

Fostering Information Pack



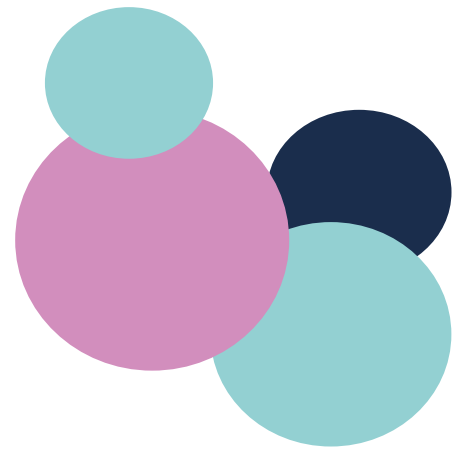
Bath & North East
Somerset Council

Improving People's Lives

Introduction

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" With B&NES I always look at it as one big family. Everybody knows each other, the children know each other whereas you don't get this with other fostering agencies. "

The booklet tells you about fostering and how we at Bath & North East Somerset Council prepare and support our foster carers. We highly value the work of our carers and aim to help them to develop their abilities so that they, and the children placed in their care, have a positive experience of fostering.



The Role of a Foster Carer

In Children's Services we do all we can to support parents experiencing difficulties to continue to care for their children at home, including Fostering Families support. When this is not possible and the children need to come into care, in most cases we arrange for them to stay with foster carers. Ideally the foster home will be somewhere not too far from their own home, to allow them to continue in school and with friendships. Many children will return to their own families after a few days, weeks or months. Others will be unable to return home so we will look for a permanent family for them.

Some children are cared for as part of a voluntary arrangement between their parents and Children's Services. Where a court has ordered that a child comes into foster care, Children's Services share parental responsibility with the parents. Foster carers do not have legal parental responsibility, although they do have the day-to-day responsibility for meeting the needs of their foster children.

The role of a foster carer is to work as part of a team, helping a child by providing security, stability and care during both difficult and more settled periods in their lives.

Children may react adversely to their previous experiences or separation from their families; foster carers need to respond with a nurturing and consistent approach, understanding the significant impact that such trauma may have on children.

"Foster care means: being able to provide a loving nurturing home to a child/children."

"Fostering has given the household a buzz, it feels alive."



This is Emily. Emily's mother has had a long-term addiction to alcohol and was unable to meet Emily's physical or emotional needs.

Emily would often come to school tired, hungry and without warm clothes. Emily's teachers reported that she often seemed sad and anxious, and they were very worried about her.

Emily needed someone who could care for her, as her mother was unable to. No one in Emily's wider family was able to safely care for her which is why Emily came into foster care. Emily needed foster carers who understood the impact of the neglect and trauma she had experienced and who were able to help her make sense of this alongside caring for her in a consistent and nurturing way.

There are around 150 children in foster care in Bath and North East Somerset but there are not enough approved foster carers offering different types of placements.

We are careful to match foster carers and children, so that carers can best meet the needs of children. We offer lots of support to new carers and as their confidence and experience grows, carers can progress to work with children with more complex needs if they wish.

"Don't take problems personally, it is part of the job. Time and Patience are invaluable."



Different Types of Foster Care

There are a number of different types of foster care. Carers may choose to specialise depending on their particular preference, experience and circumstances. The assessment process would consider the type of fostering best suited to your family.

Short Term Foster Care: providing placements for a few days, weeks or months (up to about 2 years) until difficulties at home are addressed or alternative plans are made for the child's future.

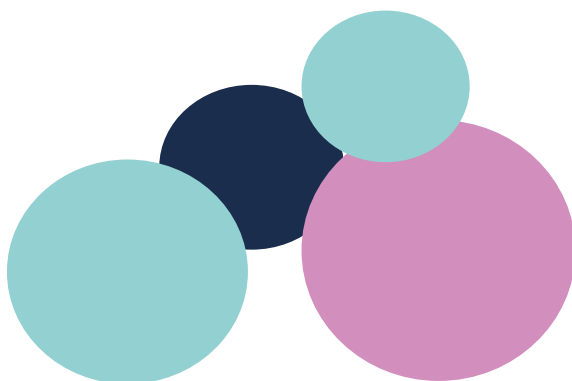
Long Term Foster Care: providing a permanent home to children who are unable to return to their birth families but usually have some form of ongoing contact.

