

8
years and
Over

SO, WHAT'S THIS FOSTERING THING ALL ABOUT?

U-pack



A Children & Young People's Guide to the Fostering Service.

Hello & Welcome to the Children's Guide to Fostering. We have made this guide for children and young people who are living or may be about to go and live with foster carers. Some of you may go and live with a foster carer who is a relative or friend who you have met before whilst others will go and live with foster carers who are new to you.

We hope this guide will help you to understand more about foster care. But don't worry it is normal to feel worried or scared when you first go and live with a foster family. If you feel like this you can always talk to your social worker, foster carer or someone you trust if you have questions. You can ask questions about what is happening again and again until you feel happy.

We hope you find this guide useful!

All About Me:

My Name is:

.....

My Foster Carer's Name is:

.....

My Address is:

.....

.....

.....

My Telephone Number is:

.....

All About Foster Carers:

Who are foster carers?

Foster carers are adults who live in ordinary families. They have been specially trained to look after children and young people like you. Fostering families come in many shapes and sizes. Some foster carers live on their own and others live in large families with other children in care. Some foster carers will have their own children as well.



What will my foster carer do?

Your foster carer will look after you and make sure you are happy, healthy and safe. They will want you to become part of a loving foster family and they will treat you as one of their family. Your foster carer will want to give you the best start in life.

Who can become foster carers?

Before an adult can become a foster carer we have to make lots of checks to make sure they would be able to keep you happy, healthy and safe. We would need to talk to people like the police and doctors to find out more about them and to see if they would be safe to work with children.

All foster carers and their family members take part in something called an assessment with their own social worker to see if they can become carers. This will make sure foster carers have the right skills to look after you.

It's really important that foster carers are able to give children like you a safe and loving home and this is why we spend a lot of time making sure carers can show us they will be able to do this.

At the end of the assessment which can sometimes take up to 8 months we will have lots of information about the foster carer and will be able to say which children they will be able to best care for. The foster carers and their social worker will then take all of the information to something called the Fostering Panel.

What do you think makes a good foster carer?

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

What does the Fostering Panel do?

The fostering panel is a group of adults that meet to decide whether people who want to foster can do it properly and offer a child a good home where they will feel safe and happy. Some of the panel are social workers and others are people who may have experience of being in care, being a foster carer or helping young people in care with education and health issues. Some of the adults work for Staffordshire County Council and some of them are independent which means they do not work for the Council.

How long would I have to stay with a foster family?

It all depends on you and the reasons why you are in care. Lots of young people go back and live with their birth parents or a family member once your social worker feels things have been sorted. Some children and young people stay with their foster family for a very short time, maybe for a few weeks or a few months. This gives families a chance to sort things out so that children can go home. Other children need to live with a foster family for a longer time. This could mean that children will stay with their foster family for many years until they grow up.

Your social worker will talk with you and your family about how long you will stay in care. Your social worker will want to know about your wishes and feelings and what you want to happen and where you want to live.

How will you find the right foster family for me?

Staffordshire County Council has a special team of fostering social workers and other workers whose main job is to find the right home for children and young people. This team is called the Placement Unit.

We know everyone is different and in care for different reasons and we need to make sure we find the right foster carers who can meet your needs. What you tell your social worker will help them to make the best plans for you and find the best family for you.

Before a foster carer is chosen your social worker will speak to the Placement Unit to let them know all the information that is in your care plan and will tell them your wishes and feelings. The fostering social workers will then look to find a family who is best for you.

They will look for a family where you can fit in and settle down well. They will be looking for foster carers who know about your background and your culture. They will search for foster carers who can support you to celebrate your religion, to have contact with your family and friends and to enjoy your hobbies and interests and they will also help you to get involved with new hobbies.

What will I know about my new foster family before I go to live with them?

All of our fostering families make something called a "Profile" that they have made to tell you about their family. Their profile will have information and photos of who lives in their family, where they live and what they like doing. The profile may have photos of things they like doing like where they go on holiday or the local park where they do their favourite sports.

We will give the profile to your social worker so you can read all about your foster family. We will also try to arrange for you to meet your foster carers before you go and live with them. This is not always possible.

Sometimes social workers may decide that it is best for children to leave home quickly which means you may not be able to meet your foster family first. If this happens we will work with your social worker to plan how we can all work together to make sure you have all the information you need.

What things would you like to know about your carer?

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

What happens when I first go to live with a foster family?

When you first go to live with your foster carer it is likely that your social worker or someone who works with them will take you to your new home. Lots of children and young people have told us that this can be a scary and confusing time but don't worry your social worker and carer will be there to help you as much as they can. When you arrive your foster carer will show you around the house, show you where you will sleep and introduce you to everyone in the house.

The house may feel a little strange at first but everyone will make you feel welcome and help you to settle in. If possible your social worker will make sure that you can bring your things. Apart from things you need, you can take your favourite clothes, toys, games and books, as well as photographs and anything else that you feel is important to you.

