

YOUR GUIDE TO BECOMING A FOSTER CARER



stepbystep.org.uk

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on making the first step to becoming a foster carer.

Here at Step by Step Fostering, we know what a huge decision it is to decide to become a foster carer. Don't worry – you are not committed to anything yet. This is just the start of the journey.

This guide has been designed to help you through your journey and provide the information you need to make your decision about whether fostering is right for you and your family. This guide will also help you decide if Step by Step Fostering is the right agency to share your fostering journey with.

Our foster carers are remarkable, working tirelessly and with dedication to transform the lives of children and young people in care. At Step by Step Fostering, our role is to ensure that our foster carers are supported and empowered to do that.

“When young people have access to safe accommodation, wellbeing and opportunities, our communities grow stronger for everyone... including you. Step by Fostering believe that through every child nurtured and every carer empowered, we can build a brighter future for us all.”

ABOUT US

Step by Step Fostering provides long-term supportive foster placements for children and young people aged 0-18 with a focus on the 11-18 age range, including those with multiple and complex needs, within South Central England.

Step by Step Fostering passes its profits to our parent company, a youth homelessness charity Step by Step Partnership, as well as reinvesting in our own services. By fostering with us, you are supporting even more young people.



How we support foster carers, children and young people:

- **We support.** We foster carers, children and young people are at the centre of our work, regardless of circumstance, gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, age, religion and beliefs.
- **We believe in honesty,** openness and excellence in the support we offer you.
- We help **identify strengths** and support foster carers, children and young people in achieving their potential.
- We foster **excellence** in all our foster carers.
- **We always listen.**

We can also offer you support from other Step by Step services...

Launch: Offers advice for young people on housing options, rent deposits, benefits advice, sexual health advice and guidance, and health and wellbeing.

Counselling: Trained and experienced counsellors who listen to young people and support them to make positive decisions for themselves, through solution-focused therapy.

Step by Step's counsellors are professionally registered and a minimum of Level 4 qualified in counselling or clinical psychotherapy. Anxiety and depression are the most common conditions among the young people attending our counselling. We also help young people deal with issues such as bereavement, low self-esteem, loneliness, relationships, eating disorders and self-harm.

WHAT IS FOSTERING?

Fostering offers children and young people a caring and supportive home when they do not have biological families able to look after them. Foster placements might be on a temporary or permanent basis. The foster carer offers compassion and kindness while providing constructive boundaries, ensuring that a young person's emotional wellbeing and developmental needs are met.

However, being a foster carer is so much more than providing a bed and putting a roof over someone's head – it is helping each child and young person to build a better life.

Every child and young person deserves a safe and loving home to grow up in, to be surrounded by people who are dedicated to helping them grow, develop and to reach their potential. As a foster carer your role includes:

- Providing support and encouragement
- Helping to build confidence and self-esteem
- Supporting the development of social skills and life skills
- Creating a sense of self-worth
- Raising aspirations
- Helping to improve educational achievement

WHY DO CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE NEED FOSTERING?

There are many reasons why children and young people may come into care, but in many cases, they are unable to live with their family because they have experienced some form of neglect or abuse. Such stressful life events can impact a child's behaviour, ability to develop skills, learn information and get along with other children and adults.

Looking after a child or young person who has experienced trauma can be extremely challenging, but it can also be hugely rewarding to play such a pivotal role in helping them to overcome their early experiences, transforming their lives and enabling them to reach their full potential.



WHY FOSTER WITH STEP BY STEP?

PROVIDING WIDER SUPPORT TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Here at Step by Step Fostering, we aim to go the extra mile to ensure that our foster carers and the children and young people they provide care for are given the best possible support.

Step by Step Fostering is a dedicated fostering service. We help to find families for vulnerable children as well as providing them with support from our parent company Step by Step Partnership. Step by Step Partnership has been supporting children and young people for over 30 years.



FOSTER CARER SUPPORT

When you become a foster carer with Step by Step Fostering, you are assigned a supervising social worker who will provide support every step of the way. We know fostering isn't a 9-5 job, which is why we provide you with extra support, along with a generous fostering allowance, and comprehensive training and development.

PUTTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FIRST

We put children and young people at the heart of everything we do and every decision we make. All children and young people deserve to live in loving, safe and stable homes. We are not driven by profit, which is why all our surplus income is reinvested back into the services and support that we provide to our carers and young people, as well as continuing to support our parent company, Step by Step Partnership charity.

We are passionate about providing a voice for children and young people in care. Their needs and views are at the heart of everything we do. They will always come first.

We carefully match children to our fantastic team of foster carers. We never pressure our carers to take a placement just because a bed is available. It's about matching each child or young person with the most suitable carers to enable them to thrive and feel supported in their foster home.



A good foster carer is...



A good communicator
and listener



Supportive and
encouraging



Patient and respectful



Empathetic and
understanding



Caring and nurturing



Committed and
enthusiastic



Good humoured

WHO CAN FOSTER?

Our foster carers come from all kinds of backgrounds, cultures and ethnic groups. We believe that your sexuality, ethnicity, marital status, age or whether you own a home do not determine your suitability as a foster carer, and will therefore not impact your fostering application.

The basic criteria are:

- You need to be over 21 but there is no upper age limit. This is to ensure you have the emotional capabilities and life experience to fully care for a child or young person.
- You must have a spare bedroom. Every child or young person deserves individual space to adjust and grow. Sharing a bedroom with you or one of your own children is not a suitable situation.
- You don't need to own your own home. If you rent, you will need your landlord's permission.
- You must be a full-time resident in the UK or have indefinite right to remain. This is to ensure full stability for the child in your care. If you are waiting for a visa, you can still get in touch to learn more about fostering with us.

If you meet the above criteria, we would be keen to speak with you and discuss your suitability to foster in more detail. We will need to know about any experience that you have, as well as any convictions or involvement with the local authority. In some cases, these will affect your suitability to foster, but would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Every foster carer is different and can bring all kinds of unique strengths to the role. The most important criteria by far are your ability to listen, empathise, provide a stable and loving home, and speak up for the children or young people you care for.

FOSTERING JOURNEY

There are **five main stages** to your fostering journey with us, and it all begins with a conversation.

1. INITIAL ENQUIRY

Contact us about fostering. Click Enquire Now on our website, or email fostering@stepbystep.org.uk and we will call to have an initial discussion. At the end of the discussion, you will be asked if you are ready to progress to the next stage which is a home visit. You may want more time to think, and you can get in touch with us when you are ready to arrange a home visit or ask further questions.



The call will usually take between 15 and 30 minutes and can be scheduled at a time to suit you.

2. HOME VISIT

Our manager will visit you to talk in more detail about fostering with Step by Step Fostering. This will involve a more detailed discussion about your understanding of fostering and the needs of looked after children. Your circumstances, your family, any experience that is relevant to fostering and your motivations to become a foster carer will also be discussed.

You will be required to show us around your home to check that it is suitable for fostering, in particular the bedroom(s) that you intend to use for fostering. If you are married or live with a partner, they will also need to be involved in the process from this point onwards as they are classed as a secondary carer.

If you are ready, and Step by Step Fostering agree that you are ready to proceed, you will be invited to apply and to attend the Skills to Foster Course.



The visit usually takes around 2 hours and can be arranged at a time to suit you.

3. INTRODUCTORY TRAINING

You will be invited to our Skills to Foster course, to give you a detailed understanding of the life of a foster carer. The course will be insightful and emotional as you explore the reasons children and young people come into care, the experiences that they may have had, and your role in helping them to understand their feelings and manage their behaviour. The course also looks at the expectations of you and your family, and some of the other people that you will be required to work with as a foster carer.

On completion, you will be supported in deciding if you want to carry on with the process to become one of our amazing, valued foster carers.



Courses are delivered both in person and virtually. There are six sessions that last approximately 3-4 hours.

