

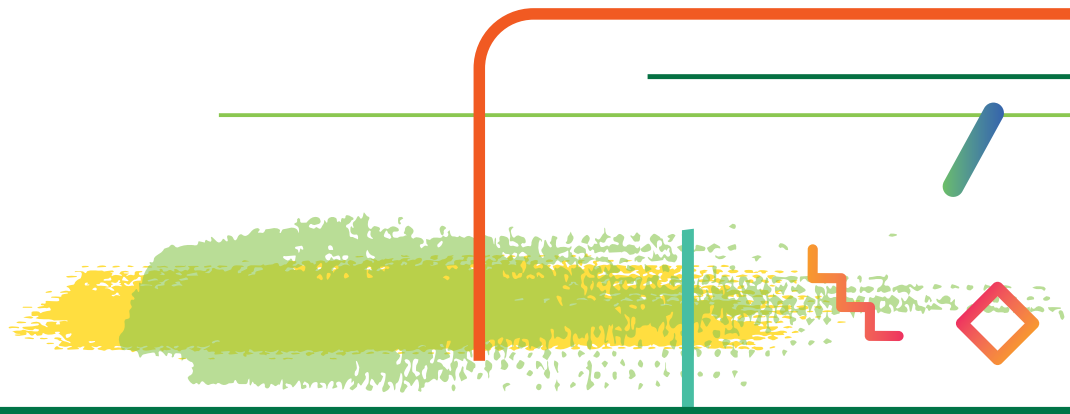
Fostering
Southampton

Making a difference

LOCAL AUTHORITY
Fostering
SOUTH EAST

Foster a future

Your guide to fostering with
Southampton City Council



0300 131 2797
southampton.gov.uk/fostering



SOUTHAMPTON
CITY COUNCIL



What is foster care?

Foster carers provide safe and loving homes for children who can't live with their birth families at the current time.

The children are from a wide variety of backgrounds, and all have different reasons for being in care. Sometimes children stay with foster carers for a few days, and some stay for a few years, but the difference a foster carer makes may last a lifetime.

Our foster carers offer a warm, supportive and firm foundation in, or very close by to, the children's hometown of Southampton. This ensures that our children and young people stay in familiar surroundings, at their current school and are close to their friends and family, whilst being cared for and nurtured by a foster family who will build their confidence and help them thrive.

You will be an integral part of a team of professionals, including social workers, teachers, health professionals and therapists, all working together to achieve the best possible outcome. You may work with the birth family to enable a child to return home or, if they are older, move into their own accommodation.

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Who can be a foster carer?

Whatever your situation, it may be possible to become a foster carer.

21+

You will need to be aged 21 or over.

You can be in a same sex relationship.



You will need a spare bedroom.

You can be Disabled.



You don't have to be a parent.
You may have your own children still living at home.

You can be living with a partner, married, separated or divorced.



You can be a single person.

You can be from any race, religion or culture.





There are many attributes needed to be a foster carer. Resilience, energy and patience are just a few. The most important quality that you can bring is your willingness to accept a child for who they are.

Depending on your skills, you could look after a child with a disability or from an ethnic or cultural background different to your own. Our dedicated Placements Team undertake a careful matching process when identifying a foster carer to meet the individual requirements of a child.

You are expected to meet the needs of the children in your care around your lifestyle and other commitments.

Some of our fostering roles require one adult to be available on a full-time basis, such as our Parent and Child foster carers.

For these more specialist roles, we are ideally looking for people who have significant experience and skills in working with children or young people and are perhaps looking for a career change.

What are the different types of foster care?

Every child and their circumstances are unique, which is why there are different types of foster care to meet their individual needs:

Respite

You will look after children for short periods of time, such as weekends or school holidays. Usually the same child, or sibling group, come to stay with you.

Short term

This can be anything from an overnight stay to a period of a few weeks or several months, up to two years.

Long term

You will look after a child who doesn't have a short-term plan to return to their birth family and needs a caring home until they are 18 years old.

Parent and child

Both the child and their birth parent (or parents) live with you in your home. This enables them to stay together rather than a child being taken into care alone or the family being placed in a residential unit.

What support and training is available?

Once you start fostering with us, we will encourage you to continue your professional learning and development through our comprehensive training pathway covering a wide range of topics, from understanding attachment and trauma, to supporting a child with special educational needs and navigating adolescence.

You'll be allocated a Supervising Social Worker whose job is to work alongside you to make sure you have everything you need to give the child or young person in your care a positive experience. We'll help you with regular meetings, advice and support with all aspects of fostering. You'll also have peace of mind with our 'Out of Hours' team in case of any emergencies.

We also offer a regular Therapeutic Support Group where foster carers can share and reflect on specific issues and gain support, and host monthly coffee mornings at a Southampton café which provide an opportunity to share ideas and experiences over coffee and cake!