What things would you want to take to your foster home?

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

What will it be like living with a foster family?

All families are different. They each have different house rules and it will take a little bit of time to work out what you can and can't do in your new home. Your foster carers will spend time with you showing you round your new home and explaining how the house is run. If you are not sure about anything or you are nervous just ask the carers to explain what normally happens.

Your foster carer will work with you and your social worker to make sure you are being looked after and supported so you can be happy, healthy and safe. You can find out more about how foster carers will support you in something called the statement of purpose which is at the end of this booklet.

We try to make sure that all children over the age of 3 have their own bedroom. Sometimes this is not always possible because you may need to share a bedroom with your brother or sister. But if you are not happy about this you can always talk to your social worker or you can ask for it to be talked about at your Placement Planning Meeting.

Your Care Plan:

It's important that everyone who is involved in your life knows what is happening and what plans you have for the future. This is called your care plan. Your care plan will cover everything to do with you, from contact with your friends and family, to school, to health and hobbies, to what food you like and what activities you enjoy doing. You can find out more about care plans by taking a look at your U-Pack.

What is a placement planning meeting?

A placement planning meeting is where you, your foster carer, your social worker and where possible your parents or someone who knows you will meet together to agree how you will be looked after and how your foster carer can best meet your needs. This meeting is called a Placement Planning Meeting.

At a Placement Planning Meeting lots of things about you will be talked about for example what food you like, any medicines you have to take, who you will see from your family and when, your school and many more things. Your social worker will write this onto a special form so that people looking after you know all about you and how you should be looked after. This is called a Placement Information Record.

Your Placement Information Record:

Most importantly your Placement Information Record will be about you, your wishes and feelings and how you want to be cared for. Your foster carer will need to know all the important information about you so that they can care for you in a way that you feel happy, healthy and safe. It's important that you are listened to and that if your social worker or foster carer is not able to make something you want to happen, that you understand why and you know what else you can do about it.

What will be in your Placement Information Record?

- Important information about your life.
- About your family and where you live.
- How your foster carer can keep you safe and how you can keep yourself safe.
- Who you want to speak to and see. This could be your parents or brothers, sisters and friends.
- About your health and any hospital appointments or dental appointments you may have already booked. You may also be taking medicine which everyone needs to know about.
- Your education and the school.
- Your hobbies.

When will I see my family?

Because you live in a foster family does not mean that you have to lose touch with your family and friends. Your foster carer knows how much your family may mean to you and that you may want see them. You may want to see your parents, brothers, sisters or other members of your family.

If it is safe for you to see your family you may meet them at their house, at a place where you like going, at your foster carers house or a place which you feel safe. Your social worker will speak to you about when you can see your family and where. You can read more about this in your U-Pack.

What about school?

If you are already at school, we will try to work out if it is best for you to move to a new school or stay at your old one. Your teacher will know that you have gone to live with a foster carer, but it is your choice if you want to tell other people. If you have any problems or you are being bullied, you must tell your teacher, social worker or foster carer.

You can read more advice about school, education or work in your U-Pack.

What happens when I want things to change?

As you get to know your foster carer better you will be able to talk to them about anything that you would like to do different such as changing your bedroom around or going to bed at a different time. Your foster carer will listen to you and you can reach a decision together about every day life.

As you spend more time with your foster carer there may be bigger changes that you need to be as agreed as part of your care plan and placement information record. These changes will take place at your Review. Your foster carer, social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer will help you to say how you are getting on and how you feel about where you live at your review meeting.

You can find out more about your review by reading your U-Pack.

What happens if I am not happy with my foster carers?

It can be very hard moving into a new family and some children and young people can feel upset about leaving their own family and everything can feel different and strange. But remember that everyone is here to help you. Foster carers want to make you feel as welcome as possible and know that you may be scared or upset about going to live with them. They will help you to sort out any problems you may have even if they are about living with the foster family.

If after living with your foster family for a while you feel you are not happy living with them you should talk to your social worker or someone that you trust about it. Your social worker will come to see you and they will ask you how things are living with your foster carer. So if you're really not happy you can contact them to talk about it.

Your social worker will make sure your views, wishes and feelings are listened to and they should tell you what they are doing about the things you tell them.

If you still feel that you are not being listened to and that changes haven't happened to make you feel part of your foster family you can make a complaint. Your U-Pack has lots of information about your rights and what you can do when something goes wrong.

House Rules:

Every house has rules and living in foster care is no different. At some point you should ask your foster carers to go through their house rules and you could write the rules below.

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

Foster carers have rules so that they can make sure you are safe and that everyone in the home is getting on. What will happen if I don't keep to the household rules? Sometimes you might forget the rules or not be able to keep to them all of the time, your foster carer will talk to you about what has happened. Sometimes you may even have a punishment which means you may not be able to do something you like doing.