Emergency Care: providing short placements at short notice, including at night or at weekends.

Stay Over Care: offering a short stay (a few days to up to two weeks) to support the child's family or another foster family - either on a planned basis or as a result of unforeseen circumstances.

Parent and Children Fostering: both parent and child (or pregnant mother) live with the foster carer, and part of the task is to help social workers to assess parenting skills, working closely with other professionals. One carer must be available on a full-time basis.

Family Link: a service for disabled children and their families. Carers are matched with a particular child or young person and provide regular short periods of care. This is for overnight stays and is usually agreed in advance.



Fostering Families: an approach to fostering which aims to support the whole families in need of long-term support. Many of the families we work with do not have family members who are able to offer them the support they need to be the kind of parent they want to be. Fostering Families was developed because we recognise the negative impact of separating children from their parents.

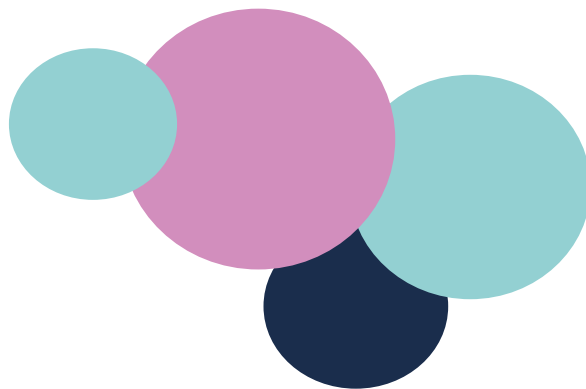
The aim is to foster connections of support around the family and improve the quality of family relationships.

Some things that you would need to do are:

- Provide guidance, emotional support and encouragement
- Practical help - assisting with appointments, support with household tasks and money management
- Child-care (short breaks)
- Helping with family mealtimes and bedtime routines
- Accessing activities in the community

Supported Lodgings: The scheme supports those aged 16 to 25 who have left home or care, but do not feel ready to live independently.

Supported lodgings can last for anything from 9 to 24 months, occasionally longer. While a young person stays with their provider, they will have a clean and comfortable room in a safe, secure, and supportive household.



"When a child comes to stay; take a step back, watch and listen, don't be judgemental, use humour to encourage them."

"Foster care is demanding, fun and fulfilling... It does mean certain sacrifices but given our family support, it's really worth it."

Who Can be a Foster Carer?

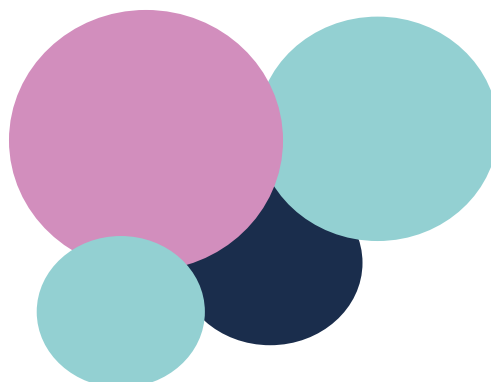
People with a variety of life experiences and backgrounds can become successful foster carers: the ability to help children is not determined by issues of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, or marital status. It may be possible for you to work outside the home, although children in foster care will have experienced separation and loss and need stability and consistent care. You do not have to own your own home, but you do need to be in secure accommodation and a child would need their own bedroom. We need carers from a diverse range of backgrounds and circumstances in order to meet our aim of making the best possible match for a child.

Anyone with an interest in and a commitment to helping children and young people could have something to offer as a foster carer. In return, fostering provides a range of diverse benefits including all the rewards that come from caring for a particular child or young person and making a difference to their future. Fostering with Bath & North East Somerset Council also provides a means of giving something back to children and the community.

"Foster care gives our life a purpose. We really enjoy looking after children and all the activities that go with it."

