



Frequently Asked Questions

What is fostering?

Fostering involves looking after children and young people in your home and providing an experience of family life. Research shows that children can grow and develop in a more positive and social way if they are looked after in a family.

Foster carers are expected to treat foster children as part of their family even if they are placed for a very short period of time. Fostering provides the main way of helping and accommodating looked after children in Bolton and is vital in turning around the lives of children and their families.

Why do children need foster carers?

Children and young people live with foster carers when they cannot live with their own families.

There are many reasons why children need to live with foster carers and each child and family's circumstances will be different. Every child living with foster carers will have their own individual care plan reflecting their specific needs.

The local authority has a legal duty to try and help children live with their families. The return of children to live with their parents or a member of the wider family is an important consideration in planning a child's future. Sometimes a family may be in crisis and need time to sort out their problems. Children may be in foster care for a short period of time to give families a break or respite.

When it is not safe for children to return home, they may remain with foster carers on a long term basis. Children may have suffered significant neglect, abuse and lack of consistent care which has an emotional effect upon them and sometimes their behaviour. Foster carers are important in providing emotional warmth, stability and consistent loving care to help children cope with these experiences.

What are the different types of fostering?

Short term fostering usually lasts anything up to two years depending on the courts and the plans made for the child. Short term fostering provides the opportunity to work with social workers and other professionals to return children to their families, prepare for adoption or move on to long term fostering if adoption is not appropriate.

Long term fostering provides a permanent family for children who cannot return home or be placed for adoption. Long term fostering is looking after a child or young person until they are old enough to look after themselves and live independently.

Short break fostering offers care for families and fostering families with disabled children which can be invaluable in helping families cope in the long term by providing planned breaks.

Do foster children see their family?

Most children placed in foster care need to keep in contact with their family, friends and other people who are important to them. Contact can sometimes be a difficult experience for both the child and their parents and foster carers have a crucial role to play in supporting children before, during and after contact. In long term foster care contact can be important to help a child understand their identity and origins and also maintain contact with brothers and sisters.

Contact can take place in different locations and be supervised or unsupervised depending upon the individual circumstances of the child and their family. Every child will have a contact plan as part of their overall care plan. In short term foster placements, particularly for babies and young children, contact with family could occur frequently throughout the week. For children of school age, contact would normally take place after school.

It is the foster carers responsibility to transport children to contact.

How are children placed in foster care?

Wherever possible we try to plan ahead to place children in foster care and ideally, the child, foster carer, social worker and parents would meet before the placement is made.

Short term placements sometimes have to be made urgently and a meeting is not always possible before placement. A placement planning meeting should take place a few days after the placement and involves the social worker, family placement worker and parents, where appropriate and possible. This meeting is held to be clear about the purpose of the placement and help plan for the child.

Long term placements are usually planned and visits to foster carers are made prior to placement to see if the placement is appropriate or matched correctly. This could include visits to the foster carers home, and spending time getting to know each other.

Do I need qualifications to foster?

There are no specific academic qualifications required to apply to be a foster carer. We provide training during and after your approval and will continue to help you with additional training and support once children are placed with you.

There will be an expectation that a foster carer has a good standard of written and spoken English and that they have the ability to work with professionals.

What are the age limits for fostering?

We welcome applications from all members of the community aged over 21 years. There are no upper age limits but all applicants should be in good health and have the energy, time and enthusiasm to look after children.

Age and experience are a factor in considering the age group of children and the type of fostering that would suit your skills and circumstances best.

Will I need a health/medical check up?

A medical check up is a legal requirement for all applicants. Many medical conditions would not stop you from becoming a foster carer, the important thing is that you enjoy good health and are able to cope with the physical and emotional demands that fostering may present.

What is the difference between fostering and adoption?

As a foster parent, you are in the role of a parent but ultimately, the local authority and the child's birth parents have responsibility for the child, though you may share some decision-making capabilities. When you adopt a child on the other hand, you have full parental responsibility and the child is a permanent member of your family.

Do I need to be married or in a relationship?

No. We welcome applications from people who are single, living together, married, divorced or separated, straight or gay. If you are in a relationship, you will need to have been together for at least two years and you will need to demonstrate you are in a long term relationship providing stability for any child placed.