Foster carers also have to follow some rules and the most important one is that they are not allowed to hit children or hurt them in any way. Foster carers must make sure that children are kept safe.

Statement of Purpose

– What you can expect from your carers..

The fostering services has something called a Statement of Purpose which says what children and young people should expect from their foster carers. You can read the Statement of Purpose below but we have shortened it and made it a little simpler so it only tells you what you need to know. But if you want to read the full Statement of Purpose just ask your social worker or foster carer for a copy. You can also find it online.

Staffordshire's Fostering Service will find foster carers who can...

- Make sure you have a comfortable, safe, warm and clean home with a bedroom of your own if you are over three years old unless there is a special arrangement.
- Make sure they know what your wishes and feelings are and we will check that they are taking them into account.
- Check that you feel an important part of the fostering family and that you feel safe, happy and secure.
- Make sure you have safe care by being clear with you about what they will do to keep you safe.
- Work hard to build an open and honest relationship with you so that you can learn to trust them and say when you are worried, upset or have been hurt.
- They will work with your social worker to protect you from harm.

- They will understand important information about you and your needs.
- They will encourage you to have interests and hobbies so that you try new challenges, develop your talents and discover new ones.
- Help you to grow in confidence, believe in yourself and be proud of your achievements. They will help you to do this by supporting you, helping you when they can, by helping you to learn from things that don't go well and celebrating with you when you achieve what you want to do.
- Be a good role model to you and help you to develop good relationships and behaviour. They will also help you to take responsibility for your behaviour. They will support you to learn how to work through problems and feelings. They will support you if someone treats you in an unfair way or bullies you.
- They will support you to have a healthy life style and help you to make decisions about your health care, for example they will help you to manage your own medication and encourage you to make good healthy life style choices.
- They will make day to day plans about your care. Your foster carer will know what is in your placement plan and will know what decisions they can make.
- They will encourage you to have your friends visit and stay with you at home and for you to visit and stay with them.

- Help you to do well at school by listening to how you think things are going and what help you think you need. They will be interested in what you are doing and will meet with your school and teachers, attending open evenings, helping you to meet your goals and targets and they will make sure you have a space where you can do your homework. They will also have meetings with you, your social worker and teachers to agree how to support you. They will attend your personal education planning meeting.
- They will know your contact plans to support you in making sure that these plans are kept and that your contact with your family and friends goes well. Your carer will talk to you about how your contact is going and what you want to happen in the future. Your carer will help you to prepare what you may want to say at your review about your contact.
- Help you if you are worried, upset or in trouble.



The Fostering Service will support foster carers to meet your needs.

We will:

- Make sure that we have all the information about you that we need to give to the foster carer who will be looking after you.
- Give foster carers a personal allowance to help them to support you. You will have a say in how this allowance is spent and have the opportunity as well as all the members of the family, to make choices about important day to day matters such as the food you eat, activities and the clothes you choose to buy and wear.
- Award foster carers who are experienced in looking after children a fee to reward their special skills and knowledge.
- Each foster carer will be given their own social worker who will support them to meet your needs. Their social worker will meet with them monthly and supervise them every three months. They will check they are caring for you properly. The social worker will not always tell your foster carer when they are coming so that they can check that they are keeping the children they care for happy, healthy and safe.
- They will review every year if they are able to carry on fostering children and that they can keep the children they care for happy, healthy and safe.

Useful Links & Contacts:

- We will provide opportunities for your foster carer to take part in training so that they learn new skills and have more knowledge about how to care for looked after children.
- We will run support groups and events including newsletters, an annual BBQ and a Christmas party for foster carers, their sons and daughters and children who are in their care.

The Children's Commissioner for England

Makes sure that adults in charge listen to your views.

Contact Them:

The Office of the Children's Commissioner,
33 Greycoat Street,
London,
SW1P 2QF
020 7783 8330

Website: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Child Line

This is the free 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK. You can call the Helpline on 0800 1111 about any problem, at any time day or night.

Website: www.childline.org.uk

Ofsted

An organisation called Ofsted checks the work of fostering agencies in England and Wales.

Contact Them:

Ofsted Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
08456 404045

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Children's Rights Director for England

The Children's Rights Director for England spends lots of time listening to what children and young people have to say about how they are looked after.

Contact Them:

Ofsted
Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

Useful Links & Contacts:

Complaints & Compliments: 0800 0837014

CARS: 0800 233 311

Children & Young People's Voice Project: 01785 253878

Emergency Duty Service: 08456 042886

Childline: 0800 1111

NSPCC: 0808 800 5000

This guide was produced by the Children & Young People's Voice Project In partnership with the Fostering Service.

Staffordshire County Council has made every effort to ensure the content of this folder is correct at the time of print. (October 2011). The Children & Young People's Voice Project would like to thank all the Children, Young People & Professionals who have contributed to the development and creation of this information guide.

