

Start your Journey

**A guide to becoming
a foster carer**

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We're on this journey together



You could be about to start a truly incredible journey. Fostering, whether you're looking at this for the first time or you've fostered before, is one of the most rewarding things you can do.

If you're completely new to fostering, this booklet will give you an idea about what fostering means and what you can expect next. If you're an experienced foster carer looking for a new agency, it will help you make important decisions about transferring. Becoming a foster carer is an amazing opportunity to give a child or young person the fresh start they need.

When you become a foster carer with us, you're supported every step of the way. You'll always have the help, training and encouragement you need to change a child or young person's life.

Here at FCA Scotland our journey began in 2002 with one vision and that was 'to make a positive and lasting difference to the lives of children and young people'. Many years later and our vision and values remains the same, we continue to be committed to helping children and young people reach their full potential. Becoming a foster carer isn't just life changing for a child but also for you – imagine making a real difference to a young person's life, giving them positive childhood experiences, allowing them to be children, to have fun and to grow up to be happy confident adults. We're proud of our heritage and excited about our future.

We hope this booklet will encourage you to become a foster carer with FCA Scotland and experience all the rewards that come with it.



What is foster care?	04
Can I foster?	06
Moving to the FCA Scotland family	07
Team Parenting®	08
Different types of fostering	10
Training and career progression	12
How will fostering affect my family?	13
Your fostering allowance	14
Our foster carers	16
The 7 steps to fostering	18



What is foster care?

Foster carers give a safe, stable family home to children and young people who can't live with their birth families anymore.

What's the difference between fostering and adoption?

When you foster a child or young person, their birth family or the local authority is still legally responsible for them, and the child keeps their surname. This is different to adoption, where the child takes their adoptive family's surname and their new family becomes entirely responsible for them. Sometimes, a child or young person only needs fostering for a few days. Other times, a fostering placement can become what's known as a 'long-term placement' lasting years, or even permanently. Adoption is always permanent. Another difference is that adoptive parents don't get financial support like foster carers do.

What kind of children and young people will I look after?

Children and young people need fostering for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes, it's because someone in their family is too ill to look after them, or there's been a family breakdown. Sometimes, it's because they've been neglected or abused and aren't safe. Children react to being fostered differently. Some settle in with their foster family relatively easily. Others might need extra help with managing how they feel or with their behaviour. But you'll never be on your own. We're always here to help.

Who can become a foster carer?

You don't need any qualifications. To be a great foster carer, you just need to be able to give a vulnerable child or young person a safe and loving home to grow up in. Just as the children we place are all different, so are our foster carers. We work with thousands of amazing foster carers from all walks of life, regardless of their relationship status, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, age, gender, income or number of birth children.





Can I foster?

All kinds of people make great foster carers. The one thing they have in common is the drive to turn a child or young person's life around.

Becoming a foster carer can never be a box ticking exercise. That's why we work closely with you throughout the application process – so we get to know you as a person. But there are a few areas we have to check first to make sure children and young people grow up in the environment they need.



You have to be over 21 to foster – but there's no upper age limit.



Regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability, you can foster.



You must have a spare bedroom, but you don't have to own your own house.



You don't have to be in work before you foster, you will receive financial support.



You need to have British citizenship or permanent leave to stay in the UK.



You'll need patience, energy, commitment and resilience.



You don't need qualifications or experience in childcare.



You don't need to be married or in a couple, you can be single and foster.



You don't have to be a parent already, we will give you lots of training.



Generally, you need to be able to foster full time, but there are a few exceptions so please talk to us about your situation.



Moving to the FCA Scotland family

Transferring from another fostering agency is a big decision, but we'll help you through the whole process.

We'll do our best to make transferring as easy and straightforward as possible – for you and any foster children you want to bring with you. Normally, that means an initial meeting with you, your current agency, the social worker for any child currently placed with you and someone from our team. It makes sure we're all up to date and working together.

If you don't currently have a foster child, you can give your current agency, local authority or trust 28 days' notice in writing and apply to us right away. We will aim to complete the transfer process within 12 weeks.

