

Roles and commitment

The fostering service's role

The fostering service aims to provide stable and high quality foster care for children who are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. To achieve this aim, we recruit and approve foster carers and deliver ongoing support training to them. This gives them the skills and confidence they need to develop meaningful relationships with the children and young people they care for and provide stable and loving homes while they are part of the foster family.

The foster carer's role

Foster carers are at the heart of the foster care service. We are assessed, trained and supported to look after children and young people by developing meaningful relationships in a family environment, providing them with stability, care, love and an opportunity to grow and develop and to reach their full potential.

Our relationships with other members of the team around the child are based on mutual trust and respect. This charter is central to what we expect from each other.

What foster carers can expect from the fostering service

1. Working in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.

We will:

- value your skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- recognise that you are the people who live with children every day and know them best
- include you in all relevant meetings that affect you and the children you care for
- ensure that our fostering service will meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance
- treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague
- respect confidentiality

2. Information

We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's need.

We will:

- give you all the information we have in order to care safely for the child
- provide this information in writing prior to placement, or as soon as possible in the case of emergency placements
- ensure that there is a placement plan drawn up in discussion with you and agreed with you in advance of placements, or as soon as possible in the placement
- provide you with information on all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements

- provide you with full details of all relevant departmental policies and procedures

3. Clarity about decisions

We recognise that in order for children to live a full family life, foster carers must be able to make decisions regarding the children they foster.

We will:

- ensure that, wherever possible, you are able to make everyday decisions that mean that your fostered child is not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family
- provide clarity about any decision you cannot take at the outset so that everyone understands who is responsible for what

4. Support

We recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task and appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the child in your care.

We will:

- respond positively to requests for additional support
- provide you with a minimum of six weekly supervision sessions
- give you honest and open feedback
- provide you with access to 24 hour support from people with fostering expertise
- pay you allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner
- ensure that you have the required level of support needed to carry out your fostering tasks

- pay fees that reflect the task
- support the Southampton Foster Carer Association who represent our foster carers and encourage the local support groups run by foster carers for foster carers, where you and your family can share experiences with other fostering families

5. Learning and development

As a foster carer you'll be able to access learning and development opportunities throughout your fostering career. This will ensure you have the skills and knowledge you need, and allow you to develop your practice in order for you to help transform the lives of the children you foster.

We will:

- provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training by trainers who understand the fostering task
- enable you to develop meaningful relationships with the children in your care and the fellow members of the team around the child
- provide you with other development opportunities which make the best use of your skills and expertise, such as mentoring or providing training

6. Fair treatment

We recognise that foster carers have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances.

We will:

- consult with you before changing terms and conditions

- ensure openness in all of our discussions and communications with you
- ensure that you are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with independent support should you be subject to an allegation
- provide a framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to our agreed timescales
- ensure that you know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that you are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation

7. Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We will:

- encourage regular communication between you, councillors and the Director of Children's Services
- ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you

Foster carers' commitment

You can expect from us:

- working in equal partnership
- respect for the child and the members of the team around the child
- information for learning, development and support
- communication and consultation

What fostering services can expect from foster carers

1. Working in partnership

We will demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct.

We will:

- demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability
- provide children with a positive experience of family life
- attend meetings about the children and young people we care for and work with the agencies involved with the child such as school and health and religious establishments
- show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child's life in consultation with the child's social worker
- meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow departmental policies and procedures
- respect confidentiality

2. Respect for the child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations and potential.

We will:

- develop a meaningful relationship with the child: understand their needs, support their growth, and become an advocate and champion for them
- respect and promote a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage according to the child's care plan
- afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own child in accordance with the national minimum standards
- ensure the child has the right to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding in consultation with the child's social worker

3. Information

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship and we will aim to build a meaningful and collaborative relationship with our supervising social worker.

We will:

- inform our supervising social worker about changes in our household
- inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us

4. Learning, development and support

We must be able to access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career. This will ensure we have the skills and knowledge we need, and allow us to develop our practice in order that we can help transform the lives of the children we foster.

We will:

- be willing and able to develop our skills throughout our fostering career

- take up opportunities offered to us
- let you know if we are unable to attend and contribute to support groups

5. Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We will:

- respond to local consultations and discussion in order to inform the development of the service
- meet with councillors, service managers and others in order to promote dialogue and a good working relationship
- support the children in our care to do the same
- promote the service positively in the public arena
- feedback through the appropriate channels any concerns regarding the service
- act in a professional manner at all times