



what is fostering?

AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT BEING
A FOSTER CARER INVOLVES

-  **Fostering in Enfield**
-  **@FosteringEnfield**
-  **Telephone: 020 8379 2831**
-  **Freephone: 0800 038 1313**
-  **fostering@enfield.gov.uk**
-  **www.enfield.gov.uk/fostering**



Who can apply to foster?

One of the first questions you'll no doubt be asking yourself is whether or not you are able to foster a child or young person.

Quite simply there is no typical foster carer. Applications are welcome from people from a variety of backgrounds and walks of life in order to meet the varied needs of the children and young people in our care.

We do not expect you to have any particular qualifications but what we do expect is that you have a real interest in caring for children and young people, space in your home and time in your life to foster a child or young person.

There are many misconceptions about who can, or can't, apply that you may have heard. So if you think you can do it, you probably can. The only absolute requirement is that you have to be over 21 years old and not committed a crime against a child.

This booklet provides you with information to help you start your fostering journey.

We look forward to hearing from you and should you have any queries please feel free to contact us on **Freephone 0800 038 1313** or email **fostering@enfield.gov.uk**

Enfield Fostering Service

“ WE LIKE EVERYTHING ABOUT LIVING WITH OUR FOSTER CARERS. THEY ARE KIND, CARING AND LOVING AND SUPPORT US IN EVERYTHING WE DO ”



What is fostering?

Fostering provides stability, care and family support to children or young people who are not able to live with their parents.

There are many reasons why children are fostered. These include:

- ♥ welfare of the child whose safety is being threatened
- ♥ family breakdown
- ♥ parents needing help due to illness
- ♥ placement whilst a permanent family is being sought for them
- ♥ the young person is an unaccompanied asylum seeker

Fostering is often a temporary arrangement whilst work is done to return the children to their families. In these cases the length of foster placements can vary from a few days, weeks or months to a few years. Sometimes fostering can be a permanent arrangement for a child.

Sometimes fostered children and young people experience a very stressful and uncertain time due to being in care. The help and support from the foster carer, and their family and friends in their support network, can have a really positive impact on their lives.

Fostering can also be a career choice. It provides an opportunity to work from home whilst being rewarded financially for making a difference to a child's life.

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LOOKING AFTER SOMEONE ELSE'S CHILD IS SO REWARDING, ESPECIALLY AS YOU'RE WORKING TOWARDS A BETTER LIFE FOR THEM

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I WANTED TO GIVE
SOMETHING BACK TO
MY COMMUNITY
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You can foster if you:

- ♥ Are over 21 and healthy and active enough to keep up with a child or young person, as there's no upper age limit
- ♥ Have the time, space and commitment
- ♥ Are married, living with a partner, single or divorced
- ♥ Are working, unemployed or retired
- ♥ Practice a religion or not
- ♥ Are disabled or have a medical condition (as long as it's stable and doesn't affect your ability to care for a child)
- ♥ You are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or heterosexual
- ♥ Are a homeowner or rent, as long as you have enough room to foster a child. (Babies can sleep in your room up to the age of 3. Thereafter foster children will need their own bedroom.)
- ♥ Are a parent already or have no children of your own
- ♥ Are from any ethnic background. We need carers from all different cultures in order to match children and young people with suitable families. Your English must be of sufficient level for you to liaise with other professionals in English, and for you to keep records on your foster child.

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I WAS FOSTERED AND I
HAD A REALLY POSITIVE
EXPERIENCE, NOW ITS MY
TURN TO HELP

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Are you an experienced foster carer?

Any decision to move from your current agency or local authority and come to foster for Enfield Council is a decision that you as a foster carer have every right to make and you should not feel pressured by your current agency to remain with them. If you need advice on transferring to Enfield fostering service we are happy to help and advise you to make this as smooth a process as possible. The process is straightforward and we will support you every step of the way.



Who might you foster?

Enfield's foster children or young people may be aged 0-18 and may need to be placed either on their own or with a sibling(s). Some foster carers express an interest in fostering children of a particular age range, whilst others foster children from a broad spectrum of ages. Some specialist foster carers foster children with special needs or disabilities.

Children can be placed in an emergency whilst other children are placed in a planned way, in which case we will facilitate introductions between you and your prospective foster child. Part of our role is to match children with foster carers, taking into consideration the needs of the child and your skills and family circumstances.

Most of our foster children will have had difficult experiences. Some of them may have also experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse or neglect, which means that they need adults who are patient, warm and understanding to foster them.

