



## a day in the life of a fostercarer

# Foster Carer

As a Foster Carer your day can include a varied range of responsibilities, highs, lows and rewards as you offer a stable, nurturing, loving environment to a child when they are at their most vulnerable. You might be welcoming a new child into your home which can be challenging as you try to help them settle. Information on the child can sometimes be limited and you hit the ground running. This can be daunting but also rewarding as you put together the pieces of a jigsaw. While it is challenging for the foster carer, it is a confusing time for the child as they may feel frightened and worried having left family to move in with complete strangers.

A child may need encouragement to attend school and require significant help with homework. They might need help to understand the importance of boundaries and routines in your home and things like having fun, laughing, individual time and attention, regular meals and clean clothes may be things they are not used to but most children respond positively to the things many of us take for granted. Talking, listening, time and patience are necessary skills as a Foster Carer. It is rewarding to build up trust with a child using tools and techniques to help them change learned behaviour, address anxieties and help their understanding of why they are with you. You have a log book for each child where you record significant or interesting events of each day.

Foster Carers are also involved in transitions where we help and support the child to move on from being in your care. This can be a difficult time for Foster Carers and the child but also a time to reflect on the difference you have made to the child's life by opening up new opportunities, helping them to grow both physically and emotionally and helping them to reach and take pride in personal achievements. You can be involved in different meetings and be in situations where you will advocate for the child. These can include a LAAC review (review of the child's Care Plan), a Child's Hearing, a Foster Carer review (your personal annual review), meeting with professionals from Health and Education, planned meetings with your Supervising Social Worker in your home, visits by the child's Social Worker or when undertaking personal training. You would also take a child to and from nursery/school and support family contact by taking the child to an arranged meeting place.

Support is available from many areas - Supervising Social Worker, Child's Social Worker, Health Professionals, School and other Professionals you may be involved with. There is obviously a wealth of information available on line and it is always good to chat with other Foster Carers. Personal life and work experiences support you in providing a professional role. It is extremely rewarding and worthwhile to see a child respond to your hard work and to witness them develop, flourish, relax and show that they feel safe and secure in your home.

### **Foster Carer for 12 years**



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## a day in the life of a fostercarer

### Newly approved single Foster Carer:

My morning starts like everyone else's. The alarm goes off and I press snooze for another five minutes. Then it's time to get up and wake her up. She gets up cheery and bright, eager to start her day. Once breakfast is done teeth are brushed and her school bag is checked. Then we are all set to go.

She puts our dog on the leash to walk to school, which she does with pride. The walk is very important as we chat about what's happening at school, who is friends with who, and should she play, football or dodge ball? As I look down I smile at her. She seems content and happy. I joke with her and mention, yesterday whilst playing football she fell and needed three plasters. I joked that reading might be less painful? We also talked about her last meeting and checked she understood the decisions made and why. I leave her to walk to the lollipop man, knowing she will look back. She turns and waves whilst saying "I think I will just do football but I'll try not to fall - memo to self to buy more plasters!"

I catch up with chores, but often, I will attend training or meetings regarding her welfare. Before I know it, it's home time and the walk home involves listening to how her day was, which I look forward to, as she is so excited and gives me lots of detail. Once home it's homework and dinner time, which is done super-fast because she has a new friend across the road. It's lovely to watch her on her scooter, laughing and enjoying the company of others. It's getting harder for her to come in when out playing as she wants five minutes more. I remind her she can play out again tomorrow and she's content with this.

Time for supper and unwinding for bed. Her bedtime routine involves lots of fun laughter and cuddles. The fun is crucial for her to learn how to laugh and play. She needs help to cuddle as she doesn't always quite know what to do with a cuddle. She needs firm boundaries as this helps her to feel safe, but this is mixed with me being very patient, consistent with lots of shared laughter.

When I think about it, I see how much she is starting to trust me, she is able to talk more about her feelings and initiate time where she needs reassurance and cuddles. My day may be very full, but equally is very rewarding. If I have any concerns I always have my own Supervising Social Worker to run things by. This helps me to reflect on my own interactions with her, remembering to be patient, whilst taking into account that her emotions are much younger than her actual age.

#### **Foster Carer for six months**



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## a day in the life of a foster<sup>carer</sup>

# Respite carers

We had no previous experience of fostering before this. We are a same sex couple and neither of us are parents. However, we felt we had enough contact with children through both our families and both our jobs to be able to offer a warm and safe environment for one or maybe two children on a respite basis.

We chose respite because we recognised that other commitments meant that we could not take on full time fostering. The training prior to our being approved as foster carers was really helpful in exploring the issues affecting looked after children. It also gave us the confidence to know that we could become foster carers and it allowed us the space and time to realise that we were fully committed to doing this.

Soon after our approval we started supporting one young girl, who was already in a full time foster placement, by providing respite for one weekend a month. Eighteen months later and this is still the arrangement. As it has been the same child coming to us, we have been able to build a good relationship with her over this time. This is what we had hoped for – the chance to provide consistency and stability in a child's life over a period of time.

We've learned a lot over the last eighteen months. For one thing, we've learned that it is a subtle balancing act between going with the needs of the child and what we thought we should be doing! For example, we have learned that even if we have a fun day out planned, if she is not up for it, then equally it is ok to have a quiet day in.

In the beginning we played a lot of board games which we now realise was a good way to get to know each other. Once we found out what she liked doing, we were able to choose activities around this. We value the on-going, consistent and reliable support of our supervising social worker and the contact with other foster carers, in particular the foster carers of the child that we help look after. It is very helpful to have phone catch-ups before the respite weekend.

Overall, we find being respite foster carers a rewarding and fulfilling experience and feel privileged that we can help a young person progress through life.

### **Respite Carers for 18 months**



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