You would need:

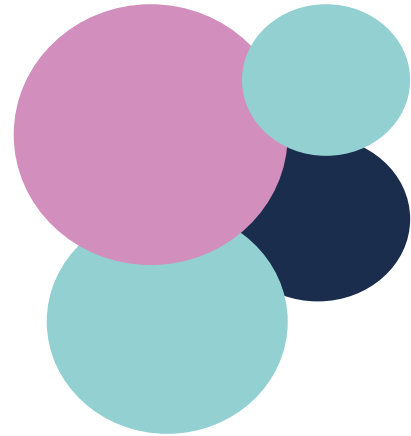
- Experience of looking after or working with children (not necessarily your own) and understanding their needs
- To be able to listen to children.
- Time, energy and practical space
- Patience, stability and a sense of humour
- To enjoy the company of children
- To be able to take a positive and non-judgemental approach with a child's family



- To be able to work as a member of a team with a range of professionals
- To have a reasonable level of health and fitness
- To be over 21
- To be a non-smoking household if you wish to foster a child under the age of 5

Katie has lived with the same foster carer, Diana, for eight years. She came into care at age seven after she was removed from her parent's care due to physical and emotional abuse. Her first placement was an emergency placement, her second placement was short term.

When Katie came to her long-term placement she was in a difficult place and would often express her feelings by rejecting her carer or throwing tantrums. Katie's foster carer was supported through training and supervision to understand and respond to Katie's behaviour. It took a long time for Katie and her foster carer to get to where they are now, but Katie is settled and about to sit her GCSE's.



"You need patience, energy, sense of humour, tolerance, to be able to be firm but kind. If you're in a relationship it needs to be strong too."



About the Children

Every child is unique, and their needs will depend on their age, background and life experiences. However, many of the children who need to be looked after by foster carers have already lived through difficult experiences or witnessed frightening and confusing situations. These experiences are likely to affect a child's understanding of the world, how they behave and show their emotions and needs. They may also be delayed in terms of their emotional, educational and social development and some will have learning difficulties or additional health needs. But with your help, they can build their confidence, learn new skills and achieve their dreams. A foster carer will bring much needed stability and continuity to children's lives. The secret is simply to offer what every child needs - family life, understanding, love and respect. Through offering these things foster carers give children - and often whole families the time and space to rebuild their lives.

There are many different reasons why a child may come into care:

Many children will have experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse and neglect.

There may be a breakdown of relationships between parents and teenagers.

Parents are unable to care for their children because of illness, mental health needs, or drug or alcohol misuse and do not have friends or family nearby to offer support.

Children in care may have been exposed to domestic abuse which can have a significant impact on their development and wellbeing.

"This is hard work... but along with the hard work comes the reward, seeing that little step forward the foster child has made, seeing them smile, it's all worth it."

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The Assessment Process

In Bath & North East Somerset Council we work to complete assessments within four to six months. We undertake extensive background checks and collect references from people who know the potential carers as well as from their employers.

The assessing social worker produces a report, with contributions from the applicant, which is presented to the Fostering Panel who make a recommendation about approval. Prospective foster carers are expected to attend panel with the social worker.

Bath & North East Somerset Council aims to work with prospective and approved carers in a respectful, open and transparent way. We value the work of our foster carers and aim to provide the highest quality service to them in all aspects.

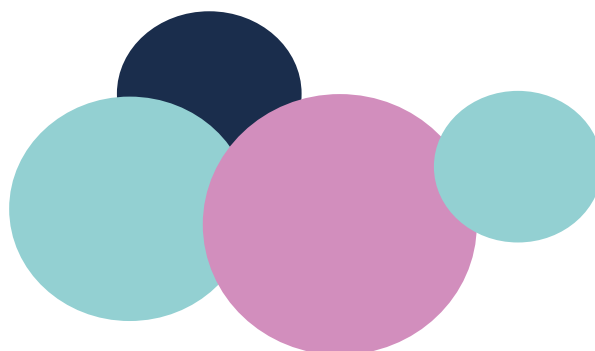
The process for assessing prospective carers is necessarily robust, in the interests of children. To ensure fostering is the right path for you, we will ask about your own history, experience and lifestyle.

In Bath & North East Somerset, we are committed to making the assessment an open and collaborative process, with the aim of reaching agreement with prospective carers about what kind of fostering is best for you.

