



F5 Foster Care

CHOOSE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Thinking of Fostering?

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Thank you for thinking about Fostering



Introduction

By reading this brochure you will hopefully get valuable information and guidance relating to this rewarding journey. There is a good chance that you have already been thinking about becoming a Foster Carer for some time now, so this is an important first step towards deciding if the time is right to start your Fostering adventure.

There are undoubtedly lots of questions you may have about what makes a good Foster Carer, the assessment journey, and the training and support we offer so we have tried to design your brochure with this in mind. If you feel encouraged to find out more or would like to talk to us about taking the next steps into the world of Fostering, please do feel free to contact one of our friendly team on 0121 2710555.



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We are all on hand waiting to answer any further questions you may have so please do feel free to get in touch.

Often the children and young people who require Foster Care have experienced neglect or trauma and need not just a place to stay, but also the right people around them to help them work through the anxieties and distress this has resulted in. The emphasis here is on the word “right”. Not everyone has the ability or the right to become a Foster Carer (discussed further in the next chapter) but for those that do go on to Foster, its often described as one of the most rewarding things they have ever done.

As a Foster Carer you have a direct impact on the day to day life of any children placed within your Care, you also have the opportunity to help them to shape their future as they move through childhood and adolescence into adulthood,

potentially redirecting some young people from a track of self-destruction onto a new more positive path with a brighter outcome.

It is no secret that there is a shortage of approved Foster Carers and alongside this is an increasing number of young people who need your help. For some the need is short term and for others the need may be more long term. It’s an emotionally challenging role being a Foster Carer, and is not suited to everyone, so there is a calling at the moment for any potential Carers who would like to find out more, particularly Carers who can support older children aged 10 upwards, sibling sets and children with health/ medical issues, as these are homes that are more difficult to find.

Children looked after Statistics

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total number of children looked after on 31 st March each year in England and Wales	78,140	80,000	80,770	82,080	83,840
Children who started to be looked after in England and Wales within the year	31,780	31,010	28,470	31,090	33,000

At the end of March 2023, there were around 43,400 fostering households in England and The Fostering Network estimates that there is a shortfall of at least 7,200 Foster Carers in England and Wales. Hence, we need to recruit more Foster Carers especially for older children, BME, Children with complex needs and sibling groups – can you be one of these Carers?

(Accredited official statistics – Fostering in England 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and The Fostering Network newsletter in October 2023)

As well as being personally rewarding, Fostering is a vocation. One that can offer you professional development, accredited qualifications and Career opportunities. Whether you are registered with an Independent Fostering Service such as ourselves, or a Local Authority/ Trust, a large part of being a Foster Carer is the ongoing training. This will start at the beginning of your assessment and continues for the entire

time that you are Fostering. As with most vocations, the more experienced and skilled you become has a direct impact on how much you are paid. We are very proud at F5 Foster Care of the high level of training and support provided to our Foster Carers and have received some wonderful feedback. So an enthusiastic mindset is a must when it comes to your development and is something we will cover during your assessment.

Could I Foster?

Not everyone who would like to Foster is able to do so. The idea behind the creation of this brochure is to enable you to find out more about what is involved and consider whether or not you feel it could be suited to your lifestyle. If you decide the time isn't right don't worry you can still help by spreading the word. Carers are needed all over the country so if fostering isn't right for you, but you know someone else who may be suited please do pass them this brochure or our details so they can find out more.

How do I know if I'm eligible?

