

Information for Family and Friends Carers

Please ensure you read this information carefully as, if we need to undertake this process, it explains the assessment of you and your household and the assessment and approval process

Your Fostering Social Worker will refer to this information during the assessment process, if an assessment is required

Introduction

What does ‘looked after’ mean

If a child is ‘looked after’ by the local authority, they will either be subject to a court order which gives the local authority shared parental responsibility, or they will be accommodated, which means that the child’s parents (or someone with parental responsibility for the child) has agreed that the local authority should ‘look after’ him or her.

The child may need to be ‘looked after’ for a wide range of reasons. Whether the child is ‘looked after’ under a court order or by agreement with the parents, it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that the child is placed with carers, who are able to meet his/her needs. The local authority is under a legal duty to consider placing the child with a relative or friend, if that person can meet the child’s needs.

What will this mean for me?

You have been approved under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 as a foster carer for the child in your care. You are approved for a period not exceeding 16 weeks from the date of approval. In particular situations this approval can be extended for a further 8 weeks. A full fostering assessment might need to be undertaken and it is important that, if this is required, you have a clear understanding of this process.

This will be required if it is anticipated that the future care plan for the child will not be concluded within a 16 week period. The full fostering assessment is a legal requirement and if you are approved under this full assessment process, this ensures you are able to continue to care for the child whilst the future care plan is determined.

Who undertakes the assessment?

The full fostering assessment is undertaken by a Social Worker from the Fostering Service. The Fostering Social Worker's role will be to specifically undertake the assessment and necessary checks and references that will apply.

The child will still have their own Social Worker.

What does the assessment involve?

The main aim of the assessment is to ensure that foster carers will be able to keep the child safe and meet their needs.

During the assessment the Fostering Social Worker will need to undertake a number of checks and will:

- Obtain your consent to enquiries, to undertake necessary checks and references including checks with other agencies, personal referees, employment references, education checks, NSPCC check, health information, other authority checks, if relevant and your previous partner/s, if relevant.
- Obtain the consent of other household members (aged 18 years or over) to undertake certain checks including other authority checks, if relevant, and other agency checks.
- Ask you to complete a Criminal Records Bureau (Police Check Form), this also will be required for other household members (aged 18 or over).

The assessment involves:

- Gathering information about yourself, and household composition.
- Looking at your family background, family relationships and circumstances. It will look at how you will ensure the child is safe and how you are already meeting, or will meet the child's needs such as their health, education, emotional and social needs. It will look at the role of foster carers and how you will meet the tasks involved in caring for the child. Also any support needs you may have.
- We will talk to your own children and other household members as part of the process.

We will also:

- Ask you to sign a Foster Care Agreement.
- Ask you to complete your own report giving your views.

- Complete a bedroom risk assessment, if the child you care for shares a bedroom with another child.
- Undertake a Health and Safety assessment of your home, Safe Care Policy, and Dog and Animal assessment, if relevant.
- Interview 2 personal referees who know you well as a family, but are not family members.

How long does the assessment take?

The assessment process can vary in length however usually involves 4-7 visits to your home by the Fostering Social Worker. If this is an assessment of a couple, you may both need to be present at each visit.

The child you care for does not need to be present during these visits.

Preparation Training

You may be asked to attend the 'Skills to Foster' preparation training as this is a requirement and part of the assessment process. This involves 6 sessions, which usually run over three days. In the case of a couple, you are both required to attend this. The training provides an introduction to the fostering task and the role of foster carers.

What if I have health problems or a criminal record?

Assessments of family and friends will focus on your relationship with the child you are caring for and how you meet the child's needs, NOT on your potential to care for any child, as is the case for other foster carer applicants. If you have a criminal record or have health problems, these will not necessarily prevent you from being approved as a family or friend foster carer, and they will be explored with you during the assessment. The assessment will look at how these issues may impact upon the care of the child.

It is very important that you tell the Fostering Social Worker about any information that might appear on a police check which the department will carry out on you. An initial emergency check will have been undertaken by the Child's Social Worker on you and any other household members aged 18 years and over, however a full CRB check is also required.