Southampton Foster Carers Association is a charity run by Southampton City Council foster carers. They organise lots of fun activities and social events, such as discos, holidays and BBQ's for fostering families and the children in their care. They also provide advice and support when needed.

You will automatically become a member of FosterTalk which provides foster carers with independent support, and we offer free membership of New Family Social for LGBTQ+ foster carers and adopters.



Will I get paid?

For every child or young person in your care, you'll receive a weekly allowance. This amount depends on the age of the child and is designed to support with the additional day-to-day costs of caring for a child or young person, such as transport, after-school activities and a contribution to household bills. You'll also receive help with specialist equipment if you need it.

Linked to our comprehensive in-house training is the opportunity to take part in our skills-based payment scheme to fully develop as professional foster carers. Gaining experience and completing training courses give you the opportunity to become a Level Two or Level Three carer, meaning you are eligible for an additional skills fee payment.



How do I become a foster carer?

When you're ready to start your fostering journey, the first step is to complete our online enquiry form which can be found at www.southampton.gov.uk/fostering. You can speak to a member of our friendly team by calling 0300 131 2797 or emailing info@lafosteringse.org.uk. We will talk you through your journey to becoming an approved foster carer.

Stage One will include an initial assessment which includes obtaining references, undertaking a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and Local Authority checks. You'll also undertake a full medical check, usually with your own GP. This stage generally takes around two months.

In Stage Two, an Assessing Social Worker spends time with your family to get to know you fully, talk about the type of fostering you want to do, why you want to foster, what skills and life experience you bring to fostering, checks to assess your suitability to become a foster carer and any areas where you might need extra support.

They will complete a Form F assessment which is then presented to the Fostering Panel who will recommend that you become an approved foster carer. This recommendation is ratified by our Agency Decision Maker. This stage generally takes about four months.

You will also undertake a 'Skills to Foster' training course which will give you practical skills and abilities to successfully foster.

Change a life – foster with Southampton City Council

Frequently asked questions

1. Do I need to own my own home?

No. You can own your own home or be renting or live in council-provided accommodation. You will need to let your landlord know you wish to foster.

2. Can I be in full-time employment?

Yes, although this may limit the type of fostering you'd be able to offer. You can also be working part-time, or not working at all.

3. Can I choose the age range of the children I want to look after?

Yes. You are normally approved for a broad age range of 0-18, but we recognise that some foster families are more able to meet the needs of older or younger children. As part of your assessment, we will look at 'matching criteria' that fits with your own expectations and circumstances and also the skills that you can offer, and the characteristics of a child or young person that would fit well into your family.

4. Is there a minimum or maximum age for foster carers?

The minimum age is 21. There is no maximum age, you are simply assessed on an ongoing basis, as long as you're able to offer a good standard of care. A medical is carried out during your assessment and then every three years to make sure you are fit and healthy.

5. Would my partner need to be assessed?

Yes. If you wish to be considered as foster carers together, we ask that you have lived together for at least a year. You would then be fully assessed and approved as joint foster carers. If you are not living together, your partner would also need to be part of the assessment, even if you're planning on being the primary carer. There is an expectation that your partner will have background checks done and will attend some of the training courses.

6. Can I be a foster carer if I smoke or vape?

Yes, but it won't be possible to foster 0-5 year olds and we ask that you smoke or vape outside at all times and never in front of the child or young person.

7. Will being a foster carer affect any benefits I may be on?

Being a foster carer may affect your benefits. If you're claiming benefits, you will need to tell the organisation that pays you that you're also getting a foster care allowance.

You will need to register as self-employed. Foster carers are subject to specialist tax rules.

Find out more here:

www.gov.uk/support-for-foster-parents/tax-arrangements

Once approved as a foster carer for Southampton City Council, you automatically become a member of FosterTalk who can provide a discounted tax return service and financial advice if needed.

8. Can I still foster if I have a criminal record?

Having a criminal record will not necessarily stop you from fostering. During your assessment, your assessing social worker would look at the nature of the offence, how long ago it was and the age you were when it was committed and will then decide if the conviction renders you unsuitable to become a foster carer. Failure to declare a conviction may adversely affect your application to become a foster carer.

9. Can I just offer respite fostering for children under the age of 2?

It is very infrequent that we have the need for respite placements for very young children and when these occasional placements are needed, we tend to use foster carers who are known to the child already, to avoid further trauma.

"Fostering is so rewarding for us as a family!"

"Teaching children a happy and healthy way of life is really satisfying"

"I feel like part of a team and know the support is there when I need it"

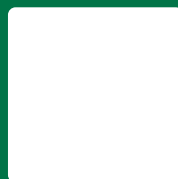
What do I do now?

If you feel that fostering might be for you, please contact our friendly recruitment team who will be happy to have an informal chat.

Fostering Service
Southampton City Council
Civic Centre
Southampton, SO14 7LY

Tel: 0300 131 2797
Email: info@lafosteringse.org.uk
www.southampton.gov.uk/fostering

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