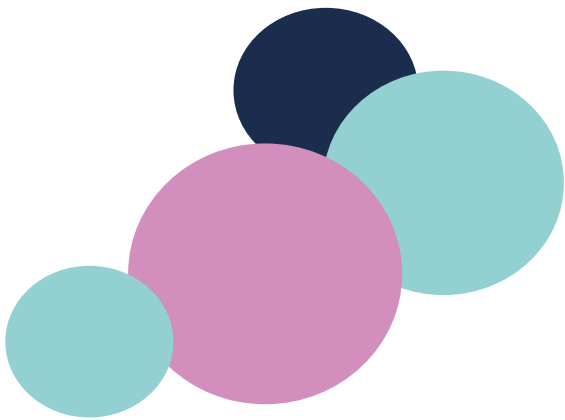
"Socialising and communicating with other carers are a very good idea, it helps enormously and makes large problems become smaller."

The assessment involves:

- All adults within a household being assessed as carers.
- A series of discussions with the assessing social worker, usually taking place in your home, covering such topics as motivation, parenting experience, safe care and working as part of a team.
- Seeking the views of all household members, including children.



- Statutory checks, including medical, and a DBS check for anyone in the household 18 and over. (A criminal conviction will not automatically mean that someone cannot foster, unless it was a serious offence or involving children, but should be mentioned at an early stage so advice can be given). Any ex-partner who has shared parenting will be contacted for a reference.
- Visits to at least two people who have known you well for a minimum of two years, to gain their opinion on your suitability.



"When a child comes to stay; be patient- it takes time to take on such a change of life experience. Use your support worker as they are extremely supportive and try to meet other foster carers."

"When a child comes to stay; let them have their own space but let them know that you're there for all their needs."

Training and Preparation

All prospective carers attend a preparation course. The aim is to help you gain a wider understanding of fostering and how it will impact upon your family as well as to prepare you for some of the issues you might face.

The preparation course usually takes place around the same time as your assessment. The preparation course can be spread over several weeks; it is usually a mixture of weekday evenings and weekend time. The sessions cover a variety of topics and include speakers, videos and discussion within the group.

After approval, you will be expected to take an active role in your ongoing development, including attending core-training or / and at least four training events each year. There is an extensive range of courses on offer to carers with Bath & North East Somerset Council. This includes access to courses across the Council and those offered by partner agencies. An annual review process helps to identify priorities for individual carers training needs.

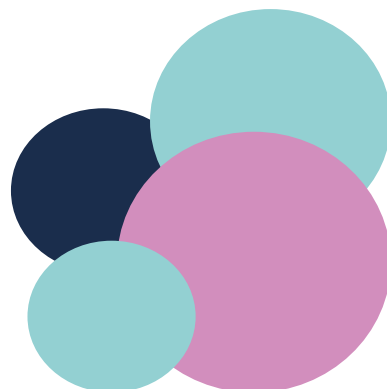
Examples of training offered by Bath & North East Somerset Council:

- Understanding attachment
- Child development
- Safe caring
- Working with diversity
- Child protection
- Managing behaviour
- Report writing

"B&NES provide excellent training and meet all the needs a foster carer requires."

"The preparation course was immensely helpful and using case studies really made you think and work out what you might do in specific situations."

"The training courses I have attended have been very informative, very beneficial and well worth completing."



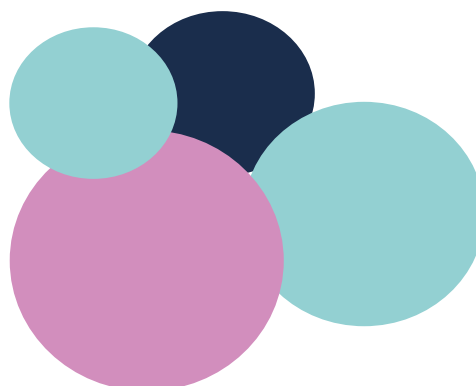
Support for Carers

We give high priority to supporting foster carers:

- All carers have an allocated supervising social worker who will visit you regularly.
- A buddy to support you through your first year of fostering.
- Other team members and managers are available if needed.
- A dedicated out-of-hours support phone line for foster carers, as well as the Emergency Duty Team.
- Regular support groups with other foster carers.
- Advice in relation to issues including health and education issues from professionals with expertise in the needs of looked after children.
- Cover the cost of you joining a fostering support agency of your choice.
- Specialist services providing expertise in relation to emotional and behavioural issues.
- Close liaison between the Family Placement Team and social workers for the children placed, being part of the same organisation with shared senior management.
- A school holiday activity programme called Adventures with Friends. Your own children could also attend some of the activities.
- Insurance scheme to cover damage where carers own insurance is not applicable.
- Club for children of foster carers (CFC).
- A Psychologist specifically to support Foster Carers.

