer regardless of whether you have children of your own. If you have children living with you, they will be included in the assessment process and supported throughout your fostering journey. If you have children living elsewhere, they will also be involved in the assessment process. This will be approached sensitively and in an age-appropriate way.



# Who can be a foster carer?

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**Your Home:** You can foster whether you own or rent your home. Some of our local authority partners may require you to have a spare room for the foster child, but this will be discussed during the application process.



**Work Status:** You may be able to foster while working another job but you must be available to care for the child and attend meetings and training sessions. The assessment process will explore your ability to meet the child's needs alongside your work commitments. More employers are developing a Fostering Friendly Family Policy to support you to be able to work and foster.



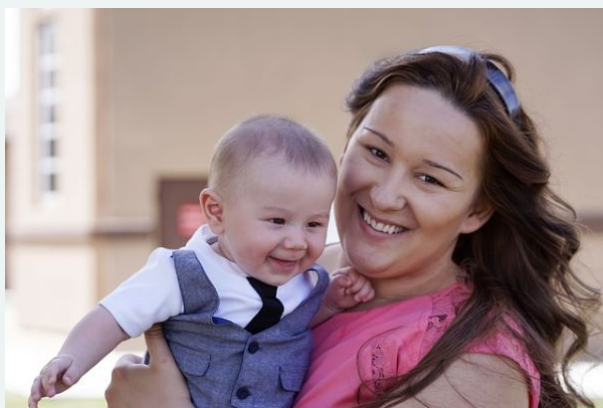
**Health Issues:** Physical or mental health issues do not necessarily prevent you from becoming a foster carer. What matters is that you are physically fit and emotionally stable enough to provide consistent care and support for a child or young person. All prospective foster carers must undergo a medical assessment with their GP.



**Criminal Record:** You must be honest about any previous offences during the assessment process. Minor offences should not necessarily prevent you from fostering, but you will be required to undergo a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check which will highlight any criminal convictions. Honesty from the outset is crucial in this process.

# Types of foster care

**Fostering is about opening your home to a child in need, and there are many ways to do it. You can foster for a short time, for longer periods or even permanently. There are also special types of fostering, like helping disabled children, supporting parents and babies or giving a safe place to a young person seeking asylum. We're here to help you figure out which type of fostering fits best for you.**



## **Short term fostering**

Short term foster carers provide care for children whose families are facing temporary challenges. These families often receive support from Children and Families Services. Children may stay with foster carers for a single night, several months, or sometimes longer, depending on their individual circumstances.

Typically, foster carers look after a child until they can be reunited with their family or until alternative plans for their future are determined.

## **Long term fostering (Permanence)**

Where a foster carer agrees to provide stable and ongoing care for children for long periods, often into adulthood. Permanence aims to ensure that children have a sense of belonging and security throughout their childhood and as they navigate their formative years.

Young people may continue to live with their foster family after they become 18, known as 'staying put'. This arrangement allows them to continue living in a familiar environment, receiving ongoing support and guidance as they transition into adulthood.

# Types of foster care

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## Emergency foster care

Emergency foster carers provide vulnerable children or young people a safe place to stay until they can return home, or until a longer term plan has been agreed. Often children will be placed into emergency foster care with only a few hours notice.

It is also possible to offer emergency foster care alongside other types of fostering.

## Short breaks (respite care)

When foster carers look after children for short periods of time. Short breaks offer temporary support and relief for families and caregivers looking after children with additional needs. It provides a short-term break for primary carers, allowing them to recharge and attend to personal needs, whilst providing a safe and welcoming space for children to stay.

## Specialist foster care

Focuses on providing essential support to children with specific needs or circumstances. These children may require additional physical, emotional, or educational assistance. By offering stability and vital care, specialist foster carers play a crucial role in helping these children thrive. Additionally, some specialist foster carers extend their care to teenagers with higher levels of need, ensuring they receive the necessary support. Becoming a specialist foster carer involves extra training, as well as excellent communication skills to collaborate effectively with the care team surrounding the child or young person.

## Parent and child foster care

Involves providing essential support and guidance to both a young parent and their child within the foster home. These parents may be in the later stages of pregnancy or have a newborn baby. The primary focus of this type of foster care is to help the parent and child stay together as a family unit. Foster carers in this role offer practical assistance, guidance, and encouragement to the parent, while also creating a safe and nurturing environment for the child. To become a parent and child foster carer, additional training is necessary.



# Types of foster care

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## Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Involves providing a safe and supportive home for children who arrive in a new country without a parent or guardian. These children often flee their home countries due to conflict, natural disasters, persecution, or other forms of violence.

Foster carers play a crucial role by offering much-needed stability, care, and guidance to help these children adjust to their new environment and heal from the trauma they have experienced.

Since many of these children speak little or no English, foster carers assist them in adapting to their new surroundings and culture. Additionally, they support the children in maintaining their identity by promoting their religion, language, and heritage.