The following points are essential in our Foster Carers

You have a passion for providing Care and support to children and young people

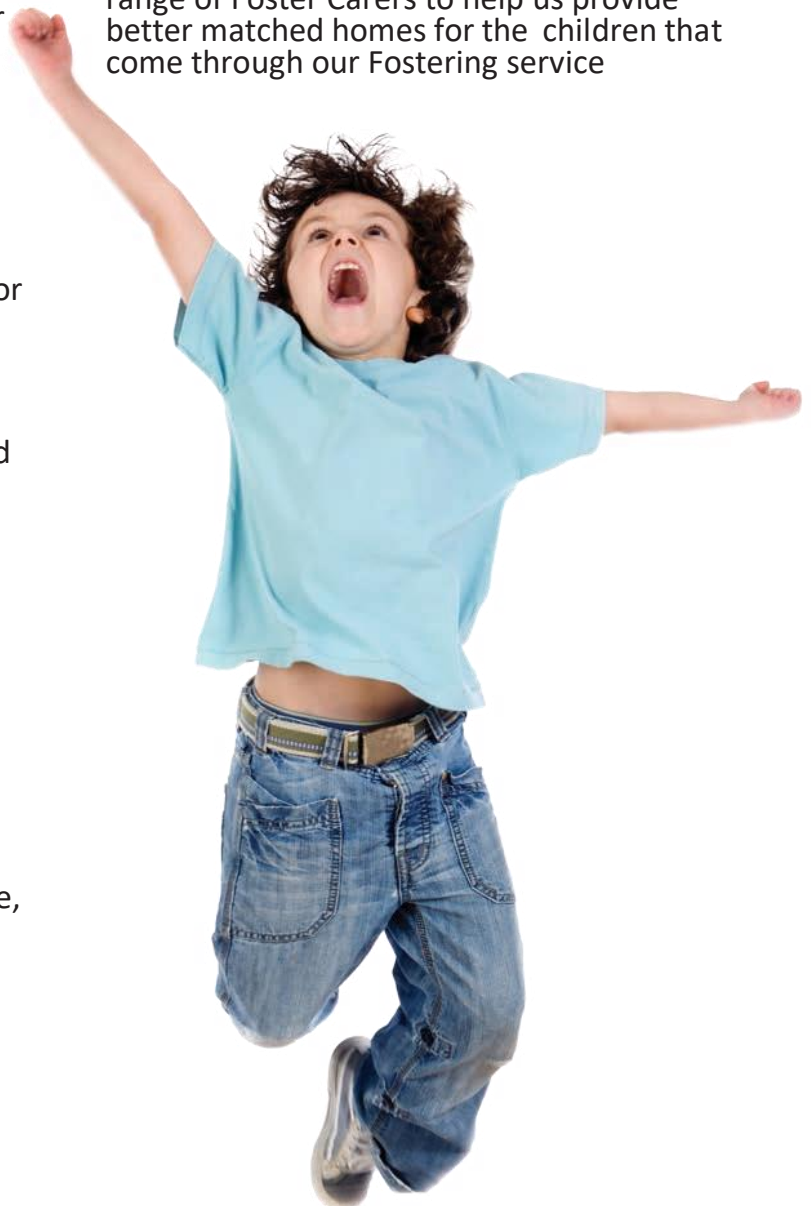
- ✓ You are over 21
- ✓ You don't have a police record for violence or for any offences towards children
- ✓ You have at least one spare bedroom
- ✓ You are happy to attend various training and support group meetings
- ✓ You have gained some form of child Care experience, not necessarily with your own children

We hear from the people we talk to that they have been put off finding out more because they assume they wouldn't be able to Foster for other reasons. Let us try to bust some myths for you:

- ✓ It makes no difference whether you're single, married, divorced or living with a partner
- ✓ You don't need to be a homeowner – all we ask is that your tenancy is stable
- ✓ Disabilities or medical conditions will not stop you from becoming a Foster Carer, so

long as it does not affect your ability to Care for a child and the condition is stable

- ✓ It does not matter whether you are in a relationship or not or whether that relationship is with someone of the same or differing gender
- ✓ You can be a Foster Carer and work – However, you will need to be available to support your foster child if they are not in school (school holidays, illness, exclusions etc) and also attend a variety of meetings and training sessions, so flexibility and the ability to remain at home will be vital. You can also Foster if you are retired.
- ✓ You can become a Foster Carer no matter what your ethnicity, religion or culture. In fact we actively look to recruit a diverse range of Foster Carers to help us provide better matched homes for the children that come through our Fostering service



Have I got the skills to be a good Foster Carer?

To be a good Foster Carer you need to be able to provide a stable, warm, safe and nurturing environment in which a child can thrive.