Switching might seem daunting at first, but once you're with us, we're confident it will be the last time you change fostering agency.

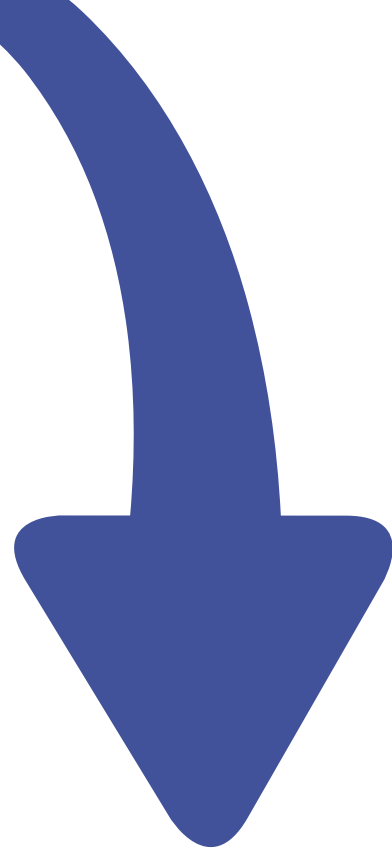
Why transfer to us?

You do your very best for the children and young people in your care. So we believe your fostering provider should do the same for you. When you foster with us, you're joining our family, and we'll look after you as one of our own.

- We are an established fostering provider and we've been fostering children and supporting foster carers since 2002.
- Our professional training and development opportunities give you all the skills and support you need, whatever your experience.
- 24 / 7 expert local support, which means you'll have access to a range of fostering professionals right around the clock.
- Our extended support network and Team Parenting® – our unique model of support which includes a network of childcare experts who may work with each child or young person to look after every single area of their well-being. Depending on the child's needs, this may include therapists, education leads, social workers.
- Regular support groups as well as fun social activities and events for all the family.
- Access to The Exchange, our exclusive online platform that offers hundreds of offers at all your favourite high street retailers.
- Have your say. Directly influence how we operate through our National Foster Carer Forum.

"I found my assessment to panel a fantastic experience. The team has been welcoming, friendly and supportive. In the first month, my young person has attended three events and met other young people, boosting her confidence. I have had a great start!"

FCA Scotland Foster Carer



Team Parenting®

When you foster a child with us, you don't raise them alone. You're part of a team of people who are all committed to helping your foster child have the happiest, healthiest future. We call it Team Parenting®.

Team Parenting®

Team Parenting® is the network of childcare experts who may work with you. They may include therapists, education officers, social workers and support workers. They help you look after every area of your foster child or young person's wellbeing. Your foster child's birth family might be involved as well. Together, we can give your foster child a safe, stable home to grow up in. In turn, that gives them the best chance of recovering from their past and becoming a happy, healthy adult.

What are the components of Team Parenting®?

Team Parenting® is guided by our range of therapeutic interventions and our ethos – to establish safety and stability for all children and young people so that they form positive, attached relationships with their foster parents. It doesn't matter if a child's needs are standard, complex or specialist.

Achieving recovery and resilience for young people can sometimes be a complex therapeutic task that takes years. In these cases, we may work with the local authority that placed them to provide therapeutic interventions.

How are we different to fostering with the council?

We're an independent fostering agency, sometimes shortened to IFA. One of the main differences between fostering with us and with your local authority is our Team Parenting® network. Although we work with the local authority to find foster homes for children, this access to expertise and support that's so focused on you and your foster child often isn't available when you foster directly through your local authority.

We are one of the most established independent fostering agencies in Scotland. We've been helping people become extraordinary foster carers since 2002. We know how important it is for foster families to have the right support, training and experience to do the absolute best for the young person in their lives.

Free FosterTalk membership

FosterTalk is an organisation that gives support to foster carers across the UK. They give impartial advice, information and counselling on everything from fostering, to finances, to family. When you foster with us, you can use their services as much as you like for free. Once you're one of our approved foster carers, we'll also give you, your partner, children, carers and any other dependants full legal expenses insurance.

Our standards are high

We're inspected by the Care Inspectorate. This means you can be confident we do things safely, legally and to a high standard.

