

Families who foster guide



Foster care where children
heal and thrive



Fostering involves the whole family and it will affect your children. Becoming involved in the decision to foster is vital for the whole family. Birth children should be seen as equal family members when it comes to making such a life changing decision. Becoming a foster family will have a huge impact on their lives and it is important they are aware of how and in what ways things will change for them. Providing your birth children with as much information as possible is essential when it comes to making a decision to foster, as well as throughout your fostering journey. Living within a fostering family can teach children vital life skills, such as patience and empathy, and many children who grow up in a fostering household go on to become foster parents themselves. However, some children can find fostering difficult, such as sharing their belongings, sharing their parent's time, or saying goodbye when a foster child leaves. Read on for some of the challenges you may face, the benefits for your family, preparing for a placement and ideas to help maintain the wellbeing of your birth children throughout your fostering journey.

Challenges you may face:

- **Sharing** – some birth children may find it difficult to share their belongings, as well as their parents time and affection. A lot of time and dedication must go into the fostering process, as the young child living with foster carers must feel in a secure, stable environment.
- **Behaviour mimicking** – your birth children may witness inappropriate behaviour from the foster child, and may believe this is acceptable and begin to mimic them. As foster children may have had more difficult upbringing, they may suffer from behaviour difficulties, meaning that they have a lower level of respect for adults, which your children may mimic.
- **Culture** – it's possible that you might foster a child from a different religion or culture, which could be a challenge for birth children. As a foster carer, it's important to help the foster child maintain their cultural identity – but if this is something your birth children have no experience in, they may not want to participate or understand.
- **Inconsistency** – part of being a foster carer involves a variety of different fostering placements. This can provide inconsistency to your birth children – which could lead to them being questioned by peers as to why they have different children living with them frequently.
- **Jealousy** – they could feel that the new child gets all the attention. They might feel jealous or feel that their problems aren't as important.
- **Dealing with loss** – children and young people can find it hard when children move on.



Some of the benefits of being a family that fosters:

- **Learning to share** – similar to the point above, if the birth child is an only child, they may not have had to contend with the notion of sharing yet in life. Sharing their time and belongings with a foster child is a great life lesson for them – and will help them develop into more of a selfless person as they grow up.
- **Learning from them** – as established, a child living with foster carers is likely to be from a different upbringing or background, or even religion and culture, than your birth children. This provides a great opportunity for them to learn and educate themselves from them – whether that's from a social standpoint or religiously and culturally.
- **Relationships** – spending so much time together under the same roof can allow for great friendships to blossom between your birth children and any children in your care.
- **Development of social skills** – with the variety of children you're likely to experience as a foster carer, your birth children will get the chance to meet many young people from different walks of life – and develop their social skills as they do.

Preparing for a placement...

Welcoming a foster child into your home can be a challenging time for any family. Routines may be disregarded as a whole new way of family life is introduced. While it is important to give your new child love and attention to welcome them into the family, forgetting to do the same for your birth child could lead to them feeling neglected and resentful towards the family. In turn, this could cause further issues down the line. Creating specific time to spend with your birth child will let them know they have not been forgotten or replaced. Spending time with their new foster sibling and the whole family is important for birth children to allow them to adapt to the change. Having dedicated time just for them lets birth children know that although family life has changed, the relationship they have with their parents has not.

Keeping communication with your birth children about fostering clear and open allows any possible changes or difficulties to be raised prior to a new arrival. Sharing as much information as you can, without breaching any confidentiality rules, about your new child will give birth children and understanding of the foster child before they join the family. This will prepare them for any difficult behaviour or situations that may occur.



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Most birth children are happy being part of a foster family and recognise the many benefits that come with the experience. Fostering allows birth children to learn valuable life skills such as sharing, becoming more caring and having more responsibility. It is important to consider your birth child and their feelings when it comes to fostering. Keeping them informed can reduce conflict and allow them to play an important part in the fostering experience.

For children who foster with their family, it's important that as a parent, you ensure you're doing everything possible to alleviate any concerns or issues that could arise from a placement. A few ways of doing this include:

- **Communication** – before you begin fostering, explain to your birth children what fostering will entail, and how it will affect them. Explain that it's likely you'll have a number of children over the next few years, and this may provide some inconsistency to your birth children. You also need to devise a plan with them about how they will share their belongings, and how you will share your time between them. If they understand early on that they'll need to learn to share, they're likely to adapt to the situation much faster.
- **Behaviour management** – nipping bad behaviour in the bud (in the form of mimicking) is integral to ensure your birth children's good behaviour is maintained. Explain that the foster child might be suffering from social and emotional problems that cause them to act out in a way that's inappropriate – and they are not allowed to copy their behaviour.
- **Relationship management** – ensuring all children get along is not always possible in every occasion. However, it's your job to facilitate that this relationship has the best chance of blossoming as it can. Explain to your birth children the hardship that these the foster child has been through, and encourage them to play together, talk and get along as a family.

It's important to recognise that the birth children of foster carers' wellbeing will always be paramount, and as your independent fostering agency, we'll work closely with you to ensure we facilitate an appropriate match between a foster child and your own family.

For more information on how to protect children who foster or the impact of fostering on birth children, please speak to your supervising social worker.



Words of Wisdom

from some of foster families



"Include your children in everything, make decisions as a family!"

YOU got This

"It has helped us to be better parents because of our training!"

"Fostering has helped our daughter with empathy and understanding other people."



YES
you can!



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