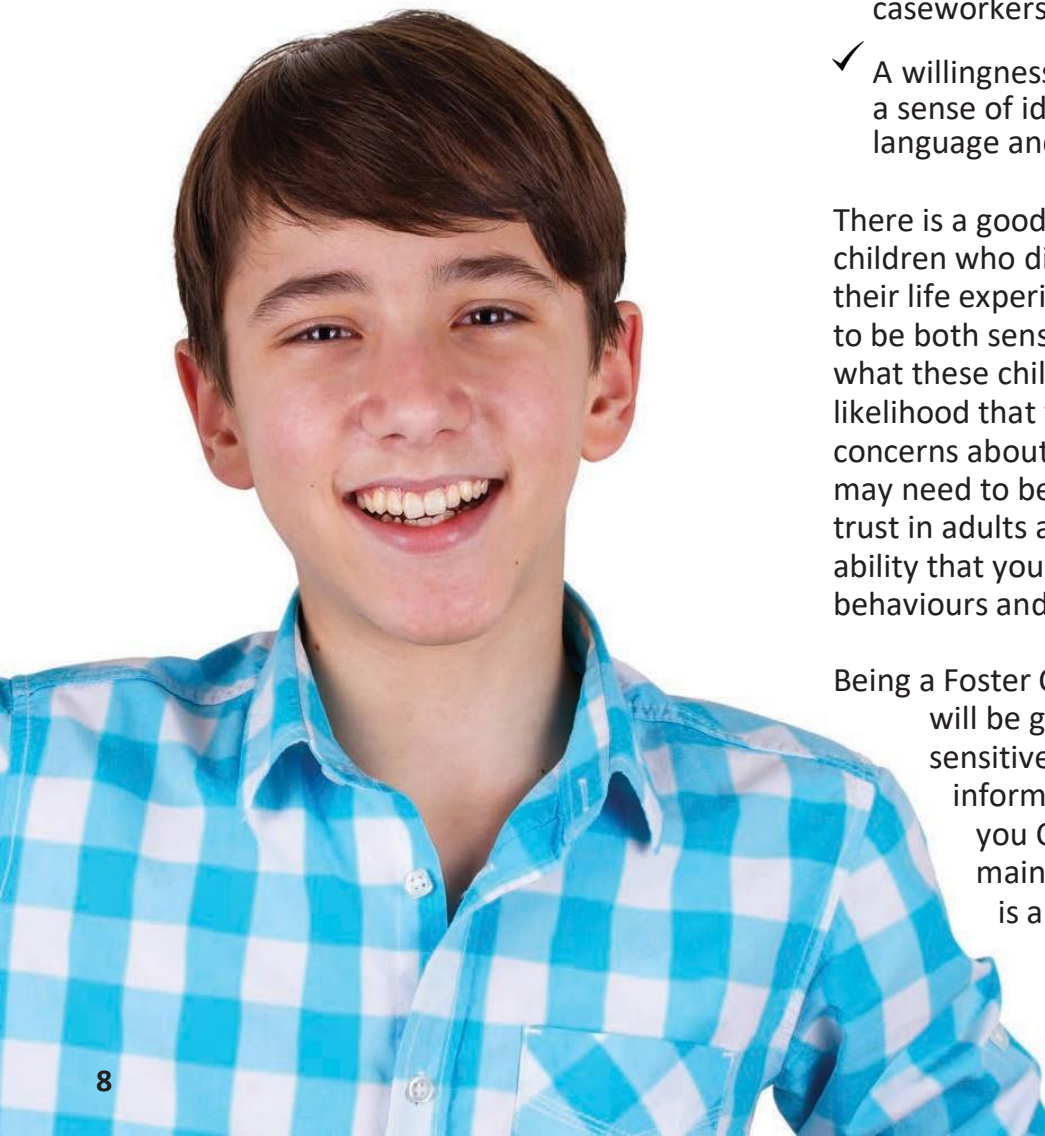
This is in part down to your home but is mainly down to you (and where applicable your family). You need to have a genuine interest in children and young people and the ability to see past any distressed behaviors and see the real need behind them. Looking after any child involves a lot of responsibility, emotional strength and juggling of tasks and as a Foster Carer you are asked to take on this, plus a lot more.