Have fun!

It can be hard work being a foster carer, so we want you to have plenty of fun as well. We have a great social calendar, packed with events. You'll be invited to family trips to theme parks, zoos, the bowling, forest walks and all kinds of other adventures. Children and young people have a blast, and our foster carers really appreciate the chance to catch up with other foster families, too.

You're always supported

We have an excellent foster carer to social worker ratio which is one of the reasons why we're able to give you, your family and your foster child the highest quality of care. But you don't just benefit from help from childcare experts. We also hold regular local support groups for foster carers to talk to each other, share their experiences, and give advice and moral support.

The Exchange

As a foster carer with us you will have access to The Exchange our online platform. You will be able to log on to get everything from regional / national updates, blogs to lots of shopping discounts and great family deals too.

“Fostering can be a challenging life to lead.

We feel fortunate to be part of the FCA Scotland team as we have never been left feeling alone.”

FCA Foster Carer



Different types of fostering

The range of fostering types you can choose from reflects the different reasons why children and young people need fostering. It means each child gets the specific care they need, and you can make the best use of your specific skills.

- **Interim** – These vary in their duration and are often linked to further assessments of the child and other family members, together with court processes. This type of fostering would mean caring for a child or young person for up to 24 months.
- **Long term** – Caring for a child or young person for more than 24 months. Typically, this is when a child or young person is unable to return to their birth parents, and placements continue until the age of 18 sometimes longer.
- **Permanent** – For a child or young person this means that the care planning process has concluded that they will thrive best if they are cared for away from home on a permanent basis. This type of fostering would mean caring for a child or young person until independence.
- **Continuing care** – In some cases, long term / permanent foster placements may be extended beyond the age of 18.
- **Short break fostering** – Here, foster carers look after a child while their birth parents (or foster carers) take a short holiday usually between one day and two weeks.
- **Solo** – This is for children with especially complex needs who would benefit from being the only child in the home.
- **Sibling** – Finding a home for brothers and sisters can really help children, but as it demands more time and space there is a shortage of carers in this area.
- **Unaccompanied children and young people** – An increasing number of unaccompanied migrant children are reaching the UK, all facing a long wait in a strange culture while their applications for asylum are being processed.
- **Specialist fostering** – This includes supporting children with complex health or physical needs or especially challenging behaviours.

Don't worry about choosing what type of placement is best for you now, though. We'll talk you through your options and help you decide.



Training and career progression

Perhaps you have children of your own, or you've fostered before. Or maybe you've never really worked with children.

Whatever your experience, we'll give you all the training and support you need to be an amazing foster carer.

We hold regular training days and courses at our local offices together with access to online training from your own home.

Training courses

We cover topics like managing difficult behaviour, empowering children and young people, identity and self-esteem, and child protection. The more you learn, the more opportunities you'll get to further your skills through our advanced training.

Therapeutic fostering training

When you live with a foster child or young person, you get to understand them like no one else. You're the person who could help them trust adults again.

We know specialist training and support is really helpful for foster carers in this position. We run a number of courses to teach you therapeutic techniques and theories so you can help your foster child grow more confident.



How will fostering affect my family?

Fostering a child or young person can be an amazing thing for your whole family

That's exciting, but they might also find sharing you with someone new daunting. It's important your whole family talks openly and honestly about how you feel so you can work out if it's the right thing for all of you.

Foster children can make your family stronger

There are so many good things about inviting a foster child into your family. For example, your children will learn about being part of a team, sharing, making friends and relating to someone new. Like in all families, there might be challenging times. But you don't have to solve problems on your own. We'll help you with support and advice along the way.

We keep everyone involved

Your whole family plays an important part in your fostering journey, and they all contribute to making your foster child feel at home. That's why one of our social workers will come and meet children already in your family to talk to them about what they think and feel about fostering.

Special guidance for your children

We have extra support available for children and young people already in your family. For example, they can talk to your social worker any time. We'll put them in touch with other young people in the area who are in a fostering family so they can share their experiences. Young people over 18 can join in with training and support groups. They can also join you and your foster children on activity days away, or get some time just with you when you work with one of our short break foster carers.



