

Information for parents of children in foster care

Whatever the reasons, if your child needs to live with foster carers, you may be feeling upset, possibly angry and confused, or lonely.

Some parents who've been through this say having their child cared for by someone else is one of the most difficult things they have faced, even if it's for a short time, or they requested it themselves. They also say, because they are upset, it is often hard to take in what they are told about how foster care works.

To help you feel more confident about asking questions about foster care, we have put together some information below for you. This may also help you to join in the discussions that take place about how your child will be cared for while they are living in foster care. It can also help make it clearer who, between you, the social workers and the foster carers, decides what, and agrees what, works for your child on a day-to-day basis.

Who are foster carers and what do they do?

Foster carers are ordinary people doing the very important job of caring for other people's children.

Fostering families come in different shapes and sizes, just like families everywhere. Some foster only one child; some care for foster brothers and sisters and small groups of children. They may foster children for short periods – helping them to return home, perhaps – or for very long periods, when young person needs to stay until they are old enough to live independently.

Some other things you might like to know about foster carers are:

- Foster carers have to be approved by either the Fostering Service or fostering service provider before they can foster.
- The backgrounds of all foster carers, and any other adults in their household, are carefully looked at when someone applies to foster. This ensures they are the right people to care for children.
- Foster carers are approved and supported by local authorities or by voluntary or independent agencies. If local authorities have not got a suitable foster home for a child, they will often place him or her with a foster carer from another service. All fostering services have to comply with the same regulations and requirements, so this is not something to worry about.
- Foster carers receive training before and after they are approved to foster by their fostering service.
- Foster carers are supervised by their own social worker – a separate social worker from the one responsible for your child.

- All foster carers receive an allowance that covers the cost of caring for the children they look after. Many foster carers also receive a fee for their skills, time and experience. They are also expected to attend meetings, undertake training, and comply with regulations. Without these payments, they would not be able to foster as, like any other family, they would have to find paid employment elsewhere.

What happens when my child goes to stay with foster carers?

How does it work?

Social workers make sure the foster home is suitable for your child before he or she goes there.

Before, or very soon after, your child goes to stay with the foster carers, a Placement Planning Meeting will take place. This important meeting brings together the social worker and the foster carers, the parents (if that is possible) and the child (if old enough). The aim of the meeting is to ensure everyone meets each other, is clear about why your child needs a foster home and everyone knows about the Care Plan for your child.

The Care Plan is important because it helps everyone involved understand what needs to happen to meet your child's needs.

The social worker's job at this meeting is to make sure the foster carers have as much information as possible to care for your child. This includes information about family, health, education, routines, activities, likes and dislikes. You are probably the person who knows your child best and you will greatly help your child by sharing information with the social workers and the foster carers.

As the parent, you need information, too. You need to feel reassured about the care your child will receive. Even in very unusual situations when parents can't be told where their child is living, they are still entitled to information about the sort of foster family their child is going to stay with. This includes what they do, what sort of area they live in, what their home is like. This helps you think about your child there.

After the Placement Planning Meeting, the initial Care Planning Meeting and the Review meetings that come later are important for sorting out arrangements for contact and how parents, social workers and the foster carers will work together to make sure the child's needs are met in the foster home. It is important that as much as possible is planned in advance to avoid delays and misunderstandings.

You should notify the Child Benefit Office as soon as possible that your child is in foster care and is no longer living with you.

How do I know who makes decisions and who does what when my child is in foster care?

Parents have what is known as Parental Responsibility (PR). If there is a Care Order, the local authority shares PR with the parent. It is important that social workers work with the child's parents and that the parents are consulted about the care their child receives and their wishes taken into account.

Foster carers do not have PR, this means that any authority to make certain decisions is given to them by people who do have PR.

The Placement Planning Meeting is for discussing what decisions and tasks foster carers undertake on your behalf or on the local authority's behalf. Whether your child is on a Care Order, or looked after with your agreement (which is referred to as accommodated), it is important that you have opportunities to meet the foster carers and to play a part in this discussion.

If you cannot attend the Placement Planning Meeting, you still need to be fully involved so that you understand what is happening and so you can have your say about how things are done for your child.

The most important thing is that your child gets the care they need with minimum delay sorting out who can make particular decisions about your child, or give particular consents.

Children and young people in foster care say they feel embarrassed and upset if there are delays agreeing things, or if getting consents and agreements from parents and social workers make them stand out from other children. That is why parents, foster carers and social workers all have a responsibility to agree as much as possible in advance, to make sure things work well for the child.

If you give prior permission, or if the local authority gives authority to foster carers to consent to things like emergency or routine medical treatment, school trips, overnight stays or haircuts (i.e. the everyday decisions that all children need), this will enable the foster carer to make the best arrangements possible for your child.

However, responsibilities work both ways. So, for you to feel comfortable with foster carers taking decisions that you or the social workers have agreed in advance, you are entitled to receive good reliable information from the foster carer or the social worker about what has been decided, and when. You also need to be reassured that you will be asked about the other things that arise. Of course, all this will depend on your child's age and your situation.

[Five things that all parents need to know about delegated authority and consents:](#)

1. You are entitled to help and support to understand and play your essential part in your child's life when they are in foster care.
2. The relationship between you and your child's foster carer is important. It is better for your child if you can talk together and agree things. Whenever possible you should meet the foster carer at Placement Planning Meetings and reviews and at times during your child's stay – and not just when contact takes place.
3. You need to be clear about the arrangements for authority and consents in relation to your child – what you will do, what the social workers will do, and what the foster carers are authorised to do.
4. If children are going to stay with foster carers until they are old enough to live independently, it is usually helpful and feels more normal for them to have foster carers who can take more day-to-day decisions for them. This ensures things can be sorted easily and quickly for them and stops them feeling different from their friends. It is not about leaving you out.
5. As your child gets older, he or she should be helped and encouraged to take more responsibility and make more decisions in his or her life as part of becoming more grown up. It may not be comfortable for parents or for foster carers, but sometimes the young person's opinion will count most when decisions are made.

Six top tips for parents

1. Do speak to the social worker and foster carer/s about the details of your child's day-to-day care, routines and preferences, such as their health, religious practices and education. You could write these down for the foster carer.
2. Make sure you are contactable. Social workers or foster carers may need to consult you or advise you of something at short notice, so let them know of any change of address or telephone number.
3. Don't be afraid to ask questions about your rights, about foster care and about your child's foster carers.
4. Do attend meetings.
5. Ask for support if you need it, speak with the fostering social worker about additional services or sources of support for parents of children in foster care.
6. All fostering services must produce a Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide about how the service is run and how it works. Ask to see these if you want to find out more about foster care.

What things mean:

Parental responsibility – all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities, and authority, which by law a parent has in relation to a child and his property.

Accommodated – when young people are looked after by the local authority and in foster or residential care with the agreement of their parents.

Care Order – a court order that means parental responsibility for a child is shared by the parent and the local authority. The local authority can only override a parent's exercise of their parental responsibility if it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

Delegated authority – where a person with parental responsibility gives permission to another person to do or agree something on their behalf in relation to a particular child

If you would like more information about what it means for children in care you can find details here: [Children in care - Dorset Council](#). The site provides lots of helpful details about our commitment to children in care, our framework for delivering effective services to children in care, details about your child's education and various policies, as well as helpful contact numbers.

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