

# children who foster guide





# Welcome to the Northumberland Fostering Service

If you are reading this book, then your parents are thinking about becoming foster carers. You have been given this book to help you understand what this will mean to you.

Fostering involves the whole family. Lots of families foster, and the experience is different for everyone. It is important that you know what is going on and who is coming to stay. You should ask questions if you are unsure about anything.

This book explains what fostering will involve and some of the changes you may face. It will try to answer the questions that are often asked by sons and daughters of foster carers.

It is important to remember that if you are uncomfortable or unhappy about anything you should talk to an adult who will listen. If you want more information or help, please ask.



# All about fostering

## What is fostering?

Fostering is when a family looks after a child or young person while they are unable to live with their own parents. This might be for a few days, a few months or even possibly a number of years.

There are many different types of fostering. Ask your parent/s what type of fostering they are planning to do. For example, some families look after children with disabilities, or choose to care for particular age groups. Other families offer 'respite' or 'short breaks', which means someone comes to stay for short periods, but regularly – for example, one weekend a month. If you would prefer your family to stick to a particular type of fostering, discuss it with them. For example, you may prefer it if your parent/s do not foster a child who is older than you.

Sometimes more than one child might come to stay at the same time. They might not be related, but sometimes brothers and sisters are fostered together.

You may hear different ways to describe foster children, such as, 'children in care' or 'looked after children' or when talking about older children - 'young people in care' or 'looked after young people'.

## Why do children and young people come into foster care?

Again there are many different reasons why children come into care. Some may need somewhere to stay for a short amount of time, for example if a parent is ill and there is nowhere else for them to go. Some may be having trouble getting on with their own family.

Sometimes children come into foster care because their own parents have not looked after them properly and some may have been hurt in the past.

Sometimes they will go back to their own families, other times they may move on to another foster family, or be adopted. Being fostered can be a scary experience – imagine how you would feel about moving away from your family and going to live with strangers.

## Why do people foster?

There are lots of different reasons. But usually it is because they want to help children who are going through a difficult time. Lots of foster carers, and their families, say that they find it very rewarding to be able to give a child or children a home when they need it and to provide the support they need.

## **What has fostering got to do with me?**

Having someone new come and live with you will have a huge impact on your life. Although your parent/s will be responsible for the children that come to stay, your life will change too, and you will be involved in helping to make them comfortable in your home. Fostering is very much something the whole family are involved in.

As part of a fostering family, you can make a real difference. When you do find things difficult, try to remember that the other children are away from their own homes, and the people that they know, which can be tough. If you are friendly and welcoming this can help them feel more comfortable.

You will get to meet lots of new people, and it can be fun to have other people in the house. Hopefully you will find fostering a good experience overall.

## **What happens when we decide to foster?**

Before your family is 'approved' to foster, you will go through a period of preparation. Your parent/s will go through what is known as an 'assessment' to check that fostering is right for you all and that you are all right for fostering. This can be annoying and you might not think it necessary. But remember, the social workers do not know your family and they have to make sure any child that comes to live with you will be well looked after and that fostering is right for your family.

Ask about the Northumberland skills to foster training for children of foster carers. This lets you know a little bit more about what to expect before the first fostered child comes to stay, and you get to meet other children who foster or who are about to foster too.



# Preparing to foster

Try to think about your family, how things work, what rules are important and which are more relaxed. Take some time to sit down together and talk about why you feel this way. Decide what is important to all of you – for example, that everyone in the house respects each other's opinions and talk about how you would make sure this stays the same.

You should talk about things that might have to change, and how you will all cope. By doing this before the first fostered child comes to stay, you will have some idea what to expect and you will have discussed it as a family.

You and your family can always ask the Supervising Social Worker from the Northumberland Fostering Service any questions.