## Supported lodgings care

Supported lodgings is a unique arrangement where compassionate individuals open their homes to young people aged 16 to 21.

As a supported lodgings carer, you offer more than just a roof over their heads, you provide a nurturing environment where they can learn essential life skills and gain independence.

## Staying put care

Provides ongoing support and care to young people who have reached the age of leaving foster care but choose to remain in the same home.

Staying put foster carers offer stability and guidance to young people preparing to live independently. They can help explore education or employment opportunities and to develop essential life skills such as budgeting and cooking.



# The benefits of fostering

**Discover the fulfilling journey of fostering, from making a difference in a child's life to expanding your family and building meaningful relationships whilst being supported at every step.**

Fostering a child is an incredibly rewarding experience, allowing you to make a positive impact on a child or young person's life. While it isn't always smooth sailing and comes with its challenges, knowing that you're providing love, stability, and growth opportunities is immensely fulfilling.

Beyond the personal rewards, fostering also offers the chance to expand your family and create meaningful bonds with children who need a caring and supportive environment. Whether you're a single person, a couple or a family with children of your own, fostering brings fresh perspectives and new relationships into your home.

Fostering also comes with a robust support network. Social workers, support groups, and training programs are available to guide you through any bumps in the road. You'll never be alone on this journey, and our active community of foster carers is always ready to offer assistance and encouragement when needed.



# Application process

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We understand how daunting the application and approval process may seem, but there's no need to worry, we'll work closely with you every step of the way. The steps below will tell you more about the journey to fostering and what's involved if you decide you want to become a foster carer.



## Step 1 - Our first conversation

Once we've received your initial enquiry or contact we will arrange to talk to you. We'll explore your interest in fostering, your home and personal circumstances.

To help you get to know us, we'll explain how we work with you, the children in need of foster care and your appropriate local council. You can expect this call to last around 30-40 minutes.

Our first conversation will help us both decide if it's the right time to take an application further.



## Step 2 - First contact with your local council and application

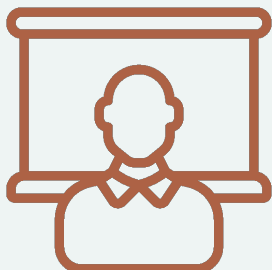
Following your conversation with a member of the Fostering South West team, someone from your local council will get in touch.

They will arrange for a social worker to visit you to discuss your interest in fostering and the recruitment process. This gives you an opportunity to ask questions and allows the local council to assess your suitability for fostering.

If both you and your council are happy to proceed after the initial visit, you will need to complete an application form providing information about your education, employment, address history and relationships. You will also need to consent to DBS and medical checks.

# Application process

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## Step 3 – Skills to foster training

You don't need any specific qualifications before you begin your journey to fostering. The Skills to Foster training is designed to provide you with the necessary tools and knowledge to be a foster carer, and help you make the best decision for you and your family about whether fostering is right for you.

Through the training, you will gain insight into the experiences of children and young people in care. We understand that fostering comes with its own set of complexities, and this training will help you navigate these challenges with confidence and resilience.

Additionally, the training offers a valuable opportunity to connect with other foster carer applicants, building a strong support network from the very beginning of your fostering journey.

The Skills to Foster training is mandatory before approval.



## Step 4 – Form F assessment

The Form F assessment stage will be completed by a social worker from your local council to assess your suitability to become a foster carer.

The social worker will talk with you, and your partner if you are in a relationship, to understand more about your background, skills, and experiences. They will also want to talk to your children or any other members of your household.

The assessment covers various aspects, including your motivation to foster, parenting abilities, support networks, and understanding of the fostering role.

Throughout this assessment, we'll be here to listen, support and encourage you every step of the way.

# Application process

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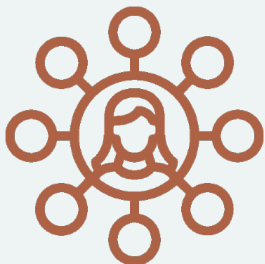


## Step 5 - Assessment and Panel

Your fostering social worker will share the Form F Assessment report with you and make a recommendation for your approval.

You will then be invited to attend a fostering panel with your assessing social worker. Panel members have experience relevant to fostering and will review the complete assessment before you meet with them. At the panel, members will discuss your assessment, ask questions, and provide an informed recommendation regarding your approval. They will also specify the age range and number of children you will be able to care for.

The panel's recommendation is presented to the council's Agency Decision Maker, to review all of the information and make the final decision about your approval.



## Step 6 - Post-approval

Following your approval as a foster carer, you will have access to ongoing advice and guidance through your local authority. You'll also be invited to training and support groups, where you can connect with foster carers and truly feel part of our fostering community.



# Support for foster carers

We're here to support you throughout your journey to becoming a foster carer. Our team will answer any questions you have, provide information, and help you feel confident in your role. You're not alone on this journey.

