



What is the Difference Between Fostering & Adoption?

With you every step of the way

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your fostering advice service

www.fosterline.info



Fosterline receives many enquiries from people who are considering becoming a foster carer or adoptive parent and are unclear about the difference. Current foster carers may also contact Fosterline as they are considering putting themselves forward to adopt a child in their care. This fact sheet may help you understand the differences between fostering and adoption and decide which is right for you.

What is fostering?

Foster carers offer short term, temporary or longer-term care to a child or children who are unable to live with their birth family. A foster carer does not hold legal “parental responsibility” for the child as this is usually held by the local authority and birth parents. Parental responsibility refers to duties that may include providing a home for the child, protect and maintain the child, choosing a child’s education provision, agreeing to any medical treatment, naming the child or agreeing any change in name and looking after a child’s property.

The foster carer will have a fostering agreement in place with their fostering service and will work in partnership with other agencies to care for the child according to their care plan and other plans that may be in place such as personal education plans etc.

Whilst a foster carer does not have parental responsibility, they may have delegation of authority (unless there are factors that dictate the contrary) to make some decisions and each local authority has a policy on this setting out its approach. This is to enable foster carers to make day to day decisions about health, education leisure etc and any decisions delegated to them should be recorded in the child’s Placement Plan. For further information about delegation of authority [please click here](#).

Prospective foster carers are subject to a rigorous assessment process that can take up to 8 months but are typically concluded on average within 4-6 months. Many fostering services have a policy requiring any prospective carer to be a minimum age of 21 and prospective foster carers must have the right to remain in the UK but do not have to be British citizens.

Fostering services are looking for a wide range of foster carers from a range of backgrounds to reflect the diverse needs of children in care this includes single carers, carers from different cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds, carers who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or other gender/sexuality, or carers who are disabled.

Prospective foster carers can choose to apply to foster with a local authority or council fostering service or to an independent fostering service and may wish to make enquiries with several before deciding which best suits their needs and making a formal application. The prospective carer(s) assessment is in 2 stages and will also include training. For more information on fostering please visit <https://www.fosterline.info/thinking-of-fostering/how-do-i-become-a-foster-carer/>.

Specified criminal offences or cautions for offences against children or for serious sexual offences involving you or a member of your household may preclude you from fostering. The assessment will consider a range of factors to help determine suitability to foster.

All foster carers are self-employed and are registered with one fostering service. Foster carers offer care to children who are currently "looked after" by the local authority and in need of alternative family-based care. "Looked after" refers to children who are unable to be cared for by their birth family and are subject to one of the following: emergency protection order, interim care order, full care order or have been accommodated at the request of the birth parent(s), or young people who have been remanded or detained.

The local authority will usually then have parental responsibility for the child and some authority to limit the parents exercise of their continuing parental responsibility. However, for young people who are accommodated, and in circumstances when children are detained, the local authority does not acquire parental responsibility.

When someone is approved as a foster carer by a fostering service they will care for children based on their terms of approval which may state the type of fostering they will undertake e.g short term or long term fostering, respite etc. It will also include details such as the number of children you can care for.

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If you are approved as a kinship or connected person or foster carer it will include the name(s) of the specific child(ren) you will be fostering. Foster carers are also subject to a review process that is undertaken a minimum of annually that will assess continued suitability to foster and the terms of approval.

The looked after child will receive regular visits from their social worker and the foster carer will receive regular supervision and support from a supervising social worker from the fostering service. The foster carer will be required to promote contact when this is in the best interests of the child and this may be with birth parents, siblings and wider family friends.

There will be expectations that foster carers continue to attend training to support their professional development and they will be expected to demonstrate they meet the National Minimum Standards 2011 and operate within the policies and procedures of their fostering service. The foster carer will receive a fostering allowance to cover the full cost of caring for the child. This should meet the [Department for Education minimum recommended allowances](#) and be set out in the fostering service payment policy as all fostering services will set their own payment rates and any criteria (NMS 28.5).

The fostering service will oversee the finances and foster carers are usually required to set aside specific amounts for pocket money and savings for the child in accordance with any policy in place. Some fostering services will also offer a fee or reward payment to foster carers for their time and skills and there is no recommended amount for this and is set by each fostering service.

Foster carers are unable to claim child benefit for the foster child but may be eligible for other benefits based on their individual circumstances. Foster carers are required to register as self-employed and complete an annual tax return. For help and advice on fostering and finances please see our [finance fact sheet](#) and Fosterline Plus can offer free confidential tailored tax and benefit advice to any foster carer or prospective foster carer living in England. You can self-refer for a [call back here](#) or Fosterline can make the [referral on your behalf](#).

