

Fostering Frequently Asked Questions

Do I have to own my own home?

No. You can foster if you live in council, housing association or privately rented accommodation. All applicants will be asked to show proof that they are up to date with any mortgage or rent payments and that their tenancy is secure.

Does a foster child need their own bedroom?

Our expectation is that each fostered child will have their own bedroom. Exemptions to this rule are young babies who may sleep in the same bedroom as their carers and siblings who may be able to share a bedroom.

I have a criminal conviction. Does this mean I cannot apply to foster?

It would depend on the offence you have committed. Certain convictions for offences including violence and crimes against children would rule you out. It is important to tell us if you have a police record so we are aware from the outset and can advise you of your suitability.

I've got a medical condition, can I still foster?

As part of the assessment process, each foster carer has to have a medical assessment completed by their GP. This is then considered by our medical advisor, who helps us to decide if there are any health factors that would prevent you fostering.

I have a disability - can I foster?

Yes. People with disabilities do become foster carers and make a valuable contribution to fostering. As part of the approval process for all foster carers, your GP will need to verify that you are physically able to look after children and not putting your own health at risk.

Will I be paid as a foster carer?

Yes. You will receive a professional fee as well as an allowance for each child. However we do need to be sure that you are able to support yourself at times when you have no children placed.

Does it matter if I work or am unemployed?

No. Children benefit from having someone to care for them full-time and it is our preference that children under five are cared for by someone that does not work.

If you work and are considering fostering you will need to ensure that your employer is flexible enough to enable you to attend meetings, arrange contact with the birth family or be at home to care for the children if they are sick or suspended from school. If you can only provide short, regular periods of care such as weekends and school holidays, you may wish to consider becoming a

short break carer for children with disabilities.

<http://www.bolton.gov.uk/website/pages/Sharedcareforchildren.aspx>

Do I have to be able to drive?

It is helpful if you can drive because it makes it easier to get to meetings and to help children get to their schools and activities. Not being able to drive may limit the number of children we would consider it appropriate for you to care for. That said, not all of our foster carers drive. Those that don't need to have good support networks and/or good public transport links and a willingness to use these.

I smoke. Can I still foster?

Our current policy is that we do not place children under 5 or vulnerable children who have respiratory, heart or other medical conditions in homes where there is a smoker. It is our expectation that a person has been smoke-free for at least a year before we will consider an application from them to foster under-5s. In addition to this, we have specific guidelines which outline the practical steps that can be taken to minimise children's exposure to tobacco smoke which we expect foster carers to abide by. Foster carers are not permitted to smoke within the home or in the presence of looked after children.

I have dogs and other pets, will this be a problem?

We will take this into account when we are considering which children to place in your home. For some children, the unconditional affection that animals offer really helps them to settle. For other children, who may have allergies or medical conditions, a home with pets may not be suitable. If we have any concerns about your pets we may request that an assessment of them is completed by an independent pet assessor.

I have no children of my own - can I foster?

Yes. We are looking for people who like and have a genuine interest in caring for children and young people. There is an expectation that you will have had some experience of caring for or working with other people's children.

Why do children need to be cared for by foster carers?

There are many reasons why children need to be looked after by foster carers. These reasons do not always mean that the child's family is at fault, or that the child is 'difficult'. Three broad categories explain why children need foster carers;

- Some families have periods of instability due to life circumstances: medical conditions, depression, family breakdown, learning difficulties, substance dependency and families who simply struggle to cope.
- Some children experience harm from family members. Abuse falls into five main groups: neglect, physical, sexual, emotional abuse and

exposure to domestic violence. In these circumstances, parents have failed to adequately meet the child's basic needs, exposed the child to inappropriate behaviour and/or risk or have deliberately caused harm to a child.

- Some children with special needs require foster carers. These children include those who have a severe disability, specific medical needs, learning disabilities or challenging behaviour. Short break care may be needed for a weekend, a number of weeks or during school holidays to give parents a break from caring.

What support would I get as a foster carer for Bolton Council?

Once you're approved as a foster carer, ongoing training and support is available from our qualified and experienced staff.

You will receive:

- Support from a qualified social worker and experienced support workers
- 24 hour telephone advice and support
- At least 6 weekly visits, more if needed plus additional telephone support
- Training and development opportunities
- Peer support via a 'buddy' service
- The opportunity to meet with other foster carers at support groups
- Financial support for caring for the child
- Regular foster carers newsletters and information
- Monthly management drop ins when an issues can be discussed
- Access to an independent 'Advice and Mediation' worker from The Fostering Network

You are never on your own and will be part of a wider team of professionals who work together to improve the life chances and quality of life of foster children.