



Men Who Foster

With you every step of the way

Fosterline
0800 040 7675
your fostering advice service

www.fosterline.info



Men can foster as a single person, or as part of a couple whether married, in a civil partnership or co-habiting. As with other foster carers they may spend most of their time on their fostering role or may have a full or part-time job outside the home.

The role of a foster carer can be both extremely rewarding and at the same time extremely challenging. Being a male foster carer has, arguably, even more challenges due to societal attitudes that often still assume women to be the traditional care giver. Men who foster who are Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and/or LGBTQ may have multiple negative assumptions made about them and their role as a foster carer. Every foster carer has unique skills, experiences and abilities that they bring to the fostering task, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race or culture and fostering services are keen to recruit a diverse range of foster carers to meet the differing needs of looked after children. This is to address the shortage of foster carers across England but also improve placement choice and matching. 56% of looked after children in England were male at year end 2019. BAME children are more likely to be in care than white children and the majority of the children in this group were also less likely to be adopted.

<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/health/social-care/adopted-and-looked-after-children/latest>

Fosterline have also produced a fact sheet for **LGBTQ carers** that you may also find useful.

The benefits for fostered children of having a male foster carer in the fostering household:

- Male foster carers make an important contribution of engaging children and young people in activities which contribute to the development of resilience
- Experiencing “involved fathering” may alter negative internal learnt behaviours and increase the chances of the young person making positive relationship choices in adulthood.
- Increase positive role models and self-identity. Boys may not have sufficient opportunities to access appropriate role models or find acceptance for their “maleness” culture and/or sexuality.



A positive role model – Men's relationship with the foster children

Living with a male foster carer(s) gives looked after children the chance to explore how to form trusting relationships with men and to have contact with men who understand their needs. It is vital that these children grow up with positive images of men being fun, creative, nurturing and, above all, safe in a family setting. Male foster carers have an important role to play within the fostering task.

Despite the significance of this role, social attitudes towards men in caring roles, particularly with children, often create obstacles. Men may experience more suspicion, judgements and gender discrimination than women who foster.

Children and young people, dependent on their earlier experiences, may expect men to leave the home, be violent/sexually abusive towards their partner (if fostering as a couple), or towards them and/or break promises. Men who foster give children and young people the chance to learn how to establish a trusting and safe relationship with men. Being able to relate well to both males and females is likely to be of significant benefit in a child or young person's personal and social development.

Research on male foster carers as role models shows children and young people flourish when the men who foster them model these behaviours or qualities:

- Caring, non-threatening, non-violent
- Appropriate use of power and authority
- Being consistent
- Spending time with children and young people including one to one
- Offering a stable, loving environment
- Supportive of their fostering partner (where applicable)
- Showing feelings and emotions (not just anger)
- Supporting children and young people to show their feelings and emotions appropriately
- Modesty
- Challenging stereotypes
- Promoting cultural differences and belief systems
- Sharing care and routine tasks such as cooking
- Assisting young people to understand right and wrong and making positive choices
- Social, sensible drinking

However, a male foster carer will need to think carefully about the role he plays in caring for children, particularly those who have had a negative experience with men in the past.

Safer caring

All foster carers need to think about safer caring issues, and for male foster carers this can be a particularly challenging aspect of the role. How can you balance the need to protect yourself alongside the need to provide care to those you foster? The answer lies in good training and support from your fostering service.

Everyone in a fostering household needs to make sure children and young people are safe, feel safe and household members avoid putting themselves in a position where a child or young person may misunderstand their behaviour. A child's past experience may make them feel less safe with a male and this may make them more likely to misinterpret behaviours. This needs to be taken into consideration when planning how to care for the child or young person. Avoiding contact with men is not good for the child or young person for their future wellbeing; they need to spend time with a positive male role model.

The foster carer should ensure their Safer Care policy is regularly reviewed and updated with their supervising social worker to reflect the needs of the child/children in the household and keep everyone in the household as safe as possible. If there are particular issues of concern or risk it may be appropriate to request a Risk Assessment is also completed to help clarify what measures are needed to reduce or manage risks appropriately.

Fostering services should provide male foster carers with targeted training, such as “Men who Foster”, and may provide a men’s support group so that you can meet regularly with other male foster cares for support and to exchange tips and ideas.

