

A photograph of two women sitting at a table, engaged in a conversation. The woman on the right is wearing a dark blue polka-dot shirt and is gesturing with her hand while speaking. The woman on the left is seen from the back, wearing a light-colored top. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a window with curtains.

Attending Fostering Panel as a Prospective Foster Carer

With you every step of the way

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If you are a prospective carer going through the assessment process there is likely to be lots of appointments with your assessing social worker (which may be virtual in the current pandemic), and training to do. In the midst of this busy time you will be aware that you are heading towards a conclusion of the assessment process and may have received or awaiting a date to attend Fostering Panel. This is a date that often brings mixed emotions; for some excitement and perhaps even a feeling of relief to be concluding a lengthy assessment process. However, for many it can bring anxiety perhaps reminding applicants of poor interview experiences or fear of meetings/public speaking. Here are our top tips!

Make sure you have read and understood the assessment report and been given sufficient time to do this. Note any errors prior to signing it. If there is content that is not clear seek clarification prior to signing and if you do not agree with some content and /or any recommendations made there is usually a space to indicate this on the report. If there is disagreement you may wish to consider if you want to submit any additional written submission or evidence that challenges the information within the report. Seek clarity on the timeframe for doing this as the reports are required to be forwarded to panel members at least 5 working days before the Fostering Panel meeting (National Minimum Standard 14.3)

Confirm whether the meeting will require you to attend in person or via a virtual process (such as via Teams or Zoom) or might be done over the telephone. Make sure any communication needs are understood and support is in place e.g that an interpreter is available if required. If the meeting is in person note the venue (as it may not be held at the fostering service) and time and plan your journey and any childcare or other commitments in advance. Aim to arrive a little earlier than the slot allowing time for traffic/parking or public transport and if you are delayed let your assessing social worker know (have their contact details with you). If the meeting is virtual and you are unfamiliar with this format ask the assessing social worker to set up a practice session with you to familiarise yourself (or practice with family/friends).

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If you are attending as part of a couple discuss beforehand how you want to communicate at the meeting, for example will one of you be better taking the lead response to any questions and the other then adding their comments or do you wish to take turns in answering questions? Whatever you decide ensure that you both contribute actively to the meeting and try to avoid interrupting or speaking over one another.

If you are attending as a single carer it may be helpful to find out beforehand about the accompanying person policy as it may be possible to take someone with you for support (National Minimum Standard 14.5). It is also helpful to clarify whether they would be allowed to speak during the meeting (if not perhaps they can write some key points beforehand with you that you want to say and the person accompanying can help remind you of as the meeting progresses). Sometimes just a smile or encouraging nod from a friend can give confidence so let them know what you feel may help you. It may be useful to have water available in case you get a dry throat and tissues as the meetings can sometimes evoke unpredictable emotions.

Taking time to understand the role of the Fostering Panel and the roles of panel members, some of whom will be independent of the fostering service and may be from other areas such as education, health or carers themselves, may also help. Many Fostering Panels produce a panel booklet that includes a photograph and information about individual members that can help ease anxieties. Panel members will usually introduce themselves on the day and will try to put you at ease. It may be helpful to take to the meeting an introduction book about your household that may be shared with any future child to be placed that includes pictures of your home and family members. Briefly sharing this can help to “set the scene”.

If you are a Regulation 24 kinship/connected person carer with a child already placed it may be appropriate to share pictures of the child in your home with family members or taking part in family activities. Talk to the assessing social worker about this in advance to see if this is allowed- it may be a real ice breaker and help to make you feel more confident. Try to establish a bit of eye contact with the Panel Chair and other members if you can and smile-remember this is something that you want to do, and it will help ease any nerves!



Panel will want to be assured that the assessment has covered all the statutory requirements in place for recruiting a foster carer which may result in questions to the assessing worker or to the prospective carer(s). There may be gaps or events referred to in the assessment that the panel wish to explore further. Try to focus your answers and don't be afraid to ask for a question again if you lose your thread of thought or are concerned if you have fully answered any query. If your assessment refers to sensitive or difficult information, try to be prepared for any questions by discussing this beforehand with the assessor and take your time.

There may be questions such as why you want to foster, how you feel about continued training and how you work with others. Other examples may include questions about caring for children from different backgrounds and/or children with additional needs and your understanding of safeguarding so it may be helpful to discuss these areas in advance with your assessing social worker.

You may be asked to give feedback on your experience of the assessment or if you have any questions. Be honest, but if you have a list of concerns remember that Panel's role is not to investigate complaints but you may wish to give a short summary/overview (and can request a copy of the complaint procedure from the fostering service).

Panel can make recommendations about suitability to foster and terms of approval but it will be the Agency Decision Maker who will make the decision within 7 working days of receiving the minutes (NMS 14.9). Applicants will receive this decision (NMS 14.10) orally (within 2 working days) and in writing (within 5 working days). Occasionally a Panel/Agency Decision Maker may decide to recommend deferring an item to return to Panel within an agreed timescale. This can feel very disappointing for a prospective carer but should not necessarily be interpreted as a negative perception of the prospective carer(s). It may be an oversight in relation to statutory checks that is outstanding or a gap in the information presented that needs to be addressed. Ask your assessing social worker for clarity on this if you are unsure.

If you disagree with a decision from the Agency Decision Maker about suitability to foster or your terms of approval you may appeal and the letter will give you details of options on how to do this. Applicants can choose to appeal either to the fostering service via Panel or (dependent on the circumstances) opt to appeal via the Independent Review Mechanism (Fostering Services (England) Regulations 27(6) and 27(7)). However, the option to appeal expires 28 days after the date on the letter.

Fosterline provide friendly impartial confidential support to any prospective and approved carer in England on any fostering matter. If you have a query about Fostering Panels or any other fostering issue please contact us on **0800 040 7675** or visit www.fosterline.org!

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step of the way

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