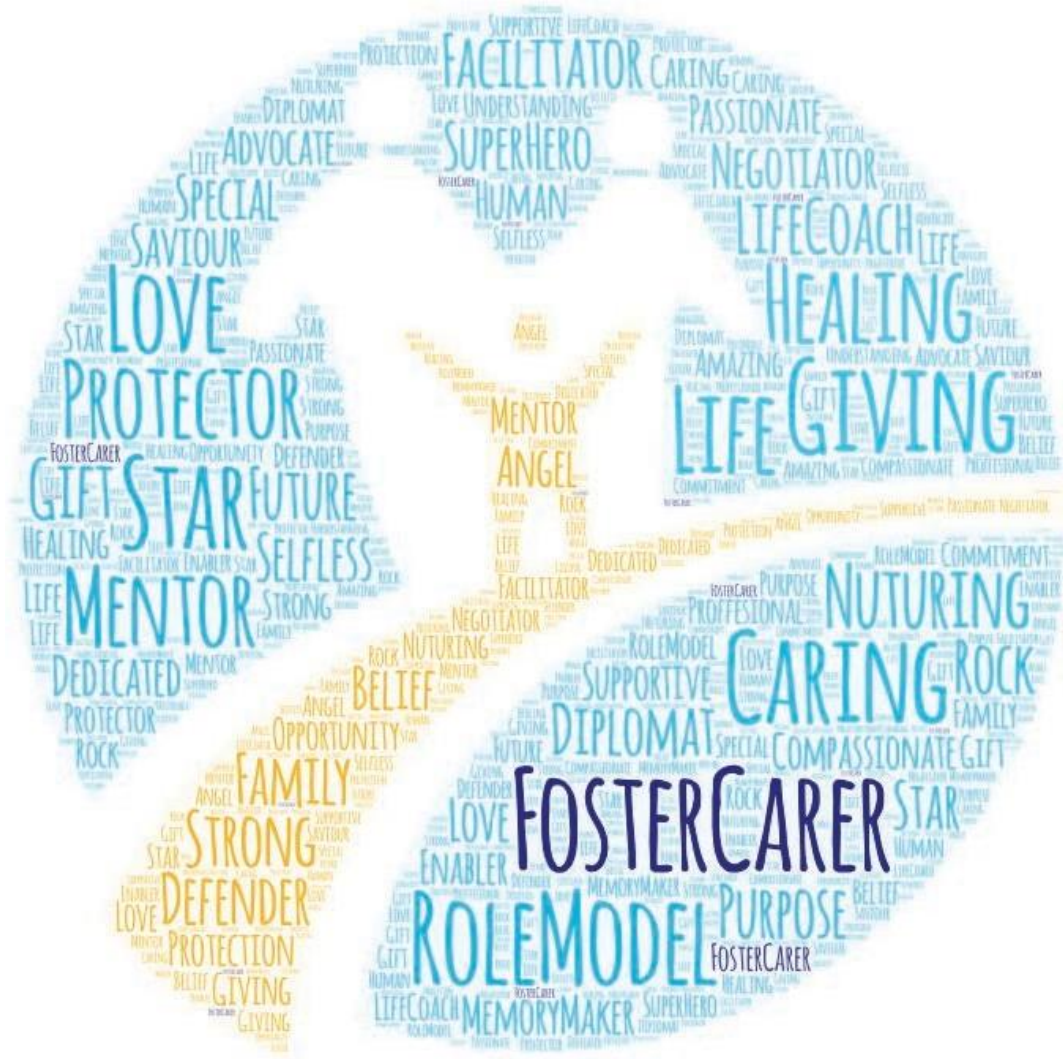
We have found that the most effective Foster Carers have:

- ✓ Empathy and good listening skills
- ✓ Resilience when things get tough
- ✓ Flexibility and adaptability
- ✓ Patience and humour
- ✓ Stability and consistency in their personal and family lives
- ✓ An ability to guide and discipline children without the use of physical punishment
- ✓ The ability to look after themselves emotionally and staying well
- ✓ A willingness to work with other people in the child's life such as birth parents and caseworkers
- ✓ A willingness to support any child to develop a sense of identity that includes their culture, language and religion where appropriate.

There is a good chance that you will come across children who display distressed behaviour due to their life experiences. As their Carer you will need to be both sensitive and resilient. Depending on what these children have experienced, there is a likelihood that your Foster child may have strong concerns about opening up to you and so you may need to be able to help them to develop trust in adults and in feeling secure. It's a vital ability that you can see beyond any negative behaviours and look at the child in need within.

Being a Foster Carer is a position of trust, you will be given extremely confidential, sensitive and sometimes distressing information about any children that you Care for, being discreet and maintaining this confidentially is absolutely essential.





F5 Foster Care asked the question, what makes a good Foster Carer? The above image has been created using these words, and is a representation of just how society views Foster Carers, and their vital contribution within the community.

If there was Job Description

Key Purpose of the role

To provide Care and support and a safe home for any vulnerable children or young people who need a Foster Family, working alongside the Fostering services and all others involved in ensuring any placed child(ren) are given the best opportunity to reach their full potential.

