

Long term fostering frequently asked questions

Why do children need long-term foster care?

Despite loving their children dearly, some parents are unable to change their lives in a way that will protect them. The local Children's Services team work closely with families to try and enable children to remain with their families, however, this is not always possible.

Sometimes the family is in crisis, because of ill physical or mental health or bereavement; perhaps the care given to the children is poor, or places them in danger and they cannot live with their family. In such instances, these children will not be able to go back and live with their own families. Some children are placed for adoption, others however, do not wish to be adopted and wish to retain relationships with their birth families. Some children may need the high-level of support that long-term foster care offers them.

What are the benefits of long term foster care for the child or young person?

Long-term foster care provides a sense of normality, of family membership, and a framework for emotional and physical development that encourages stable relationships through to adulthood. It allows children to make mistakes, to learn, to mature and feel cared for and encouraged in a safe and stable environment. It allows children to build attachments.

It means that children have an advocate and that someone is looking out for them, supporting their ambitions in much the same way that parents do for their own children. It provides them with a sense of permanence that encourages positive behaviour.

Long term fostering also enables children to stay in contact with their birth family, wherever it's safe for all concerned. It allows children to have access to their personal histories, extended family, and the stories that inform their identity and self-image. It allows children to better cope with key changes in their lives – like moving to a new school, or from home into the wider world. It allows young people to live for a period of time in a particular area where they can build networks and be supported through their education and into the world of work.

What is expected of a long-term foster carer?

As a long-term foster carer, you will:

- offer children the chance to grow up in a safe and stable environment
- provide the care and attention they need through to adulthood; while you support them to keep in touch with their family
- reassure them that this is their home, and will remain their home until such time as they are ready to move on, at least until they are 18
- support them through emotional and unsettled periods in their lives

- help them to stay on track with school work, to enjoy life and to set their own goals and aspirations
- encourage them to be healthy by ensuring they visit the dentist and eat a healthy diet
- care for them as a full member of your family and support them to cope with change in their lives
- offer commitment to them so that they can make the essential emotional attachments that all children need to learn to trust and to have a feeling of safety in their lives

What role will a child or young person's parents play?

This will depend upon each individual situation and the needs of the children. Children who need permanent care will generally have plans agreed and protected by a court order. The decision will already have been made that a child cannot be cared for by their birth parent. However, children in long-term foster care usually retain relationships with their birth family. This can be direct contact or indirect post box contact.

Any care plan will also consider the needs of the children relating to their wider birth family, including siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles etc...

What are the benefits of long term foster care for the birth family?

Birth parents of children in care usually want the same as any other parent, but don't have the means to provide it. Through a planned process, they know what is happening to their children and that they are safe and well. They are helped to keep the child as part of their wider family.

On-going direct or indirect contact gives them the opportunity to show their children that they are loved, and allows birth parents and their wider family to help their children to understand their histories; building on the child's sense of self and identity. When direct contact is safe and feasible for all concerned, birth family members can often build a meaningful relationship with the child and their foster family. This builds the birth family members' own self-esteem and confidence, and allows them to be involved in the life of their child in a way that benefits everyone.

What are the benefits of long term foster care for the foster family?

- encouraging development and growth - watching a child or young person progress in life
- developing yourself and your family
- working as part of a dedicated team of people
- attaining a sense of achievement as a foster family

- continued support as a foster family as part of a professional corporate parenting team

What support will I receive as a long-term foster carer?

As with all types of foster care, you will receive preparation and training from the fostering team during your assessment. After approval you will receive:

- intensive support during the initial stages of the matching process
- on-going support and supervision from a dedicated social worker
- out of hours support and ongoing training and development
- regular support meetings
- a buddy mentor link with an experienced local foster carer
- a weekly allowance for the child as well as an enhanced long term allowance - a foster carer fee equivalent