



Frequently Asked Questions

Below are some frequently asked questions about the intricacies of fostering and becoming a foster carer. If you can't find an answer to your question here, please feel free to reach out to us; we are always here to help.

Everything You Need To Know About Fostering

What is fostering?

Fostering means opening your home and your heart to a child who is unable to live with their family. You'll do this by offering them safety, stability, and care, while helping them rebuild confidence and self-esteem.

Children in foster care come from many different backgrounds and may have experienced trauma such as neglect, abuse, or separation. As a foster carer, your role is to listen, understand, and walk alongside them, providing the support they need to heal, grow, and reach their full potential.

Who can become a foster carer?

Our foster carers come from all walks of life with different backgrounds, cultures, religions, sexual orientations, genders, and ages. None of these are barriers to fostering. What matters most is the ability to provide a safe and caring home for a child in need.

We look for qualities like empathy, reliability, warmth, and an open mind. Foster carers should be approachable, non-judgemental, committed, and curious about people and what makes them tick. Resilience, a practical mindset, and the ability to be playful are also important.

Experience with children is helpful, whether that's through parenting, a professional role, or supporting others, but it's your attitude and dedication that count most.

Do I need any experience to become a foster carer?

While you don't need professional qualifications to foster, experience caring for or supporting children, either through parenting, family life, or another role, is important. Once you're approved, we'll provide all the training and guidance you

need to care for children with a range of needs, so you'll feel prepared and supported every step of the way.

What are the reasons children need foster care?

Every child in foster care has faced loss and separation from their birth family, but the reasons behind it vary. Some children are removed from a home for their safety due to neglect or abuse. Others may come into care because of family difficulties that threaten their well-being. Sometimes foster care is temporary, intending to reunite the child with their family, while other placements may be longer term. It depends on the child's unique circumstances.

Am I too old to become a foster carer?

You can foster at any age, as long as you're 25 or over and have the time, energy, and commitment to care for a child. Many people choose to foster later in life, often after their own children have grown up. As part of the assessment process, we'll carry out health checks to make sure you're well enough to provide the care and support a child needs.

Can I foster if I have children living at home?

Yes. Many foster carers also have children living at home, and your parenting experience can be a real strength. Before placing a child with you, we'll carefully consider the needs of both your own children and the foster child, and help your family prepare for sharing your lives. The only requirement is that your youngest child must be at least two years old before you can foster.

Can I foster if I'm gay?

Absolutely. Your sexuality has no impact on your ability to foster. We warmly welcome applications from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

Can I foster if I'm not married?

Yes. You don't need to be married to foster. Whether you're single, in a partnership, or cohabiting, what matters most is that you can offer a stable, loving, and supportive home for a child.

Can I foster if I'm single?

Absolutely. Children can thrive in a loving single-parent home just as much as they can in a two-parent household. If you're fostering on your own, having a

strong, reliable support network of friends or family can be really helpful for both you and the child in your care.

Do I need to give up work to become a foster carer?

No, but you will need flexibility. Many children in foster care can't get themselves to and from school, so you'll need to be available for drop-offs, pick-ups, and days when they're off school due to illness, exclusions, or appointments. You may also be asked to attend meetings about the child during working hours.

Some foster carers work part-time or are self-employed in roles that can fit around their fostering responsibilities. The key is making sure your work can adapt to the needs of the child in your care.

Do I need to be able to speak and write English to become a foster carer?

Yes. As a foster carer, you'll need to communicate clearly with professionals such as social workers, teachers, and health specialists about the child's welfare. You'll also be required to complete regular written reports on the child's progress and development.

Do I have to own my home to become a foster carer?

No. You don't need to own your home, but you do need a secure tenancy. If you rent, we'll need to get your landlord's permission to foster in that property.

Do I need a spare bedroom to become a foster carer?

Yes, every foster child generally needs their own room for privacy and security. However, siblings may share a room if it's suitable and in their best interest.

How does fostering differ from adoption?

While both provide a stable, loving home for a child, adoption is a legal process that transfers full parental rights and responsibilities from the birth parents to the adoptive parents. Fostering, on the other hand, is usually temporary (often until the child turns 18) and allows the child to maintain ties with their birth family. As a foster carer, you'll work closely with social workers and may have ongoing contact with the child's family. You'll also receive training, ongoing support, and a fostering allowance that reflects the child's needs.

Can I foster if I can't drive?

Possibly, yes. What matters most is that you can reliably get a child to school, appointments, and activities. If you have good public transport links nearby and can manage these journeys, fostering could still be an option for you. We'll talk it through with you to make sure it's practical for both you and the child in your care.