Key Duties - Providing Care

- To provide day to day Care for any child or young person who is placed into your home, keeping in mind the extra needs and anxieties of children who have been separated from their families or have experienced trauma or neglect
- To play an active role in ensuring the personalised Care plan created for your Foster child(ren) is followed as agreed and continues to work in their best interest
- To support and encourage the healthy growth and development of your Foster child(ren) paying attention to their physical and emotional well-being and educational progress, this includes attending related appointments, i.e. dentist.
- To ensure that your Foster child(ren) are positively encouraged to understand their culture and origins and are provided the opportunity to explore this and where applicable given the opportunity to attend faith and culture related events
- To work alongside birth families and other important people from your Foster child(ren)s life with a non-judgemental mindset and to support contact arrangements that have been put in place for supervised meetings.
- To support the transition period for your Foster child(ren) both when they are moving into your home and when they are moving on by means of introduction plans made by all concerned with the child.

Providing a Safe Home

- To ensure that your Foster child(ren) is protected from harm and abuse and kept safe.
- To make sure that your Foster child has any information required to be able to get help should they feel they are being treated inappropriately
- To work with your Foster child to promote a secure attachment and to assist in rebuilding trust
- To act as an advocate for your Foster child(ren)

Providing Team Support

- To be an active and vocal part of the team that are supporting your Foster child(ren) working alongside the Fostering service and/or Local Authority or Trust and any other professionals and adhering to guidelines, policies and procedures.
- To be involved in all reviews, family meetings, case conferences and court hearings as required, ensuring that you are keeping records and evidence needed for reports, life story work, memory boxes etc
- To ensure that you are continually providing the best possible Care by attending relevant training and development opportunities, growing your own knowledge and understanding to better support your Foster child(ren) do the same.
- To maintain full confidentiality in order to protect all who are involved including the Foster child(ren) and their family

What to expect as a Foster Carer

Being a Foster Carer is not just about becoming approved and having a child or young person come and live with you. It is so much more than that.



Finances

We know, that when people and families are “called” to fostering, its not for financial benefit, moreover a deep seated need to help and nurture the vulnerable children in their care and to see the tangible difference they are making to a child’s life. However, having said that we also recognise the hard work, commitment and dedication that our Foster Carers demonstrate repeatedly. In today’s world, Fostering is as much a professional role as it is a personal one, and as such we believe that our Foster Carers rightly deserve to be rewarded for the work that they do day in day out.

Additionally, particularly in the current climate of financial strains that so many people are experiencing it is more and more important that financial support is provided to those who are providing loving homes for our communities most vulnerable children. The weekly fee that we provide to our Carers will offer peace of mind in knowing that the costs involved with looking after an extra child are covered. This includes things such as general household expenses, food, clothing, mileage, school meals and travel as well as including additional payment for the work and support that is being offered, especially keeping in mind that unlike other “paid work” there is not a finish time. Foster Care is a 24/7 in the same way that parenting your own children would be. It is for these reasons that we provide our Carers with a robust financial support package to ensure that they are not having to worry about the cost implications having an additional child in the house would bring.

F5 Foster Care Fostering Allowance Package

We provide the following to our Foster Carers

- Generous weekly fee, with potential fee top ups where additional support levels are needed
- Annual Birthday grant to help you and your foster child celebrate their big day in style
- Annual Festival celebration grant – this could be used for Christmas/Eid/Diwali you choose
- Annual Holiday grant – Because every should have the opportunity to create great new memories
- Fully funded membership to Foster Talk
- MAX discount card proving a host of discounts for shopping and entertainment

Our Foster Carers are paid a weekly fee (this is paid to our Carers fortnightly) of up to £750** per child per week for mainstream foster care (including solo or parent & child placements), and where our carers are able to offer more bespoke therapeutic parenting there are options for this to rise to reflect the levels of additional support that the child needs.

It should also be noted that all Foster Carers need to register as self-employed and are responsible for paying their own taxes if there are any due. If this is something totally new to you, it may feel quite a daunting thought, but worry not, we can provide training and guidance to those who this may be new to and registering as self-employed is actually quite straight forward. This is completed online on the HMRC website.

**£650 per week per child is conditional based on type of placement, individual needs, disabilities, behaviours and requirements around contact, health appointments, etc.

Choosing To Foster

If you decide to go ahead and start your Fostering journey you will need to decide whether you want to Foster with an Independent Fostering Agency, such as ourselves or with a Local Authority/Trust. Either way you will be carrying out a very worthwhile and needed role and will still be provided with training and your own social worker to support you through the application process and afterwards as you welcome your Foster child(ren) into your home.

What is the difference between Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) and Local Authorities/Trusts?

