

Give. And take.

If there's room in your heart, find a place in your home.

To ensure our services are accessible to all, documents prepared by Blackpool Council are available in large print, Braille, on audio-cassette or computer disc upon request.

We can also provide help for British Sign Language users and provide information in other languages. Please ask for details.

Blackpool Fostering Service
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Questions & Answers About Fostering

What is fostering?

Fostering is caring for children or young people in your own home while their own parents are unable to look after them. Local authorities have a responsibility to look after children in their area who are in need, and they see foster care as a good way of meeting children's needs.

Although children will usually return to their family, this is sometimes not possible. In this situation a decision will be made to find a permanent new family for the child, possibly through adoption. While a child or young person is with a Foster Carer, their parents still have responsibilities for them and will expect to be very involved.

All children who are looked after by local authorities have a Social Worker. The Social Worker is responsible for planning and working with the child, their parents and carers in the best interests of the child.

What is a Foster Carer?

A Foster Carer is the person who looks after a child or young person on a temporary basis. Sometimes, the term foster parent is used, but Foster Carer is the preferred term because the job of fostering involves more than parenting.

Most children will eventually move back to their own parents and it is important to be clear, from the start, that Foster Carers are not trying to replace the child's parents but are helping to reunite the family.

Why do children need fostering?

There is usually a family crisis or problem, which means that it would be better for the child to be looked after by Foster Carers.

Parents may find that a teenager's behaviour becomes unmanageable, or the family of a child who is disabled - and therefore particularly

demanding of care and attention - may need a break.

Families who are affected by HIV and AIDS may need help with their children. They will appreciate carers who can provide supportive care to both the parents and the children.

Some children have been physically or sexually abused and have been removed from their parents by order of a court. Others are in residential children's homes because of the drastic shortage of Foster Carers in the UK.

The decision about where the child will live is taken by the child's Social Worker in consultation with the parents and other social work staff.

Children in Foster Care have also had to cope with the move to a foster home. Some have had many such moves and changes in their lives, and this will mean that they need sensitive care.

The way each child and young person reacts to upheaval will be different. Some may be aggressive and noisy, and others may at first be over-polite and too willing to please. Some will withdraw into themselves, and others will act as if they do not have a care in the world.

How old are the children?

Fostered children will be all ages, from babies to teenagers. The Social Worker will discuss with you what age children will best fit into your family.

How long do children stay?

There is no easy answer to this because it depends on the reason the children need looking after. It can be a day, a week, months or even years.

Most families will be encouraged to think about the sort of work they want to do with children and their families, and this will then identify what kind of care they can offer to children. Each child will have a care plan that is regularly reviewed, determining how long the child will stay.

Can anyone apply to become a Foster Carer?

Virtually everyone has the right to apply to be considered as a carer. Foster Carers are as diverse as the children they look after. You can be gay or straight, single or married or be in a long-term stable relationship. You can have a high or low income. You can own your own home or you can rent.

The only specific barriers to applying are these:

- You cannot apply to be a carer if you have certain types of criminal record. Because of this, the application process will include police checks so as to exclude people who would not be considered suitable to be carers. A conviction will not necessarily stop you from being accepted, but it will mean that the social services/social work department will carefully consider your application.

What is important is that you have time and space in your life for a child who may be demanding. You will need to show that you can care properly for children and are willing to undergo preparation and training for the job you will be doing. You will be asked to supply the names and addresses of personal referees who will be supportive of your application.

Foster Carers are needed from all ethnic communities.

Making an application does not commit you to anything and many people do not go further than the first information stage. This is quite acceptable, as people need to feel sure that fostering is right for them.

Do I have to have children of my own?

No. Having your own children means you can bring your knowledge and experience to caring for fostered children, but many children are successfully placed with carers who do not have children of their own or whose children have grown up.

Will my children be jealous?

If you have children, they may sometimes be jealous. However keen they may initially be to have foster brothers and sisters, they may become anxious as they see how much attention the fostered child needs. It is important that the

decision to foster is shared by everyone in the family, and that you are aware of your children's feelings. Blackpool now run groups for children of the foster family. These can provide an opportunity to meet and share experiences with other young people in similar circumstances. It also helps if your relatives and friends support what you are doing and want to learn more about fostering.

Do I need a big house?

No. As long as you have room for a child, it does not matter what size your home is. A child will need their own bed and space to keep personal possessions.

Do I get financial allowances?

Yes. You are given allowances that cover all the costs of caring for the child. The Fostering Network publishes a table of minimum recommended allowances although, sadly, not all fostering services pay as much as it is recommended they should. Blackpool operates a Payment for Skills Scheme.

What support will I get?

All fostered children have a Social Worker and every foster family has their own supervising Social Worker. They should be a source of help to you, as well as ensuring that the children were well looked after and their future is planned.

Do Foster Carers need training?

Yes, because foster care involves more than being a caring person (although that is, of course essential). Some children will have been very upset by their experiences, and skill is required to help them deal with this.

What about contact with the child's family?

It is normally very important that the child's relatives and other people who are special to the child remain closely involved, preferably by visits but also through telephone calls, letters or emails. The Social Worker will negotiate the nature of the contact with everyone.

How can I find out more?

By contacting Blackpool Council's Fostering Service on 01253 477888 and we will send you an information pack.