The children and young people who need looking after come from Enfield's many different cultural backgrounds. So we invite people from all sections of the community to apply to become foster carers.

Some of our young people will exhibit challenging behaviour and may be struggling to manage boundaries. Their behaviour may leave them vulnerable to child sexual exploitation or even at risk of gang involvement. These young people need foster carers who show consistency and empathy, and who are flexible in their approach to parenting. We will provide you with the information about the child that we have, so as to assist you in making a decision about caring for the child. We will support you with training, regular visits and telephone calls, as well as identifying any other support you may need.



What do foster carers do?

Children sometimes need a few days or weeks in foster care, while others may need to stay until they are ready to live independently. They need the support of their foster carers to make these transitions. Foster carers attend and contribute to meetings about the child, promote the child's health, education, social interaction and leisure activities. There will be additional travel responsibilities to manage such as school runs and any arrangements for the fostered children to keep in contact with their birth family. Furthermore,

depending on the care plan of the child, foster carers of children up to primary school age are often required to travel to our contact centre in Edmonton to facilitate contact with their birth family. This can take place once or up to several times a week.

Foster carers are also expected to continue to develop their skills and to form good working relationships with other professionals in the child's network.

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WORKING WITH OUR LOCAL AUTHORITY MEANS WE CAN WORK DIRECTLY WITH THE CHILDREN FROM OUR COMMUNITY THAT NEED HELP

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What qualities and skills are we looking for?

Foster carers come from all walks of life; what is important is your interest in caring for a child. We need a diverse range of people with different skills and qualities to come forward so that more children are placed in the right homes.

Every child's story is different but they all require security, stability and the opportunity to achieve their full potential. The benefits of an ordinary family life is needed permanently or until they can return to their parents. If they cannot return to their parents or go to live with family it will be until they can move to a new permanent family or to living independently.

There are other roles that foster carers undertake. In addition to the day-to-day care of the child, foster carers attend meetings about foster children, keep written records, support contact with families and others close to the child, and manage sensitive and confidential information. Foster carers often play a significant role in helping children come to terms with difficult or traumatic experiences. Foster carers also play a key role in promoting foster children's education and health, as well as their social wellbeing.

Difficult or challenging behaviour displayed by foster children can be a way of dealing with the upheaval of changes in their living circumstances. As a foster carer it will be important for you to work towards establishing a positive relationship with the child/young person, and to recognise the possible causes of such behaviour. Enfield Fostering Service will work alongside you to develop strategies to assist the young person to manage difficult feelings and experiences.

Depending on the plan for the child, foster carers help children to maintain contact with their families and friends. Contact can be face-to-face, or indirect such as via telephone, email or letters, and we offer training to foster carers in managing contact.

Types of foster care

Short-term fostering

This type of placement can last a few days to several years. Short-term foster carers look after a child for a period of time, often whilst court proceedings are in process to determine whether it is suitable for the child to return home. This may involve parents or other family members undergoing assessments about whether they are able to provide safe and consistent care to the child. In other cases parents voluntarily agree to their children being in care. In all cases we work in partnership with parents. At the end of the placement children are likely to return home or be placed with other family members, or with long-term foster carers or adopters. Being a short-term foster carer can be rewarding as foster carers play a key role in helping children through difficult times.



Permanent/long-term fostering

Where it has been decided that a child cannot return home and adoption is not possible, we may choose a long-term foster placement for a child. They will remain there until they are at least 18 years, unless a 'Staying Put' arrangement has been considered, then they can remain with foster carers until they reach the age of 21. When young people remain beyond 18 this is an arrangement that is mutually agreed between all parties, including young people and foster carers, and financial payments to the foster carers continue. This enables children to thrive in a stable home and for foster carers to develop strong, rewarding relationships with children and young people on a more permanent basis and to prepare them to live independently.

“ I'VE ALWAYS WORKED WITH CHILDREN, ITS SOMETHING I ALWAYS THOUGHT OF DOING ”

Parent and child fostering

These placements are time-limited and are specifically for a young parent and their child. This type of placement offers stability and consistency in a family environment, whilst assessments are taking place. We have a specialist salaried parent and child fostering scheme which we run together with our other North London Fostering Consortium members. This involves foster carers contributing to the assessment of the parent. We also have regular parent and child fostering. If you are interested in this type of fostering, please ask us about the two different schemes.