The key difference is that Local Authority's/Trust's hold the responsibility for the children who are in Care. They recruit their own "internal" Foster Carers with whom they can place their children, and additionally they also work with selected Independent Fostering Agencies who have available Foster Carers (we are proud to say that we are approved to provide foster homes to every Local Authority in the West Midlands). This is to ensure they can find the best matched homes for them. There are some subtle differences between the two, forexample:

Local Authorities/Trusts hold the duty of Care for the children who are in need and often have an "in house first" ruling. This means they will look to their own recruited Foster Carers first to find a home for the children in their Care.

If a child or sibling group is in need of a home and the relevant Local Authority /Trust does not have suitable Foster Carers available they will then approach the IFA's that they work with to see if they have available Foster Carers that match the needs of the child(ren). With this in mind the children that are placed with IFA Foster Carers tend to be children that the LA have the least well matched homes for, these are often...

- Older children (5 years +)
- Sibling groups
- Children from minority back grounds
- Children with medical and/or complex needs
- Children from specific religious or cultural backgrounds

The in house first ruling does not mean that IFA Foster Carers can only look after the above, more so that there is significantly more demand for homes that can accommodate them.

The weekly fees paid to Foster Carers vary from agency to agency, but IFA Carers are usually paid a significantly higher weekly fee than Carers who are recruited through the Local Authority. Our recommendation would be not to look solely at the weekly fee/allowance that you will be paid, but also pay close attention to the wrap around support that you will receive as this can also differ agency to agency and the difference this can make is substantial.



In general, it is recognised that the level of wrap around support for Foster Carers and their families can be higher for IFA (independent fostering agency) Carers. This is because generally IFA social workers have much lower caseloads and can therefore spend more time with the Carers that they are supervising. This could be this longer appointments, or more frequent visits. At F5 For example, we ensure that all of our experienced Foster Carers have home visits at least once per month, and our new Carers are supported with even more frequent support, starting with a minimum of weekly appointments. Many IFA's, including ourselves will also provide access to more tailored support and training for Carers, their families and for the looked after children including therapeutic and complex needs. This is another reason that Local Authorities will often approach Independent Fostering Agencies when they are looking for Foster homes for children with these needs.

Another important thing to consider is that Local Authority Foster Carers will Foster children from within that Local Authority only, so are limited to the children that they can foster, an Independent Fostering Agency works with all Local Authorities meaning their Carers can provide homes for children from any area. This means that the number of possible referrals increases significantly.

The Assessment Process

Having made the decision to leap into your Foster Care journey, you (and if applicable your partner) will need to go through the Prospective Foster Carer assessment process. You need to be prepared fully before undertaking this. It is a very in-depth and personal assessment that will look at every part of your life. Don't worry this is something that you will be supported to complete. And you will be provided with an Assessing Social Worker to guide you through the whole process. We have listed the key areas that are checked, this list isn't exhaustive but will hopefully give you a good idea as to what you can expect.