If I have a criminal record, does that mean I can't be a foster carer?

Not necessarily. Having a criminal record doesn't automatically prevent you from fostering. It depends on the nature of the offence, how long ago it happened, and your circumstances since then.

We can't accept applications from anyone with convictions for offences against children or certain serious crimes. For other offences, we'll look at your individual situation with transparency and sensitivity. Our goal is to ensure that every child is placed in a safe and supportive home, so we carry out thorough checks as part of the assessment process. If you're unsure, we're happy to talk it through with you before you apply.

Does my religion affect whether I can foster?

Absolutely not. We welcome foster carers from all faiths and cultural backgrounds. We're committed to supporting the cultural and religious needs of the children in our care, and where possible, we match children with carers who can help them stay connected to their own beliefs and traditions.

Fostering with Soundly Fostering

How long does it take to become a foster carer?

For most people, the journey from first enquiry to approval takes around three to six months. It starts with an informal chat so you can ask questions and find out if fostering is the right journey for you. From there, we'll guide you through each step of the assessment process at a pace that works for you. There's no pressure, just support when you need it.

What training will I complete before becoming a foster carer?

Your journey begins with preparation training designed to help you understand what fostering really involves in day-to-day life.

We run preparation training for individuals and families who are new to fostering. These sessions are thoughtful, honest, and grounded in real-life experience. They explore what it means to welcome a child into your home, how to respond to emotional and behavioural needs, and how fostering can affect your household.

Alongside this, you may be asked to complete some online courses, including:

- Safeguarding
- Diversity and inclusion
- First aid (followed up by in-person training)
- Administering medication (online only)

If suitable, you may also be invited to attend some of our training sessions for approved foster carers during your assessment. This gives you a feel for how we work and the kind of ongoing learning and support you can expect once approved.

Our aim isn't to overwhelm you, but to help you feel informed, prepared, and confident as you move forward.

How do you match children with foster families?

Matching is one of the most important parts of fostering. We take time to understand your family's strengths, skills, and preferences. This includes your lifestyle, experience, and the types of needs you feel confident supporting.

We also look closely at each child's background, personality, and specific needs to ensure the child coming to live in your home will feel safe, stable, and positive for everyone involved. This includes considering practical things like location, so a child can stay in their school and community, as well as emotional and cultural factors that will help them feel understood and accepted.

We make these decisions in partnership with you, so you feel fully informed and comfortable before any placement begins. The goal is always the same: to give each child the best chance to settle, thrive, and feel at home.

Do foster carers need to pay tax and National Insurance?

Yes. Foster carers are responsible for paying National Insurance and registering as self-employed. However, there are generous tax allowances designed specifically to support fostering households.

Under the UK Government's Qualifying Care Relief (QCR) scheme, you receive:

A basic tax exemption of £19,360 per household per year. This is pro-rated if you foster for part of the year. On top of this, you receive weekly tax relief for each child in your care, regardless of how much you earn:

- £415 per week for each child under 11
- £495 per week for each child aged 11 or over

You add the annual exemption and the weekly amounts together to calculate your total tax-free threshold.

For example, fostering one 14-year-old for a full year would give you:
 $£19,360 + (£495 \times 52 \text{ weeks}) = £45,100$ tax-free

This means many foster carers pay little or no income tax on their fostering allowance.

We'll talk you through how this works in practice, help you understand what you need to register for, and guide you through what's required when it comes to record-keeping and annual returns. You won't be left to figure it out alone.

For full details, you can also read the [UK Government's guidance on Qualifying Care Relief](#).

What is respite care, and how does it work?

Respite care is a time when the child in your care stays temporarily with another trusted carer, giving you a break. At Soundly, your fostering allowance already includes provision for up to 14 nights of respite per year, whether you use it or not. If you arrange respite, whether with an approved foster family, backup carer, or extended family, any payment for that respite would come from your allowance. Some carers choose not to use respite, while others arrange it within their support network. The flexibility is yours, and we'll help guide you through options when needed.

How often will I receive my fostering allowance?

You'll receive your fostering allowance whenever you have a child in your care. Payments are made fortnightly, but we understand that some carers may need extra flexibility. That's why, where possible, we can arrange additional payments outside the regular schedule to help you manage your finances and ensure you have everything you need to provide the best care for your child.

Thinking About Transferring to Us?

What should I do if I am unhappy with my current foster agency?

If you're feeling unsupported by your current fostering agency, start by reflecting on what isn't working, whether that's a lack of communication, training, or shared values. This will help you decide if a move is the right choice.