Whether you are single or in a relationship, stability is vitally important for foster children and it is important that you have thought about your long term plans. It is important that all applicants have a good social and/or family support network to help with the fostering role. If you are assessed as a single carer and you enter into a serious relationship after your approval we will need to assess your new partner as well.

Can I foster if I have children living at home?

The short answer is yes, as long as you have a spare room for a fostered child. Clearly, you will need to consider the impact of fostering on your own children and we would expect that they have been involved in helping make the decision to foster. The age of your children living at home is important in deciding the ages of fostered children placed with you. These issues will be discussed during your assessment to help prepare for future placements. We also run a support group for foster carers' birth children so they can meet other children who share their homes and family with fostered children.

Do I need a spare room?

You will need a spare room to be able to foster a child. Fostered children cannot share a bedroom with your children. Babies under one year can be placed in a cot in the carer's bedroom but typically we look to recruit foster carers with a spare room to help plan for the future.

If you have a spare bedroom because your own child has moved out of the family home, for example to university, you may need to consider whether they are likely to still require that room during holidays or after their course has finished.

I don't drive or have access to a car, can I still foster?

You can still foster but you would need to think about how you would safely transport children to school or contact visits across Bolton. You will also be expected to attend training events and meetings about the child at different locations across the city. If you do not have a car or don't drive we would need to take this into consideration when matching you with placements.

Can I foster if I work full time?

Your working hours need to be flexible to make sure children placed with you can be looked after, taken to school, cared for during school holidays and transported to family contact sessions. There is no prescription regarding hours worked but these may need to be adapted to meet the needs of the child. If you are interested in fostering pre-school children, one carer would need to be available at all times. To help with consistent care for fostered children, attendance at after school clubs or play schemes are not always considered appropriate.

There are also a number of training sessions and meetings you would be expected to attend during the day as part of your role as a foster carer.

Can I foster if I smoke?

If you or any other person living in your home uses tobacco or e-cigarettes then you will not be able to foster children less than five years of age. If you smoke and have children placed with you over five years of age, then you must smoke outside the house and out of view of foster children.

I have a criminal conviction, can I still foster?

Having a criminal conviction does not necessarily prevent you from fostering and every application is considered individually and on its own merits. If you have any offences against children, or other serious offences then you will not be considered for assessment as a foster carer.

All applicants are subject to an Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check, along with any members of your household aged 18 or over. No convictions or cautions can be considered as 'spent' and you should inform us immediately if you have any convictions or cautions, no matter how long ago they were committed.

I have recently moved to the UK, am I allowed to foster?

If you have just moved to the UK we will need evidence you can live and work indefinitely in the UK. You will also need to demonstrate that your language skills are sufficient to communicate clearly with children and professionals involved with caring for children. You will also need a support network with friends or family to encourage and support you in a fostering role.

I don't have any children. Can I still foster?

Yes you can, as long as you have some experience of looking after children, whether through work, voluntary or in a personal capacity. Your ability to interact with and form positive relationships with children will be assessed during the assessment process via discussions and observations.

Do I get paid to foster?

Yes. There are different scales of maintenance allowance depending on the age of the child, plus professional carers will also receive a carers fee for each week a child is in placement.

There are special tax arrangements for foster carer payments, there is information for foster carers on the [HMRC website](#).

Bolton Council will pay a retainer fee for up to 8 weeks per child within a 12 month period if you are available for placements.

Can I have pets in the house?

Yes, as long as they are happy to live around children. We may need to do a pet assessment.

Do I need to live in Bolton?

No, however you need to consider that you will need to transport children to school, contact, appointments, etc, and will be expected to attend meetings which will be based in Bolton.

I'm in the process of moving house, can I still apply to foster?

It depends on your circumstances and the stage you are at in the process. The assessment will take place in the home that we expect the foster child to be placed.

Can I take a foster child on holiday/abroad?

Yes you can, however you will need to gain consent and permission from the local authority and the person with parental responsibility for the child and you cannot take a child on holiday for longer than 28 days and/or during school time.

Can I foster if I live in rented accommodation?

Yes you can, but you will need a spare room for the child to sleep and permission from your landlord.

For more information:

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We look forward to hearing from you.

Thank You