## What Will We Know Before They Come?

Obviously, you will want to know as much as possible about who's coming to stay before they turn up. Your parent/s should tell you as much as they can. Sometimes it is difficult, as a child or children may have to come and stay at very short notice, and there isn't time for your family to find out everything they need to. Remember, sometimes things don't work out as planned, so some children may stay for longer or shorter times than you were told they might.

**Don't be afraid to ask questions.**

## Making Changes

Having someone new come to stay with your family will probably mean lots of changes for you – some will be good, and some you may not be happy about at first.

### Sharing

One of the biggest changes is that you will have to share not just your toys and/or belongings, but also your parent/s, family and possibly your friends. This can be difficult. Sometimes fostered children can demand a lot of attention, and this could leave you feeling a bit left out. If this is the case, speak to your mum or dad about it. Don't forget that just because your parent/s is spending a lot of time looking after another child, this doesn't mean that they care about you any less.

The most obvious change is that you will need to share your home and some of your belongings. Sometimes, children may take your things without asking, or break them. This can be very frustrating, and it is understandable that this will make you angry. Sharing is part of fostering. You may want to ask your parents if you can have a cupboard with a lock where you can keep the things that you treasure the most.





## Rule changes

There are bound to be certain rules in your home that will change. This is because, as foster carers, your parent/s has to follow certain rules set by the fostering service. There is normally a good reason for things changing, although it may not seem like it sometimes.

For example, you may find that it is now expected that you knock on bedroom doors before you enter. This is to show respect for other people's privacy. Foster families may have to be strict about allowing you to watch films that have certain certificates – while your parent/s may have been happy for you to watch certain films, they don't know whether this will upset another child.

One thing that might be a big change is that you might have to change the way you dress around the house. This might mean putting on a dressing gown if you are walking around in your night clothes, for example. Again, this is to make sure everyone feels comfortable – children who come to stay may not be used to things that seem normal to your family, or it may upset them.

Ask your parent/s what rules will change before you start fostering, and ask them to explain anything you are unhappy about.

## Dealing with things that annoy you

The thing sons and daughters of foster carers often find most difficult to deal with is when the children or young people being fostered behave in a way that they wouldn't. This behaviour can take many forms, lying, stealing, not speaking, being violent, shouting, breaking things, bed-wetting or being 'hyperactive'. If a foster child is rude to your parent/s it can be very hard to not say anything.

If you feel yourself getting worked up, it can help to go to your room or out of the house to calm down. Obviously, it is easier to say 'Don't lose your temper' than it can be to do it! It might help to remember that this behaviour is sometimes a result of fostered children being upset or frustrated about being away from their own family.

If you are finding things difficult to cope with, you should talk to someone (see 'Support for you' section). Also if you feel uncomfortable about the way someone talks to you, or acts around you, or touches you, you must tell your parent/s.

It is important to remember that children in foster care are all different, just like you are different from your friends, brothers or sisters, or cousins. Some might be difficult to live with, others you will get on with well.

# Contact

'Contact' refers to the contact that a fostered child or young person has with their family and friends. How often this happens depends on a lot of things – some children will see a lot of their family, others may only see them a few times a year. It is important that they are able to stay in touch – after all, if you had to go and live somewhere else, you'd want to still be able to speak to and see the people you know, wouldn't you?

Some sons and daughters of foster carers find contact very stressful. It can take time for your parent/s to organise, and may mean that you can't do the things you want to as a family all of the time. If the fostered child's family are coming to visit them in your home, this could mean more stress for your family.

Contact can often make a child who is fostered feel sad or upset, which might mean they behave differently when they come back. You may not see the point in continuing with contact if it just makes them miserable. However, try to think how you would feel in that position. It would be hard to see your mum or dad and then have to leave them again, but this doesn't mean you wouldn't want to see them.

Try to be patient about contact, and discuss anything that upsets you with your parent/s or Supervising Social Worker (see 'Support for you' section). It may be possible to change the way things are organised to make it easier for everyone.