Research other fostering agencies in your area to see how they compare in terms of support, training, and the way they work with carers. Think about the kind of relationship you'd like and how you can be best supported to succeed in your role, since happy and well-supported foster carers help children thrive.

If you want to explore a change, you can have a confidential, no-obligation chat with another agency. At this stage, there's no commitment until you're ready. When you do decide to transfer, the process follows the Transfer Protocol, which is designed to protect everyone involved, and can sometimes be completed in as little as six weeks.

What does transferring to Soundly Fostering involve?

Once you've decided that Soundly Fostering is the right fit for you, and we've confirmed that you meet our requirements, we'll meet with you to go over the transfer steps and timeline. From there, we'll guide you through each stage so the move feels clear, steady, and well supported.

Will I have to go through the full assessment process again?

If you're transferring from another fostering agency, you won't usually need to repeat every stage of the assessment process from scratch. Instead, much of your existing information can be reviewed and updated, rather than fully re-done.

However, there are still regulatory checks and steps that must be completed, such as verifying your references, DBS checks, and updating your assessment to reflect any changes in your circumstances since your original approval. This ensures we have the most up-to-date and accurate picture of your fostering experience and home environment.

At Soundly Fostering, we aim to make this as straightforward and efficient as possible, using your existing records wherever we can while still meeting all legal requirements.

What training will I have to do if I transfer?

When you transfer to us, we'll review your training record from your current agency and Local Authority. Once you're with us, any core mandatory training will be repeated to align with our standards, and you'll be offered ongoing training as part of our agency's support. We ensure you stay up to date while receiving continuous development opportunities that fit your fostering journey.

What does a protocol meeting involve, and will I need to prepare anything?

Soundly Fostering will help arrange the protocol meeting with the child's team. The purpose of this meeting is to confirm that Soundly can offer you and the child in your care the support needed. During the meeting, the team will discuss timelines for your assessment and confirm that the child will continue living with you. Everyone agrees to keep each other informed throughout the process.

Am I free to transfer once the Agency Decision Maker has approved me?

Yes. Once the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) has formally approved your transfer to your chosen agency, you must give 28 days' written notice to your current fostering agency. This contractual step confirms the date you'll leave one agency and officially join the other.

Can I transfer to Soundly Fostering if I have a child placed with me?

Yes. The child's well-being will always be our priority. If you wish to transfer, we'll work closely with you and the child in your care to ensure any disruption is kept to a minimum. You'll need to let your current agency know as soon as

possible. They will arrange a formal protocol meeting to discuss the transfer, and we'll be there alongside you to answer questions and provide support.

For more on how transfers work, you can read [The Transfer of Carers Protocol \(2014\)](#), or simply call us, and our team will be happy to talk you through it.

What happens once the new agency is satisfied that I can be considered to transfer to them?

Once your chosen fostering agency is confident you meet their requirements, they'll meet with you to outline the full transfer process and the timescales for each stage.

Just like when you first applied to foster, you'll go through a formal assessment. This includes completing regulatory checks, gathering references, and compiling your assessment report. The completed assessment will then be presented to the agency's independent panel, which you'll be invited to attend. Only after panel approval will the transfer be finalised.

How We Support Foster Carers

Is Soundly Fostering an inclusive agency?

At Soundly Fostering, we're proud to be a fully inclusive agency. We welcome foster carers from all walks of life and celebrate diversity in every form. From culture, language, and religion, to gender and sexual orientation. What matters most to us is your ability to connect with a child, understand their feelings, and offer the empathy, encouragement, and stability they need to thrive.

How will you support me when I am fostering?

At Soundly Fostering, your well-being as a foster carer is a top priority. You'll have regular one-to-one supervision with a dedicated social worker, giving you space to talk openly about any challenges and celebrate successes. If you need support outside these sessions, we're a phone call away 24/7.

We'll connect you with other local foster carers for valuable peer support, and invite you to regular family days and meet-ups to help you feel part of a strong, caring community. Our ongoing training programme is designed to

boost your skills and confidence, ensuring you always feel equipped to give children the best possible care.

What will my supervising social worker do to help me with fostering a child?

Your supervising social worker is your go-to support throughout your fostering journey. They'll visit you regularly to discuss how things are going, offer practical advice, and help you reflect on your experiences so you can keep developing your skills.

They're also there to guide you through any challenges, connect you with additional resources or specialists, and make sure you have what you need to provide the best possible care. Whether it's celebrating progress, problem-solving together, or simply being a listening ear, their role is to help you feel supported, confident, and never alone in the work you do.