The child may stay with the foster carer for a limited time based on their circumstances and care plan and/or the carers terms of approval. The child may move from foster care to return to their birth family or a member of their extended family or network, be placed for adoption or be placed with long term foster carers who agree to care for the child until they reach 18 unless there is a change in the child's care plan.

Long term foster carers continue to work with the local authority who retain parental responsibility for the child though the frequency of visits/meetings may be reduced if appropriate. Any foster carer can resign by notifying their fostering service in writing and this will take effect 28 days after it has been received by the fostering service.

What is adoption?

Adoption is the legal process that enables a child or group of siblings who are unable to be cared for by their birth family to become full permanent and legal members of a new family. The adopter(s) become the child's legal parents and acquire all rights and responsibilities as they would have done if the child had been their birth child.

The child would no longer be a 'looked after child' once the Adoption order is granted. Adopters must be over 21 and legally resident in the UK the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man for at least 12 months. Prospective adopters may approach a local authority or a voluntary adoption agency and may wish to contact several initially before deciding which to formally apply to as this can only be one adoption service. Specified offences or cautions for offences against children or of a sexual nature for the applicant or member of their household may preclude adoption.

Adopters are required from a variety of backgrounds, faiths, ethnicities, all genders, sexual orientation and relationship status. There are many myths around who may be suitable to adopt and the facts around this can be found [here](#).

The process of adoption is typically described in 4 stages and prior to this prospective adopter(s) are encouraged to explore more about adoption and the different adoption agencies available. There is more information about the four stages [here](#).

When applicants have been approved as adopters, and a match with a child or children has been agreed at a matching panel and agreed with the child's agency there will be an introduction programme agreed based on the needs of the child and the adopters.

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A final planning meeting will usually take place prior to the child moving in. Adopter(s) may be eligible for statutory adoption leave and pay unless they are self-employed as many adoption agencies will encourage the adoptive parent to spend time at home when a child is first placed to help them settle in. During the early months the adopters will have joint parental responsibility with the child's adoption agency (and the child's birth parents which may vary in individual cases). There will be regular reviews of the care arrangements and support visits by the adoption agency.

The minimum time that the adopter(s) can apply to the court for an Adoption Order is 10 weeks but this is done at a point that the adopters feel ready to take on full parental responsibility for the child. The court will require full information from the child's adoption agency including details of any contact plan that might include confidential letterbox contact or contact with their siblings via letters or meetings (and rarely may include direct contact with their birth parent depending on what is in the interests of the child). It will also include details of any financial support.

Some adoption agencies may, dependent on the adopters circumstances and/or the needs of the child/sibling group, pay an [adoption allowance](#). This may be means tested and may be time limited.

The court will also require details of any therapeutic support that may be in place. The child does not attend the Adoption Hearing but once an Adoption Order is granted there will be an opportunity to bring your child to a Celebration gathering at the court to meet the judge or magistrate who made the Adoption Order and take photographs that will be important in the child's adoption story.

Once the Adoption Order is granted an Adoption Certificate will be issued replacing the child's birth certificate. Post adoption support will be offered but support is tailored to the specific needs of the adoptive family. There is more information about [adoption support here](#).

What is Fostering for Adoption?

This is an initiative to reduce delays and reduce the number of placement moves for looked after children. Approved adopters may also be approved as foster carers and during the fostering stage of the placement the court will weigh up what is in the long-term best interests of the child.

This means that a child may be placed with the fostering for adoption carer(s) at an earlier stage reducing placement moves and enabling the foster to adopt carer(s) to begin bonding with the child at an earlier stage. It will only be considered when there is clear evidence from the local authority that the child is unlikely to be cared for by the birth parents or other family members.

However, the fostering to adopt carer(s) would need to deal with a level of uncertainty before a final court decision is made and may be asked to bring the child for supervised contact sessions with the birth parent(s). Many fostering agencies run preparation groups to enable adopters to consider if this is the right route for them and additional information and support will be available from the adoption agency.



Foster carers adopting a child in their care

Current foster carer(s) may decide they want to offer permanence via adoption to the child(ren) in their care or may be asked by the local authority to consider this. Fosterline would advise seeking legal advice before making any final decision and to ensure you have all the necessary information available to make an informed decision. The financial arrangements are likely to be different and any additional financial support that may be available to local authority foster carers may cease after 2 years unless agreed due to the exceptional needs of the child or any other **exceptional circumstances**. The local authority may also consider **additional financial support to an adoption in certain circumstances**.

Foster carers (and second time adopters in some cases) may be eligible for a “fast track assessment” entering at stage 2 of the process and adoption agencies will decide whether to re-do statutory checks depending on the length of time since approval and length of time the child has been placed with them. The assessment should be completed and a decision on approval made within 4 months. Foster carers may wish to apply to their own local authority or the one responsible for the child and are free to choose a local authority or voluntary adoption agency.

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**Department
for Education**

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