# School and friends

If your family is fostering a child who is around the same age as you, you may find that they start going to your school, or want to spend time with you and your friends. Again, try to remember that it is very difficult going to a new school and not knowing anyone, so if you can help them settle in this would really help.

## What do I say?

If a child who is fostered by your family comes to your school you may be asked questions about them, such as why they are staying with your family. Speak to your parents and social worker about what you should say. Sometimes it will be easier just to say that you can't talk about it, because it wouldn't be fair on the fostered child, especially if they don't want everyone to know all about their life. After all, how would you feel if someone went around telling everyone all about you? What if sharing that information meant they got bullied at school?

## Bullying

If you suspect that a child your family is fostering is being bullied, or is bullying someone else, it is really important that you tell someone. Its best not to get involved yourself, but you must speak to your parent/s or a teacher at school you trust. There should be a teacher at your school who will know that the child is fostered and who will be responsible for supporting them at school. Your parent/s should know who the teacher is.



# Support for you

## What do I do if I am upset or angry?

The first thing is to remember that it is ok to feel this way. Everyone feels upset and angry sometimes, and you will probably find your own ways to deal with this. You might find that you need to take some time to yourself to calm down, or you might want to share your feelings with someone else.

## Who can I talk to?

It is important that you always feel you can talk to someone who understands. Always consider speaking to your parent/s about anything that is bothering you. After all, they are living in the same house and will probably understand best what you are going through. You could also speak to someone else within the family, such as an aunt, uncle or grandparent.

The Supervising Social Worker who works for the fostering service visits your family to check everything's going okay. This person may also be referred to as your 'family placement social worker'. Their job is to support your family through fostering. They should speak to you during their visits. If something is bothering you, you should talk to them about it.

## what's a support group?



As well as your parents and supervising social worker, speaking to other sons and daughters of foster carers can be very helpful. A 'support group' is when you can get together with other people in foster families in your area and talk about your experiences. You'll also probably get to do some activities. This can be a really useful way of talking about what's going on with other people who understand because they have experienced the same things. They may even be able to give you some advice on how to deal with it.

Ask your supervising social worker about the Northumberland Children Who Foster Group.

# Secrets

Sometimes a fostered child might tell you something and ask you not to tell anyone. This might be to do with something they have done recently (for example if they have broken something in the house) or about something that has happened to them in the past. Sometimes it is easier to trust someone who is closer to you in age than to trust an adult. Someone who is being fostered by your family may tell you something they have not told anyone else. This can be very upsetting for you, particularly if they tell you about something bad that someone might have done to them in the past.

## What do I do?

Such things can be difficult to listen to. If someone does start to tell you something, remember that it is not their fault that this has happened to them. Try to be supportive, but if the conversation is upsetting you, tell them that you think they should speak to an adult about this.

Don't agree to keep secrets. This will not help the child in the long run. If you tell your parent/s you will eventually be helping them get the support they need. You can be a good friend to them, but it is not your responsibility to cope with everything alone.

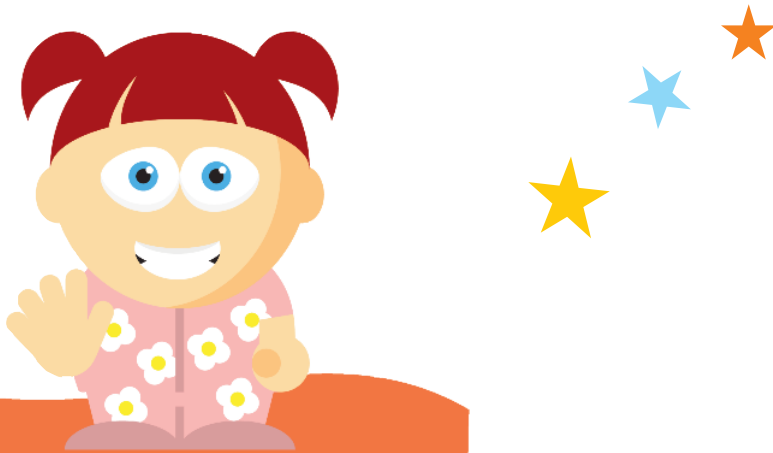
# Moving on

## What happens when fostered children leave?

It is part of fostering that children will eventually move on. In many cases this will be a happy event as the child will be going back to their own family, moving on to a permanent foster home, moving in with new adoptive parents or moving into their own place. However, if you have become friends with them, or just got used to having them around, you will naturally be sad to see them go.