If you have offences against children this will automatically disqualify you from becoming a foster carer.

You will be required to complete a medical form and make an appointment with your GP for a medical.

Will I receive any financial support?

As a foster carer, you will receive a weekly fostering allowance. Allowances are designed to cover all costs of caring for a 'looked after' child, e.g. food (including school dinners), clothing, pocket money, school expenses, social and leisure activities, travel, and additional household costs, such as laundry, heating, general wear and tear.

You will be asked to provide your bank details to enable the fostering allowance to be paid directly into the bank. The fostering allowance will be back dated to the date your Regulation 24 assessment and child's placement was approved.

Fostering allowances are not classed as taxable income.

Will the fostering allowance affect my benefits?

Fostering allowances do not generally affect means-tested benefit payments. You should contact your local benefits office for advice on this, as the Fostering Service cannot provide specific advice in this area.

Can I claim Child Benefit?

If you receive a fostering allowance in respect of a child, you are not entitled to claim Child Benefit. You cannot claim benefits for a child you are fostering, including free school meals. If, however, the child placed with you has a disability, you may be able to claim certain benefits.

What are my responsibilities as a foster carer?

The main responsibilities of any foster carer are to keep the child safe and to provide a good standard of physical and emotional care and support. Foster carers also need to make sure the child's health needs are met and you may be asked to register the child with a GP and Dentist and take them to medical appointments. You are also responsible for supporting the child in Nursery or school attendance.

Foster carers are required to keep the arrangements made by the department for contact between the child and their parents, and siblings, and any other significant people. If you are asked to supervise any contact, you must make sure that you fully understand what is being asked of you by the Child's Social Worker.

As a foster carer, you will be expected to keep the Child's Social Worker informed of any important changes and events in the child's day-to-day life and you will be invited and expected to attend any meetings about the child.

You will be expected to allow the Child's Social Worker to visit your home and see the child – the Social Worker will want to see the child alone.

During the assessment, the Fostering Social Worker will go through with you a Foster Carer Agreement, which you will be asked to sign. This provides further details about the responsibilities of a foster carer.

Training and Development

As a foster carer you will be asked to attend Mandatory training courses. Dependent on how long you are likely to be approved as a foster carer you might also be required to complete an induction workbook based on the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Standards where you would need to evidence how you are meeting the roles and responsibilities required of a foster carer. This is a mandatory requirement for all foster carers.

Is there anything I can't do if I am a foster carer?

Foster carers do not have parental responsibility for the child they are caring for. If there are any important decisions to be made about the child's health, education, contact etc., you must talk to the Child's Social Worker who will advise.

Foster carers do not have the authority to consent to any form of medical treatment for a child placed with them. Foster carers should always consult the Child's Social Worker regarding issues of medical consent and any other consent that may be required i.e. school trips etc.

If in any doubt about your responsibilities as a foster carer you should always talk to the Child's Social Worker.

Approval Process

You will have the opportunity to read and comment upon the assessment once completed, and your signature on the assessment will be required. The Fostering Social Worker will also share your assessment with their Team Manager and the Child's Social Worker.

Once all necessary checks have been received, your assessment will be presented by the Fostering Social Worker to the Fostering Panel, who will consider all information and make a recommendation about approving you as a foster carer for the child. You will be asked to attend Panel with the Fostering Social Worker.

Following Panel the Agency Decision Maker will consider the Panel's recommendation and make a decision as to whether they endorse this.

The Fostering Social Worker will talk to you further during the assessment about the Panel process.

What if I am not approved?

If a recommendation is made at Panel not to approve you as a foster carer and the Agency Decision Maker upholds this recommendation, you have a right to appeal.

The Fostering Social Worker would advise on the appeals and complaints procedures.

Who do I talk to if there is a problem?

If you are worried about anything to do with the child or his/her parents or family, you should contact the child's Social Worker. The Social Worker can be contacted during normal working hours.

If you have an urgent problem outside office hours or at the weekend, you can contact the Emergency Duty Team on 0191 4770844.