Teenagers

‘The teenage years are when most young people are finding their feet, and the focus of the foster carer’s role will be different to that of the carer for younger children. A strong emphasis will be on supporting the young person to make sense of their past experiences, make important decisions about their future, and develop life skills that will be useful to them in their adult lives. The relationship you develop with a young person as their foster carer will be crucial in ensuring they receive encouragement, positive guidance and advice in order to develop confidence to achieve their goals.

Respite care

As a respite carer you would work in partnership with birth parents and short or long-term carers to provide weekend, holiday or support care on a regular, one off or intermittent basis, depending on the plans for the child. Respite care is about looking after a child to support the birth family or foster carers.

Family and friends/connected persons foster carers

A child being cared for by the local council goes to live with someone they already know, usually a family member. Family and Friends foster carers are subject to the same foster care Regulations and Standards as regular foster carers.



“ I WANTED TO GIVE SOMETHING BACK TO SOCIETY. I HAD GREAT CHILDHOOD AND WANTED TO GIVE A CHILD THE SAME OPPORTUNITY ”

Working with birth parents

Contact is the process by which children and young people in care remain in touch with their birth families and significant other people. It can include e-mails, telephone calls, text messages, social networking sites, letters, visits and overnight stays. Contact may be with parents or other adults known to the child but can also be with siblings who are in other placements or with significant others. Any arrangements will have been agreed in the child's care plan, which is regularly reviewed in case anything needs to change.

Except where it is not deemed to be in the child's best interests, parents have a right to be involved in their children's lives. For the children, their parents are important people, whatever their circumstances. Along with other professionals, foster carers must work to the agreed Care Plan; if it is to work towards rehabilitation, this will mean using contact sessions to help the parents develop the skills to adequately care for their children. We offer training to foster carers in managing contact. Contact can be supervised or unsupervised, depending on the need, age and plan for the child. The arrangements for a child's contact may undergo changes over time.



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IT TAKES A SPECIAL PERSON TO BE A GREAT FOSTER CARER, SOMEONE WHO REALISES THAT THE CHILD MAY NOT BE PERFECT BUT NONE OF US ARE ”

Why is contact important?

Research suggests that in the majority of cases the well-being of foster children is improved if they maintain regular and positive contact with parents and other family members. Continuing successful contact is the key to children returning home early and there are fewer placement breakdowns. It is also important in order that children can more easily retain and develop their sense of identity.

What is the frequency of contact?

Contact will vary in frequency. For a baby, where the plan is rehabilitation with a parent(s), contact usually takes place around 4 times a week in order to build the bond between them. When there are care proceedings for a foster child the court will determine the level of contact and this can change with different family members. Contact is likely to be less often

for children in long-term placements and sometimes contact consists of letters and photos, rather than face-to-face meetings. Where contact will cease altogether, which may happen prior to adoption, there will be a goodbye visit.

Where does contact happen?

The agreed venue for contact varies according to individual circumstances. Most often it will be a venue in the London Borough of Enfield - usually the Edmonton Family Centre. The foster carer will be expected to take the child to this venue. The contact will usually be supervised by a social worker or contact supervisor. Sometimes contact takes place in the foster carer's home under supervision by the foster carer as this is where a child may feel more comfortable and secure. It can also take place in a neutral location somewhere in the community.

What support will I be offered?

We will provide you with:

- ♥ Free training beforehand to help you prepare to be a foster carer
- ♥ A dedicated supervising social worker from the fostering team who will meet with you regularly and also stay in telephone and email contact, to provide you with ongoing support
- ♥ 24-hour support service
- ♥ We have a psychologist who works specifically with foster carers to provide support when challenges arise in foster placements. We also have close links with our local CAMHS (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service) who provide consultation, advice and therapeutic support to children. There are also a number of other specialised services within Enfield with whom we have close links
- ♥ Membership of Enfield Foster Carers Association, which is run by foster carers, for foster carers
- ♥ Ongoing training opportunities once you are approved to build on your skills
- ♥ Access to regular support groups
- ♥ Membership of the Fostering Network, an independent national charity which offers a host of



benefits which include: subscription to Foster Care magazine, monthly newsletters, access to online resources, 24-hour dedicated helpline, expert legal assistance, advice on tax, national insurance and benefits, exclusive financial advice on mortgages and pensions, training and regular events.

- ♥ Resources in supporting children's education with support from our Virtual School.

