

7 things to know about: FOSTERING



Run by and for LGBT+ parents/carers, their children and those considering parenthood living in Greater Manchester.





INTRODUCTION

Many people enter into foster care thinking that they are rescuing a poor child from an abusive parent. These foster parents believe that the child will be grateful and relieved to be out of their home situation. This is rarely the case. Abuse is all that the child may know. The child's bad situation is their "normal." Be prepared for the child to be anything but happy about being in your home. In other words, examine your expectations. What are you expecting? Not only from the child but from their parents, social services, and the fostering experience itself? High expectations can lead to your fall!

Children in care have sometimes been neglected, physically, sexually, mentally and emotionally abused. The children can be angry, resentful and sad. They may take it out on their foster parents. This behaviour is often the extreme of 'normal' acting out and can be especially hard to deal with when faced with - deregulation, disassociation, attention seeking and manipulative behaviours as well as physical abuse and verbal assaults.

However foster carers are vital for the protection, support and guidance of a child that can't live with their family anymore. Often LGBT+ carers have a greater insight into some of the difficulties Looked After Children (LAC) go through, and these skills can really support children navigate through the system to come out the other end. There is a whole range of things to consider before stepping forward to either a Local Authority (LA) Foster agency or an Independent Private Foster agency (IFPS). Allowances vary but IFPs usually offer a larger allowance which they claim back from the LA. The level of support - especially practical - is often higher with an IFP than an LA. They have a better ratio of supervising social workers to foster carers so one is usually available to step in, if necessary, in an emergency and offer hands on support, for example, by collecting a child from school. However, as a general rule LAs place in house first so if you work for an LA you are unlikely to have an empty bed for long. However, IFP usually cover a wider area - more than one LA, so be prepared to travel further: for contact, meetings, appointments, school runs etc.



THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE FOSTERING

1

Consider the ages of your own children and where another child would fit into your family. Is a baby right for you? While you won't have to deal with foul language, you will have to give up sleep and basically "start over" if your children are grown. Or would a school-age child work better? In this situation, you may not have to worry about childcare. For whatever age child you decide to go for they must have a spare room. Any young person you're fostering needs their own space. They need somewhere they can move away from other people and process their thoughts. They also need somewhere to do their homework.

2

You must be financially stable.

Fostering shouldn't put you in a place of financial insecurity. You need to have a level of income (or savings) to make sure you can pay all your bills, while the money you receive for fostering can top up your income, you don't want to have to rely on it. That's because fostering can be so irregular. For example, you might only have a foster placement for a short period of time and it could take months between placements.

3

You must not have a criminal record that means you pose a risk to a child.

Having a criminal record won't necessarily stop you becoming a foster carer. It depends entirely on the kind of offences and the context (for example, how long ago it was, how old you were, what was happening in your life at the time). But while having a criminal record doesn't necessarily exclude you, having violent offences or offences against children will.

4

You must have a good command of verbal and written English.

Fostering involves some reading and writing, including writing daily logs and reports on a computer system which your agency will show you. You need to be able to communicate with lots of professionals at LAC reviews, Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, so you have to be able to communicate well in English.

5

You have the ability to reflect.

Good foster carers have an ability to look back, reflect and understand what has gone on for them in an interaction. Without this ability to reflect, it's difficult for someone to be able to look at their contribution to relationship patterns developing and notice when they could take a different approach to a problem.

6

You have a motivation to learn.

Being a foster carer is a life-changing experience for both you and the young people you care for. You will learn new approaches to looking after children and gain an understanding of yourself you might not have had before. Are you able to challenge yourself and push yourself? Learn new ways of engaging and putting the theory into practice?

7

You show empathy and patience.

Without empathy it's difficult to see a young person as someone who has experienced trauma or as someone communicating a need. This doesn't mean we accept everything we see or that we don't hold firm boundaries, but we need to be kind and compassionate. If a child could choose not to be in care, they would most rather be with a family member. It's our job to offer them security. Many of us think we have patience. However, as a foster carer, you are really tested on that front daily.

Your young person will test you to see if you are as patient as you say you are. They'll test you to see if you're as patient as the last adult who said they were patient but gave up. They'll test you to see if you really do accept them for who they are.

Do you have patience for professionals? Are you willing to have social workers in your home, sometimes every month? Can you work in a partnership with a team of professionals to help the child either get back home or to another permanent placement, such as adoption? This goal requires excellent communication skills on your part, and a commitment to follow the plan set forth by the social workers, even if you don't agree with it.

Finally, it's important to consider every member of your family when thinking about fostering a child. Everyone in the house will be living and interacting with the foster child/ren, their behaviours can and will impact on each family member. Your children will have to share their home, room, toys, and parents. They sacrifice a lot in becoming part of a foster family, but often the benefits outway the negatives.





OTHER THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT FOSTERING

FINANCES

Foster carers, whether working for the LA or an independent fostering agency, are not technically employed by the fostering service, and therefore must submit an annual tax return; it is an offence not to. You can gain support with this through an accountant or HMRC.

CHILDCARE FUNDING

From the term after your child turns two, you will be able to claim 15 hours a week early education and childcare up to a maximum of 570 hours per year, funded by the government. This 2 year old free childcare is for a child who -

- is looked after by a local authority

PUPIL PREMIUM

The Pupil Premium provides extra funding to state-funded schools to help their staff give extra support to disadvantaged pupils including, but not restricted to, those looked after by a Local Authority. From April 2022, funding was increased to £24100 per pupil.

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

Priority School admissions - In May 2014, new guidance was issued to school admission authorities asking them to give the highest priority to all children who are LAC. A new School Admissions Code came into force on 19 December 2014 which now makes it a statutory requirement for school admission authorities to give the highest priority to these children.

If you have any further questions regarding fostering please get in contact with Proud 2 b Parents or attend one of our Parent 2 b workshops. We look forward to seeing you and your family at some of our meet-ups soon.