Your fostering allowance

Your fostering allowance

Fostering a child or young person isn't something people choose to do for the money. The reward of helping to change someone's life for the better is what motivates our foster carers.

But fostering is hard work and takes a lot of your time, so we give all our foster carers excellent financial support and other benefits.

What you could earn

There's no set allowance when it comes to fostering. Instead, a number of factors influence how much you'll get. We understand that some children have more challenging needs and requirements than others, and that sometimes you'll need a helping hand. The age of the child being placed with you, and the type of placement can also affect the allowances and fostering payments you'll receive.

As a rough guide, we offer, on average, allowances of £481 per week, per child. Plus, additional allowances and tax exemptions.

Will I have to pay tax?

When you become a foster carer, you are classed as self-employed and entitled to significant tax relief. Many foster carers pay no tax at all, but if you have more than one placement or another job alongside fostering, you may need to pay tax.

You will be completing your own tax return but when you foster with us, you get the benefit of a free tax and accountancy helpline, and a discounted tax return service to help you with your paperwork. **For more information, you can contact HM Revenue and Customs.**

You still get your other benefits

You may still be entitled to benefits such as tax credits. For more information, you can contact the Department for Work and Pensions.

You can also get unlimited professional and independent advice, information and support during your assessment and training process.

Our Foster carers

“

To be honest FCA Scotland makes fostering one of the best decisions I ever made. Our supervising social worker is very professional, understanding, patient and guides us within our role as foster carers.”



“

I work closely with the FCA Scotland therapist; she listened to all my worries and was able to give me strategies to use to help the child in my care.”



“

I enjoy all the training FCA Scotland offer, especially the therapy led training. The ADAPT course was really interesting, I learned more about the young person as well as myself as a result of doing this course.”



“

The FCA Scotland Children and Support Service provides plenty of opportunities for children and young people to attend activities and events. Feedback is also taken from them on how to improve the services which is really good.”



Ready to start your journey? Please get in touch to talk to one of our team. We're here to help every step of the way.

1

Get in touch

Talk to a member of our friendly fostering team on 0141 646 4805 or filling in our online form for a call back. Everyone's journey is different, so getting personal advice is really helpful.

2

We'll visit you at home

One of our officers will come and see you to talk more about fostering and answer your questions. They'll tell you more about what you can expect, how we'll support you, and find out a bit more about you.

3

Start your application

Once you've decided fostering's definitely for you, we'll start your application together. The process involves an application form and giving your consent for us to obtain statutory checks and references.

4

Fostering assessment

Following your application, we'll undertake a fostering assessment. Your assessing social worker will visit you and your family at home a number of times over a few months to speak to you and collect information about you and your life. It helps us understand more about you and what sort of foster placements might suit you best.

5

Preparatory training

All prospective foster carers complete a pre-approval training course during the assessment process to help you learn more about fostering, what to expect and how to handle different situations.

6

Meet the panel

Once your assessment is finished, you'll go to see a fostering panel to answer a few more questions. This group is made up of people with experience in a number of fostering areas. Don't worry. Your social worker will help you prepare and be there for support. At the end, the panel will make their recommendation.

7

Now the real journey starts!

You've made it as an officially approved foster carer and you're ready for your first placement! This is an exciting time, but you'll probably feel a bit nervous too. Our team is still here to help you, from finding the placement that's right for you to helping your first foster child settle in.

The 7 steps to fostering

Still not sure if fostering is for you?
Give us a call anyway and ask us any
questions you have. You don't need
to commit to anything yet.

You could be about to start an amazing journey.

Fostering a child or young person is one of the most rewarding things you can do. This guide will help you think about if it's right for you and your family, and see how we support you every step of the way.



Got a question about fostering?

Call our friendly officers on **0141 646 4805** or email **startyourjourney@thefca.co.uk**.



Learn more about fostering, find events and meet-ups near you, read real foster carers' stories and more at **fcascotland.co.uk**.



Join our friendly community of foster carers and professionals at **facebook.com/fcascotland** or follow us **@FCAScotland**