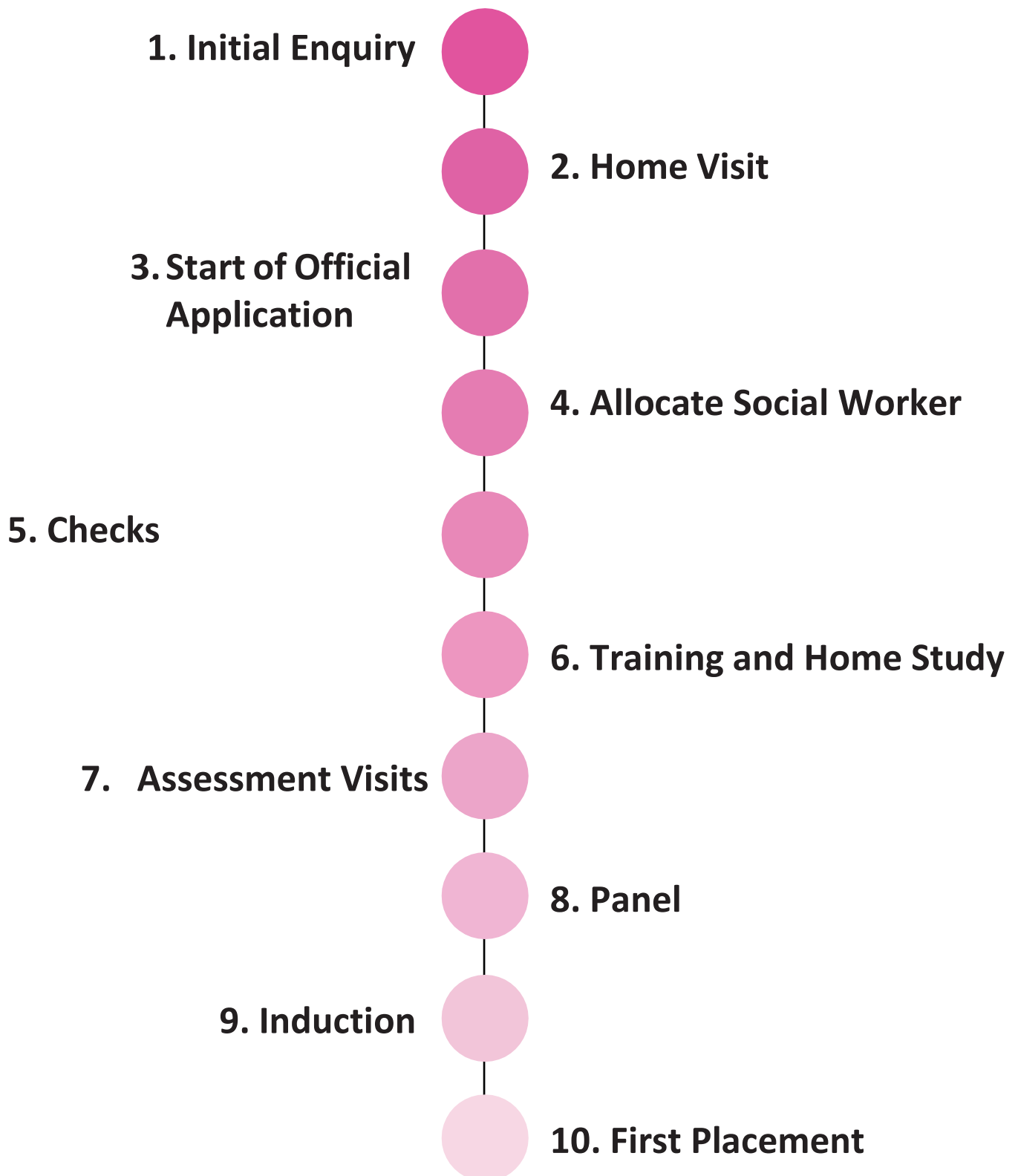
- Finances
- Employment
- Personal references
- Family References
- Ex -Partner references
- Medical Checks
- Criminal Record and Baring Checks
- Home Risk Assessments
- Pet Risk Assessments

The assessment will also include an in-depth analysis on you, your childhood and adolescence, your family history and your achievements and traumas. The Assessing Social Worker will discuss with you at great length all the significant events in your life and will also provide you with home study that will help you understand more about the children that may potentially be joining you in your home. There will also be classroom-based training sessions (a minimum of 3 full days) that you will need to attend, the feedback from these sessions will form part of your "Prospective Foster Carers Report".

The assessment process takes roughly 4 – 6 months and once completed is passed over to an independent panel who will read through the report in detail to make a recommendation as to whether or not they feel that you would be suitable to Foster. You will likely be asked to attend the panel meeting with your Assessing Social Worker, so they can meet you in person and ask any questions they may have regarding your application and circumstances. The recommendation they reach is provided to an "Agency Decision Maker" who will confirm an outcome.



Journey to becoming a Foster Carer



Ongoing Foster Care Support

The training and support does not stop once you are approved, in fact it keeps going for as long as you are Fostering. There is a certain amount of mandatory training you will need complete as a new Carer, your social worker will help you and arrange these, some examples of these will include:

1. Induction training – Working in Partnership with your Fostering Service, GDPR, Health and safety etc.
2. Training and Development Standards
3. Reporting and recording
4. First Aid
5. Safer Caring and Allegations Training
6. Managing Behaviour
7. Safeguarding and Child Protection

Core trainings are updated every 3 years or when significant changes are made to Working Together.

Independent Fostering Agencies will sometimes offer more tailored training solutions, at F5 Foster Care, for example, each year we will offer a variety of different courses, and additionally access to online training. We also offer access to formal accredited qualifications.

In addition to this, at F5 Foster we also offer our Foster Carers:

- Fostering Buddy
- Support Groups
- Membership to Foster Talk
- Out of hours support
- Personal Development Plans and access to accredited qualification training



Frequently Asked Questions

There are some questions that we come across frequently, so we have compiled some of these here with answers that will hopefully be helpful. This list is far from exhaustive so if you have any other questions that you would like to ask or if you would just like to chat please do feel free to give us a call.