"I feel lucky to have a good relationship with my supporting Social worker, I have had the same one for years and she knows me well."

"We feel there is always someone available to help with advice, relaying messages and information, as well as in emergency."



Placements

Foster carers are approved for a type of fostering and a particular number and age group of children. When a placement is needed, carers are contacted and given as full details as possible about the child(ren) needing placement.

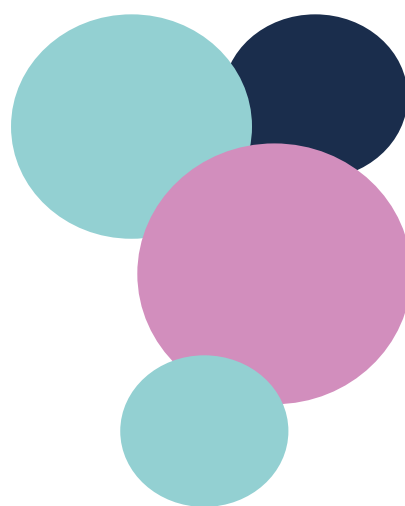
Foster carers work to achieve the best possible future for the child(ren) placed with them. This could be returning home or moving on to other carers. It can be hard to see a child move on, but foster carers are given plenty of support.

A key role for foster carers is to support the child's contact with their family and friends. Foster carers often develop good relationships with birth parents, and this can be a very satisfying aspect of the work. The Family Placement Team are very mindful of any potential risk to carers and will take all necessary precautions in the rare cases where there is a concern in relation to the child's family. This risk would usually be apparent and discussed prior to carers agreeing to take a placement.

Occasionally placements may run into difficulties. Children's Services will do their best to resolve problems with foster carers and offer any additional support to both carers and the young person they are caring for. This is to help stabilise the placement and avoid a breakdown if possible.

"My social worker is very helpful and a great support."

"The family placement team are generally the first port of call when a problem arises. They can often help or point you in the right direction."



This is Frankie. Frankie has been looked after since the age of four due to his parents not looking after him properly. Frankie's parents both had significant drug addictions and Frankie was exposed to a lot of domestic violence in his early years. This had a considerable impact on his ability to trust in adults. Frankie needed foster carers who could understand the impact that Frankie's experiences had on his ability to form trusting attachments and be creative and therapeutic in the way they looked after him.

Frankie was fostered for five years by Pam, a woman whose own children had grown up and moved out. Frankie left his placement to live with his own family at age ten. His mother was in a much better place and for three years everything seemed to be going well for Frankie at home, other than the occasional argument. Then Frankie's mother got a new boyfriend, he had a very short temper and was physically and verbally abusive to Frankie and his mother. Frankie's mother was unable to protect him.

Frankie needed to be looked after again by someone who would protect him. Frankie's experience had made him angry and defensive making it hard for him to know how to communicate his feelings. At age fourteen it was much harder to place Frankie, even though he desperately needed a foster carer.

Darren was new to fostering but had been a secondary school teacher for many years. He had dealt with many difficult situations in the school environment when children's home lives had affected their behaviour. This is what had made Darren think about fostering. Frankie was going to be Darren's first placement; he was anxious at first that it may be more than he could handle. At first things were not easy, Darren was still finding his feet as a carer and Frankie was finding it difficult to settle in. Darren spoke to his supervising social worker regularly for advice and was able to attend training in managing difficult behaviours. Darren also started speaking to other carers regularly for support and advice which helped Darren to feel more confident in his ability to care for Frankie.



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Our aim is to maximise the number of Children in Care who are enabled to realise their potential within a safe and nurturing family environment, and to help prepare them for adult life and independent living. We aim to achieve this by recruiting, supporting, and valuing our own foster carers. Having read this booklet, if you feel you have the drive and commitment to become a foster carer, please contact us.

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