Discuss all of these issues thoroughly with your fostering service and ensure that you receive the right level of support for you and your placement, and don’t be afraid to ask for help. If you feel you are being treated differently by professionals as a result of gender race or sexuality, you can raise this with the fostering service and have the option to make a formal complaint.

Single Male Foster Carers

Fostering children and young people as a single foster carer is hard and there is no doubt single foster carers face additional pressures and challenges. As women continue to be seen traditionally as caregivers’ single males may also face increased negative attitudes and suspicion. However, as there is a greater awareness of the different models of family within society, attitudes towards single male carers are beginning to change. All single carers need to ensure they have a supportive network around them to offer practical and emotional support. Fostering is a challenging role and support may be available within their extended family/community, access to a buddy and/or other support services via their fostering service such as support groups etc. They may also have a fostering membership service in place to access specialist advice such as counselling and legal advice.

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As with all foster carer households matching considerations will be key to successful placement outcomes. When considering any new placement make sure you have as much information as possible on the child/children's needs. If you have any concerns discuss this with your supervising social worker to determine whether the issues can be addressed within the safer care policy and any accompanying risk assessments. Consider the need for any additional support perhaps from within your own network (with agreement from the fostering service) or whether any additional support services are required. Single male carers sometimes tell Fosterline they felt they needed "to prove their ability to foster" immediately upon approval but resist pressure to accept care of a child if you are uncomfortable or concerned about meeting the specific needs of a child. It may be that the match on this occasion is not appropriate, and a later placement breakdown can be disruptive and distressing to the child and leave carers feeling guilt and self-doubt about their fostering ability.

Tips from men who foster

- As a man who fosters, it can feel as if you don't know what to do for the best at times; you may be afraid to hug a young girl who is upset, for fear of being called an abuser. Good communication, effective record keeping and open discussions about real-life explanations of safer caring should help to make you feel more confident in your role.
- Reading together or doing homework together is an excellent way to build relationships with children and young people.
- If meetings and training are always arranged when you are not available, point this out and suggest more appropriate times.
- Assessment, support, training and good matching will be especially important if you intend to foster as a single male carer, or as the main carer in a couple.
- Discuss all of these issues thoroughly with your fostering service and ensure that you receive the right level of support for you and your foster placement and don't be afraid to ask for help.
- If your fostering service or agency does not have a buddying scheme or a support group for men who foster, suggest they start one. Men need to be able to talk to other men who foster, particularly because fostering is often seen as a women's role.
- Be willing to answer questions and discuss any concerns about the placement that may be expressed by the child's family. Many questions and concerns can be resolved with good communication. This does not mean you should put up with inappropriate questions or discriminatory attitudes.



Read how you can make a difference just like Peter has.

Peter never chose to be a single male foster carer but demonstrated that he had a positive influence on the children in his care. Peter originally went through the assessment process with his ex-wife over eight years ago. He didn't have his own children and at the outset his wife was the main carer. During their first placements Peter found that he had an ability to connect with some of the children in their care and became more and more involved, especially with some children that expressed difficult and challenging behaviours and attachment issues.

Following the break-up of his marriage, Peter decided to continue fostering alone and currently cares for two young people who nominated him for a prestigious award. At the time Peter received his award he had in his care two teenagers.

BJ aged 16 added: "Over the past three and a half years Peter has helped me to control my temper and keep to school and home rules. I know that I was very difficult to live with but with Peter's help I am a calmer person."

Peter fosters young people to give them the best future he possibly can he finds this rewarding and life changing for them, but also for him! Peter would recommend being a foster carer and while giving so much of himself to the role he has also taken so many positives from fostering and it has taught him never to be complacent, always be ready for anything and be adaptable.

Peter is a fantastic example for single male foster carers who offer a genuine home to young people in real need. Everyday foster carers just like Peter make a positive difference to so many vulnerable children and young people and at times it is very difficult and challenging but there are lots of rewards too.

If you are in England and would like more information about fostering or require impartial confidential advice on a fostering issue please **contact Fosterline**.

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**Department
for Education**

Fosterline is funded by the
Department for
Education and delivered
by FosterTalk.