Financial Support

In addition to all of the above all foster carers receive an allowance to look after the children in their care. They also receive a fee to recognise the skills they offer to the child or young person and for the ongoing training they attend to maintain those skills. When a child is placed with a foster carer, payment is made directly into the carer's bank account. Fostering allowances mean that carers have the necessary funds to care for children plus a fee as a financial reward for themselves. Foster carers are not employed by Enfield Council and are required to register as self-employed with HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs). If in receipt of benefits, they can still receive a fostering allowance which will not affect benefit claims.

There is guidance on taxation and benefits on the government website: www.gov.uk/foster-carers/claiming-benefits-while-fostering and the Fostering Network website: www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/finances/tax-and-national-insurance





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MY FOSTER CARERS ARE THOUGHTFUL
AND CARING. THEY VALUE MY OPINIONS
AND ARE ALWAYS THERE TO SUPPORT ME
WHEN I NEED THEM THE MOST ”

First steps to becoming a foster carer:

Contact us

You can call us to ask further questions about fostering and we will help you to consider how fostering will impact on your life and the changes you may need to make. We will ask you about your reasons for considering fostering, your previous experience and the room you have available in your home.

We run regular information sessions that we encourage enquirers to attend. There you will have the opportunity to discuss fostering topics with one of our foster carers and a fostering team member.

We will take an initial enquiry from you over the telephone or in person if you wish to visit us at our offices.

Following the completion of the initial enquiry, if you and we are in agreement, we will arrange an initial visit to your home. You may also wish to apply to foster at this stage, and again if we are both in agreement, we will start Stage 1 of the assessment process, which will minimise any delays.

The Assessment Process

At the initial visit, you will have the opportunity to find out more about fostering and the kinds of children who need foster care. We can also advise you on the fostering allowances, and discuss with you how you might be able to balance fostering with other commitments you may have, such as children or work.

If the outcome of the initial visit is positive, we will invite you to our next preparation training for prospective foster carers, which is called 'Skills to Foster'. This 3-day training is a mandatory part of the assessment, and both you and your partner are

required to attend. This training will help you to learn in greater depth about fostering and the role of the foster carer and also assists us to gain a sense of whether you have the potential to foster.

There are two stages to the assessment process, and sometimes they can run at the same time to make things as seamless as possible. Once you have indicated to us that you wish to apply to become a foster carer, and if your application is in line with our current recruitment criteria, we will start the first stage of the assessment process.

Stage 1

At Stage 1 we take up checks and references about you and your family in order for us to establish:

- ♥ The suitability of you and your household to foster
- ♥ Whether your home will provide a safe, comfortable environment for a foster child/ren
- ♥ Whether you would be able to provide a good standard of care to a foster child/ren

At any stage of the process you will have an opportunity to meet with an existing foster carer on a one-to-one basis, to find out first-hand about what it is like to be a foster carer for Enfield.

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MY FOSTER CARERS CARE FOR ME LIKE I AM THEIR OWN CHILD

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Stage 2

During Stage 2 more detailed information is gathered. You will be allocated an assessing social worker, who will meet with you approximately 6-8 times in your home, to carry out an assessment which will be presented in a report to our Fostering Panel after a 4-5 month period. During the visits the assessor will get to know you well, and set you some practical tasks as part of the assessment process.

The purpose of the visits is to assess how you would manage fostering and to determine, with your help, what type of fostering would be suited to you and your family. You will have an opportunity to share any concerns you may have, and to consider more closely the impact fostering will have on your family. Once Enfield's Fostering Panel have considered your assessment report they will make a recommendation and shortly thereafter our Assistant Director, who is Enfield's decision maker, will make a final decision about approving you as a foster carer(s) for Enfield.

Although the fostering process can seem a little daunting, our current foster carers tell us they found it a rewarding experience which gave them opportunities to reflect and gain a clear sense of the

skills they bring to fostering and also of which skills they will need, with support, to develop further.

So we promise to make it as straightforward and simple as possible and to support you every step of the way. The most important thing to remember is to be open, honest and to discuss any concerns you may have early on, so that we can address them. The assessment is a two-way process so as we learn about you and your capacity to foster children, you are also learning about how the department works and expectations of and support available to foster carers.

“FOSTERING INVOLVES OUR WHOLE FAMILY AND EACH OF US TAKES RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE THE CHILDREN WE FOSTER CAN FEEL AT HOME WITH US”



Considering fostering?

Our friendly team are ready to guide you
every step of the way!



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