- 1. Am I too old to Foster?**
- 2. Can I work and still Foster?**
- 3. How long does it take to become a Foster Carer?**
- 4. Do I have to own my own house?**
- 5. Can I choose the age range of the children I Foster?**
- 6. Do I have to be able to drive?**
- 7. How long will the children stay with me?**
- 8. How much will I know about the child?**
- 9. I have dogs and other pets, will this be a problem?**
- 10. I've got a criminal record - can I still Foster?**
- 11. I've got a medical condition, can I still Foster?**
- 12. What about complaints and allegations?**



1. ***Am I too old to Foster?*** There's no age cap for people who want to start Fostering. In a lot of cases many Foster Carers didn't start their journey until their own children had left home. When you are being assessed it's your values and your commitment to supporting children and young people that matters, not your age.
2. ***Can I work and still Foster?*** The short answer is yes, however this would depend on how flexible your work allows you to be. Fostering includes a lot of meetings, some of which can be unexpected, so you will need to know that you can respond to these (or have people in your network who can assist you).
3. ***How long does it take to become a Foster Carer?*** It can take four or five months from the time you contact a Fostering Service to the time you become approved as a Foster Carer as long as there are no hold ups. (If you're already approved we can manage this process much more quickly.)
4. ***Do I have to own my own house?*** Not at all – It makes no difference whether you rent or own your property. We just need to know that your tenancy is stable and that you have at least one spare room that is suitable for a Foster Child. We will also need to check in with your landlord to get a reference and make sure they are ok with you having a Foster Child in place.
5. ***Can I choose the age range of the children I Foster?*** Foster Carers have something called "matching criteria". This is agreed between you and your Assessing Social Worker as you go through the assessment process and then confirmed at Panel. This sets out things such as the age, number, genders etc that you are most interested in Fostering.
6. ***Do I have to be able to drive?*** Not all Foster Carers drive so it's not a deal breaker, however it is helpful if you can drive because it makes it much easier getting to meetings and transporting children to their school or for activities. If you do not drive, you will need to consider your transport options closely.
7. ***How long will the children stay with me?*** Unfortunately, that's a question we can't answer at the moment. Each placement can be different. Local Authorities put in place tailored plans for each child. Sometimes that means a child will move on quickly. Other times, the plan can change once the children arrive. Many Foster Carers can tell stories of 'short-term placements' that ended up lasting several years! But it could be anything from overnight onwards.
8. ***How much will I know about the child?*** As an agency F5 will share you with all the information we have about a child, however there are things that the Children's Social Worker and we don't know – a Foster child will often talk to their Foster Carer about difficult issues that they have not previously revealed. We often don't know about the totality of their lived experiences in their birth family. It will be a journey of discovery and you will get support if the child tells you difficult things.
9. ***I have dogs and other pets, will this be a problem?*** You can have pets within home and as part of your application process a pet risk assessment will be completed. Once approved, the pets you have in your home will also be considered when matching is occurring. For some children, the unconditional affection that animals offer really helps them to settle, but for others, who have allergies or medical conditions, for example, this could mean they can't be placed with you.

10. I've got a criminal record - can I still Foster?

This would depend on what your record is, if you have committed any offence against a child then no you would not be able to become a Foster Carer. Any other offences will be considered as part of your assessment. Your assessing Social Worker will look at: how long ago the offence happened, the circumstances of the offence, how serious the offence was etc. We would always recommend that any criminal record is disclosed as soon as possible, this can then be talked through with you in a sensitive and respectful way.

11. I've got a medical condition; can I still Foster?

Each potential Foster Carer must undergo a medical assessment as part of the application process. This is then assessed by our medical advisor, who helps to decide if there are any health factors that would prevent you Fostering. If you are particularly concerned, it might be helpful to arrange for a medical early on in the process, so any significant issues can be looked at sooner rather than later.

12. What about complaints and allegations?

As part of the training you are given as you are being prepared for Fostering, this should be talked through with you in detail and advice given on how to best avoid any allegations or complaints. There are several straightforward steps you and your family can take to keep you and the children you Foster safe. Some Fostering services, like ourselves, also provide their Foster Carers funded membership of Foster Talk who can also provide advice and guidance relating to this.





For more information or to discuss your enquiry further please contact F5 Foster Care on



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