

7 Steps to long-term Fostering

1 Think about it

First you need to know the difference between adoption and long term fostering. Talk to your partner if you have one and your children if you have any. How might it affect them? If you know anyone who has fostered, talk to them. Do some research on the internet (www.fostering.net or www.baaf.org.uk are good places to start).

2 Find an agency

Depending on where you are in the UK, fostering services can be provided by different bodies, including local authorities and independent fostering providers. Contact a few agencies and ask them what they are looking for and what they can offer you in terms of support (look in local directories or go to www.fostering.net/providers).

3 Choose an agency

Fostering services will usually send you their information pack and either offer to visit you to discuss your interest further or to invite you to an information evening.

4 Group Sessions

You'll be invited to attend training sessions to find out more about fostering. Areas covered include children's backgrounds, why they might behave in certain ways, what happens about contact with their birth families etc. The groups are led by fostering workers and carers who can tell you what it's been like for them. There are usually several or more group sessions that take place over a few weeks. Around this time you'll complete an application form to confirm that you want to go ahead and to begin the assessment process, which can take around six months.

5 Assessment visits (or home study)

Your fostering worker will visit you in your home, usually between six and 10 times over several months, getting to know you, finding out about the support you'll get from family and friends, discussing with you the age and type of child or children that would fit in best.

The worker will write an assessment report, which you will get to see. This may include information about your family routine, the neighbourhood you live in and your views on managing behaviour. They'll also put various checks into action, including references and health checks.

6 Panel

You will be invited to attend panel – it's a nail biting time as they sit to recommend if you should be approved! But don't worry, it's unlikely your fostering worker would put you forward if they had big doubts about your suitability. You should know whether you are approved within a few days.

7 Meet the children and start to foster

This is the exciting bit! Your worker will talk to you when they have children they think are suitable and check whether you agree. Then it's time for confused, sad, worried and even frightened children to move in with you. You need to make them feel welcome as soon as you can. Never think you have to manage it all on your own, there's always more training, advice and support if you need it.