It may be possible to stay in touch with children who have stayed with you when they leave. Speak to your parents and the social workers to see if this can be arranged.

These days it is easy to stay in touch on the phone and via email. It may also be possible for you to meet up.



## Some definitions you might find useful

When your family starts fostering, you'll probably hear a lot of phrases that don't sound very clear, particularly from social workers! If there is anything you don't understand – don't be afraid to ask. Here are a few phrases you might hear:

### **Allegations**

Occasionally, children in foster care may tell someone that they have been treated badly by someone they are staying with. Social workers call this an 'allegation'. If an allegation is made, they have to investigate to find out whether it is true.

### **Disclosure**

This is when a fostered child tells someone for the first time that someone hurt them. When a child has been badly treated, this is called 'abuse'. If a child tells you about something that has happened to them, you must tell your parent/s.

### **Fostering service**

The fostering service is the organisation which employs your parent/s as foster carers, and organises which fostered children come to stay with you, and when. Your supervising social worker works for the fostering service.

### **Placements**

When a child goes to stay with a foster family, this is known as a 'placement'

### **Respite**

This is a particular type of foster care, which provides a break for the family. Your family may be offered respite, when someone else looks after the fostered children for some time (for example if you go on holiday), or you might provide respite for another foster family.

### **Reviews**

These are meetings where foster carers and everyone else involved in looking after a fostered child get together to talk about what is happening with them.

Usually, the fostered child will attend too. This is when decisions are made about whether they will stay with your family or move on.

### **Social Worker:**

There are different types of social workers. The two main types who you will meet are: Child's Social Worker (Also known as 'Social Worker'; 'Field Social Worker'; 'District Office Social Worker')

This is the social worker who supports the fostered child or young person. They work with your Supervising Social Worker. They will visit the child staying with you and also talk with you and your family.

### **Supervising Social Worker**

This is the social worker who supports and supervises your family. They work with the Social Worker who is supporting the child / children staying with you.

They will visit you and will also talk to any fostered children that are living with you. Your Supervising Social Worker can help to answer your questions.

# Words Of Wisdom

Here are some words of wisdom from some Northumberland Children Who Foster:

- ★ **Lucy:**  
*You need to give the foster child some space.  
You can help them to make their bedroom nice and let them make it their room.*
- ★ **Nicole and Leanne:**  
*"We have just started fostering, and so far it is good and lots of fun."*
- ★ **Sarah:**  
*"We are friend and family foster carers; this is different to mainstream foster care, as we are related.  
It has been hard at times, across the wider family, but it is good and worthwhile.  
I feel that I have learned a lot."*
- ★ **Megan:**  
*"You can play with the toddlers. You need to share your toys and be patient.  
You treat foster children like they are real family."*
- ★ **Daniel:**  
*"It's ok. You help to look after the foster children."*

## Want To Find Out More?

Always ask questions! It is your right to know everything you can about what is going on in your family. Speak to your parents, your Supervising Social Worker, and other sons and daughters of foster carers.

The Fostering Network is the UK's national charity for everyone involved in fostering. There is lots of information on their website about everything to do with fostering. You will find answers to many of your questions in their Foster Care Resource Centre at [www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)

Northumberland is building a webpage especially for children who foster. We would like you to contact us with your questions and if you think there should be a particular topic included on the page, please email us at [familyplacement@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:familyplacement@northumberland.gov.uk)

### Family Placement Service

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## Foster Care

*every child matters in Northumberland*