4. APPLICATION & ASSESSMENT

Once you have completed the Skills to Foster course, and if you and Step by Step Fostering agree that you should proceed, you will be allocated an assessor who will work with you to complete an assessment of your suitability to become a foster carer. This is called a Form F and has two parts:

1. A series of checks are carried out including medical, financial, DBS and employer and personal references. Because fostering involves the whole family, other significant adults including ex-partners and adult children may require checks. Your assessor will discuss this with you and confirm who needs to be involved.
2. Regular meetings with your assessor will involve detailed discussions about your family, your childhood and upbringing, and relationships, as well as things like your religion and beliefs.

The assessment can feel intrusive, but the questions are designed to help the assessor and panel to understand the impact that fostering might have on you and your family. It is important to be honest and open throughout and speak to your assessing social worker if you have any questions or concerns.



The assessment takes four to six months to complete. Your social worker will keep you informed of progress and the planned panel date.

5. PANEL

Your Form F will be presented to our fostering panel which is made up of independent care professionals. The panel meeting is held in person but can be held virtually if required. You will be required to attend for an interview. The panel will review the assessment and make a recommendation to Step by Step Fostering whether to approve you as a foster carer.

Prospective carers often get anxious at this stage, but there is no need to worry. You will meet with your assessor and social worker on a regular basis throughout your assessment and they will let you know if they have any concerns before you go to panel.



The panel call will usually take between 30 and 45 minutes and you will be informed of the date and time.

YOUR FIRST PLACEMENT

After approval we will begin the process of matching you to your first placement and we will continue to support you through every step of your fostering career.



TRANSFER TO STEP BY STEP

HOW TO TRANSFER TO STEP BY STEP FOSTERING

If you are thinking of transferring agency, talk to us and we can discuss your specific circumstances, why you are looking to transfer and answer any questions you have.

As an approved foster carer, you will have already been through the recruitment and assessment process. As such we will aim to fast-track this as much as possible. After your initial conversation with our enquiry team, you will be allocated a recruitment social worker who will meet with you to discuss the fast-track process and transfer protocols.

In order to approve you as a Step by Step Fostering foster carer, we will need to complete a new Form F assessment, but we often find that this is much quicker for carers who are transferring agency. Having completed a Form F with your current agency you know what to expect and have a deeper understanding of the process.

TELLING YOUR CURRENT AGENCY

At Step by Step Fostering, we follow the Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol set out by the Fostering Network. These protocols aim to promote high standards of practice, minimise the length of time taken in the transfer process, and most importantly, to ensure continuity of care for children in placement during any transfer of foster carers. The transfer protocols state that before you formally apply to a new agency, you must inform your current agency of your intention to transfer.

If you wish to transfer to Step and Step Fostering and you have a placement, you will need to inform the placing authority and a meeting will be held to discuss your plans to transfer and the implications for the children placed.

www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/recruitment-and-retention/transfer-protocols

FOSTER CARER FEES & ALLOWANCES

You will receive a generous fostering allowance that recognises the importance of your role in supporting a child or young person. The amount that you will receive will vary based on a number of factors such as the type of foster care you are providing, the age of the child and the complexity of their needs.

Here are some examples of the fees you could expect to receive:

Standard Placement 11-18 Years

Carer fee £400 - £450

Complex Needs 11-18 Years

Carer fee £500 - £580

Solo Placement 11-18 Years (high need)

Carer fee £550 - £600

As a foster carer, your pay will be calculated on a weekly basis, per child in placement. You will be paid monthly into your bank account. The amount that you receive is usually determined by the placing authority and will be based on the needs of the child.

The payment that you receive will be made up of a maintenance allowance, and a foster carer fee:

MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE

This part of the payment is designed to cover the costs of caring for any children or young people placed with you, such as food, travel and clothing, as well as a portion of the rent or mortgage and household bills. The amount you receive will vary depending on the ages and needs of the child or young person in placement.

FOSTER CARER FEE

This payment is effectively your salary, for the work that you do as a foster carer.

TAX ARRANGEMENTS

As a foster carer, you are classed as self-employed. However, your earnings will be subject to special tax arrangements which in most cases mean that you will pay very low, if any, tax on your income from fostering.