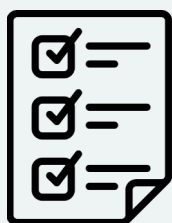


## During your application

You will have several support options open to you throughout your journey to foster including:

- A dedicated phone line you can call to ask questions, find out about the process and seek support and advice.
- Training events led by a specialist team to introduce you to the realities of foster care and prepare you for fostering.
- A 'buddy' mentor scheme, which links you to experienced foster carers in your area who can share their experience of fostering and answer questions.

Some of the above will be delivered by Fostering South West, and some will be delivered by the local council you are applying to be a part of.



## During your assessment

Once your enquiry is passed on to your local council, they will become your point of contact and you will be assigned an assessing social worker. Our team will continue to support you on your journey, checking in with phone calls, answering your questions and explaining each step of the process.

# Support for foster carers



## Post-approval

Once you become an approved foster carer, you will be able to access the support and ongoing training from your local council. Each local council offers its own programme of post-approval training, which you will be able to access free of charge. You will also be able to access events, activities and support groups where fostering families in your local area can meet and support one another.

In our region, we are proud participants of The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme. Mockingbird was designed to develop and cultivate meaningful relationships and support between children, young people and foster families.

Through the Mockingbird programme, fostering families come together in groups called 'constellations', consisting of six to ten families. Within these constellations, families effectively act as an extended family to one another, facilitated by a dedicated constellation host. Through group get-togethers, activities, celebrations and informal support, they act as a support system to one another in a way that feels natural and sociable. It's like having an extended foster family you can call on.



# Fees and allowances

**Wanting to understand the financial aspects of fostering is a natural part of the process. Our advisors can answer any questions you have about fees and allowances, helping you make informed decisions. Each local council sets its own allowance rates based on Government guidelines, so there's no fixed allowance for fostering.**



## **Fostering allowance**

In the south west, foster carers receive a competitive allowance and fees.

All foster carers receive an allowance to cover the costs associated with caring for the child, including food, clothing, toiletries and other necessities. This financial support helps alleviate the financial strain of fostering, so you can focus on meeting the needs of the child in your care.

## **Fostering Payments**

As a foster carer, you will be paid by the council you are fostering for.

Fee payments are made on top of allowances to recognise that foster carers are essential to our work to support children in our area, and that their task is one of the most challenging of those involved in supporting children and families.

The amount you are paid will be based on the number of children and young people in your care, as well as other factors such as their age and needs.

# Fees and allowances

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## **Self-employment and paying tax and National Insurance on fostering allowance**

Foster carers are classed as self-employed for tax and national insurance purposes and need to register with HMRC.

Qualifying care relief means that households do not pay tax on the first £18,140 they earn from fostering. On top of this exemption, you can also get tax relief for each week (or part week) a child is in your care, reducing the tax paid on any earnings above this amount. This means you do not have to pay tax on some of your earnings and you would keep more of your fostering income compared to other employment with a similar salary.

## **Foster caring and claiming benefits**

You might be surprised to learn that people who claim benefits may not automatically lose those benefits if they start to foster. The exception to this is Job Seeker's Allowance as a foster carer who is looking after a child will not usually be available for start a new job.



# Myth busting

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**It is normal and understandable to have some concerns or anxieties when thinking about fostering and the application process.**

**However, there are many myths and misconceptions about fostering. Let's debunk them!**



## **Myth: Perfection is required**

It is a misconception that foster carers need to be flawless. There's no such thing as a 'perfect' or 'typical' foster family. We understand that everyone comes with their own set of strengths and vulnerabilities. With the right support and training, you can become a capable and confident foster carer, well-equipped to tackle challenges and make a real difference in a child's life.

## **Myth: I'm unable to handle complex needs**

It's natural to feel hesitant about supporting children with complex needs. Every child in care is unique, with their own background, experiences, and needs. However, the fostering journey is a learning process, and facing challenges head-on is a fundamental part of the role.

Your life experiences and resilience can serve as valuable tools in navigating these challenges, allowing you to provide the understanding and stability that foster children need.

# Myth busting

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## **Myth: There is a lack of support for foster carers**

At Fostering South West, we make it our priority to support our foster carers throughout their journey. We are here to answer your questions and provide you with the information you need to make the right decision for you. We are committed to building your confidence and supporting you every step of the way.

## **Myth: Fostering is a long term commitment**

Unsure about committing to long term fostering? That's perfectly ok! Foster carers can start small, for example with short breaks fostering, and still put their skills and experience to good use.

## **Myth: You must be ready to apply before making an enquiry**

It's a common misconception that only those fully committed to fostering should enquire about fostering. Fostering South West offers a safe space to ask questions and explore the best options for you.

You can contact us with no obligation. Remember: if you never ask, you'll never know!



If you require this document in another format, please contact –  
**[info@fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk](mailto:info@fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk)**



Start your local council fostering journey and get in touch with a member of our team via the methods below.

 **[www.fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk](http://www.fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk)**

 **0300 456 0120**

 **[info@fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk](mailto:info@fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk)**

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