The main points are:

- There is a fixed tax exemption of up to £10,000 per year which means you don't have to pay tax on the first £10,000 income you make from fostering.
- Tax calculations only take into account the fee element of your fostering allowance. The maintenance allowance is to cover the expenses of fostering and is therefore not included.
- You also get tax relief of up to £250 per week for each child in your care. This means if you have a child over the age of 11 in your care for a whole year, you won't pay tax on your earnings up to £23,000.

BENEFITS AND FOSTERING

If you currently receive benefits, these may still be paid alongside your fostering payments. The government website has more information: <https://www.gov.uk/becoming-foster-parent/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>



TRAINING & DEVELOPEMENT

Here are the ways we support you as a foster carer:

YOUR OWN SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER


You will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker who will visit you regularly, provide supervision, and complete your annual review. An unannounced visit will be carried out at least once per year. Foster carers will be required to maintain written records about each child on our Intuitive Care case management system.

Supervising Social Workers will attend placement planning meetings, pre-disruption and disruption meetings, and child in care reviews wherever possible. During core working hours, carers can contact their supervising social worker for advice, information and support whenever necessary. If the supervising social worker is unavailable, the Manager will respond to urgent requests. In addition to the Supervising Social Workers, the foster carers will have access to the Fostering Support Workers.

OUT OF HOURS SUPPORT

We will provide you with a membership to the Fostering Network who provide a 24/7 stress support service. You will also be able to seek support from the placing authority's out of hours service.

<https://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/get-involved/membership/foster-carer-membership>



The fostering team will provide relevant training for foster carers, through a combination of in-house and externally-sourced training. Additional support and specialist training will be available through Coram BAAF and the Fostering Network.

PRE-APPROVAL TRAINING

During the recruitment process, you will attend our Skills to Foster training. There will also be other opportunities offered while you complete your Form F. After completing your application, you will be given access to our dedicated training website which provides over 100 training courses. The assessment to be a foster carer introduces theory of therapeutic parenting and begins to develop the skills needed to support children and young people and deliver life changing outcomes for them. Foster carers do not need to already have therapeutic parenting skills but need the ability to be open to advice and new ways of working.

POST-APPROVAL TRAINING

Once approved, we offer hundreds of courses designed to help you to enhance your knowledge and experience. Many of our courses are now online meaning that you can participate from the comfort of your own home.

You will start with an induction course and meet with a member of our fostering team to discuss your training and development needs. This will create your annual training plan.

Your first year will mainly be focused on completing the Training, Support and Development standards (TSD's). The TSD form part of your induction into your new role. They set out a national standard of what foster carers should know, understand and be able to do within their first year.

ANNUAL TRAINING

We have a set of 32 online short courses covering safeguarding, health and safety, GDPR, and first aid, amongst others, which you will be required to complete on a yearly basis.



TYPES OF FOSTERING PLACEMENTS

As a foster carer there are many factors to consider when deciding what type of fostering to pursue, including skills, family dynamics and lifestyle. With that in mind, below is a general overview of the different kinds of fostering on offer through Step by Step fostering:

STANDARD (INCLUDING UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN)

A low to medium need supported placement. The foster carer would receive a standard core payment and provide ongoing parental support.

SOLO

A medium to high need supported placement. This is where a young person is required to be placed on their own and provided with constant supervision and support by carer on a 1-1 basis. The foster carer receives a higher payment over and above the standard core payment.

PARENT AND CHILD

The carer provides support to guide the parent in developing their parenting skills. It is likely that in this type of placement, the carers take a more active role in the care of the child. There is a higher payment above the standard core payment.

DISABILITIES OR COMPLEX NEEDS

A complex need placement for a child or young person with usually enduring healthcare needs. There will be additional, specialist and sustained needs and demands, including at night time. There is a higher payment over the standard core payment.

SIBLING

This is a placement for siblings where a foster carer is able to support them together within the same household. Carers receive a standard core payment for each child and provide ongoing parental support.

CONTACT US

READY TO START YOUR FOSTERING JOURNEY? GET IN TOUCH TODAY.

@ fostering@stepbystep.org.uk

☎ 01252 411107

🌐  stepbystep.org.uk

