



The Foster Carers' Charter

A guide to roles and responsibilities between Foster Carers, Social Workers and Staffordshire County Councils Children's Services



#This is
Fostering

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Foster Carers' Charter

This charter explains what all parties can expect from one another. The foster carers' charter represents a commitment on behalf of Staffordshire Local Authority in its role as the corporate parent, the fostering service and the foster carer including Kinship carers to work in partnership in the best interests of the children for whom they care. It is a promise, owned by everybody involved, to strive for best practice at all times. It will be reviewed Annually, and we will work with the 'The Foster Carers Voice' around our action plan.

Everyone working with children and young people has a duty to keep them safe from harm. In Staffordshire, we want to improve the lives of all children and young people, using a whole system approach enabling children to be happy, healthy and safe. Restorative approaches are widely accepted as highly effective way of achieving better outcomes for children.

Our pledge is to focus on removing barriers and encouraging a sense of community. Understanding and strengthening relationships with children, young people and families can empower them to share responsibility and bring about positive changes in their own lives. It is about finding out what people can do and working with them to build on those strengths in order to mitigate risks and overcome challenges they may face.

'Healthy relationships are built upon high challenge and high support.'

The corporate parent's role

'Culture exists in every organisation but is it by design or default'

The role of the corporate parent when placing and supporting children with a fostering family is to:

- act in their best interests, and promote their physical and mental health and wellbeing
- encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings and take them into account
- help them to gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by Staffordshire Local Authority and its relevant partners
- promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes for them
- ensure that they are safe, and that there is stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living.



**Neelam
Bhardwaja**
Director for Children
and Families

The fostering service's role

The fostering service aims to provide stable and first-rate fostering families for children who are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals.

'Every child (and adult) need a champion'

The Fostering service recruits, trains and approves foster carers and delivers ongoing support to them, in order to give them the skills and confidence they need to develop meaningful relationships with the children and young people they care for. In this way the service provides stable and loving homes while the children are part of the foster family.

The foster carer's role

'You were born with the ability to change someone's life'

Foster carers look after children by developing meaningful relationships in a safe and nurturing family environment. The stability, care and love provided by foster carers helps the child to achieve recovery and healing from past trauma and promotes resilience for the child to realise their full potential.



'Create a sense of belonging'

A foster carer's relationships with other members of the team around the child should be based on mutual trust and respect.

What foster carers and fostering services can expect from the corporate parent

Working in partnership

We understand that we must provide foster carers with the best possible opportunity to give the children in our care a loving, stable home, and to enable those children to enjoy a positive, nurturing experience of family life – one that does not set them apart from their peers.

We must:

- treat foster carers as experts on the child and include them in all relevant meetings where planning and decision-making affect them or the children they care for.
- treat foster carers without discrimination and respect them as colleagues, including representation on the Corporate parenting panel.
- respect confidentiality.
- value foster carers' skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals





Information

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

'Magnify strengths rather than weaknesses and focus on gifts rather than deficits'

We must:

- share, with the fostering service and/or foster carer, all the relevant information needed in order to care safely for the child and to support the child in fulfilling their potential
- provide this information in writing prior to a child joining your family, or as soon as possible if a child's move is unplanned.
- secure clear and timely plans for the child's care.

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 care for.

We must:

- ensure that foster carers are able to make everyday decisions that mean that their fostered child is not treated differently from their peers and can feel part of their family
- provide clarity about any decision foster carers cannot take at the outset so that everyone is clear about their respective responsibilities
- deal swiftly with any requests for decision making on matters that are outside of the foster carer's authority.

Communication and consultation

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

We must:

- facilitate communication between foster carers and decision makers
- provide foster carers with the opportunity to influence relevant policies and procedures.

What foster carers can expect from the fostering service

Working in partnership

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

We must:

- value foster carers' skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- recognise that foster carers are the people who live with children every day and usually know them best
- include foster carers in all meetings that affect them and the children they care for
- ensure that our fostering service will comply with fostering regulations and guidance
- treat foster carers without discrimination and respect them as colleagues
- respect confidentiality.





Information

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

We must:

- share all information we have about the child to care safely for them
- provide this information in writing prior to a child joining your family, or as soon as possible if a child's move is unplanned.
- provide foster carers with information on all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements
- provide foster carers with full details of all relevant policies and procedures.

Support

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

We must:

- ensure there is a robust post-approval induction process
- respond positively to requests for additional support, including short break support and out of hours support
- provide foster carers with regular supervision and phone contact
- give foster carers honest and open feedback
- provide foster carers with access to 24-hour support from people with fostering expertise
- pay foster carers' allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner

- ensure that there is a local group, recognised by the fostering service, where foster carers and their family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families. Or that Foster Carers can access support virtually.
- support foster carers when facilitating family time.
- recognise and champion the contribution foster carers and their families make to fostering.

Learning and development

We believe foster carers must have learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need and allow them to develop their practice in order that they can help transform the lives of the children they foster.

We must:

- ensure all foster carers have a personal development plan
- provide foster carers and their family with appropriate, accessible, and relevant training by trainers who understand fostering
- support foster carers to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care and the other members of the team around the child
- continue to provide all foster carers with other development opportunities which make the best use of their skills and expertise, such as mentoring or providing training or support.





Fair treatment

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

We must:

- consult with foster carers before changing terms and conditions
- ensure honesty and openness in all our discussions and communications with foster carers
- provide a framework for dealing with allegations, including access to independent support, and adhere to agreed timescales
- ensure that foster carers are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support should they be subject to an allegation
- ensure that foster carers know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances if they are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation.

Communication and consultation

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

We must:

- ensure that we consult with foster carers in a meaningful way on matters that affect them
- give foster carers timely feedback from consultations
- provide clear information on how foster carers can give us feedback and report concerns.



What fostering services can expect from foster carers

Working in partnership

We must demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct. 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 social worker and the child's social worker.

We must:

- 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 advocate on their behalf
- work with the individuals and agencies involved with the child such as the child's social worker, fostering service, school, and health and religious bodies
- work with birth parents, wider family, and any other significant people in a child's life
- meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow policies and procedures
- inform our supervising social worker about factors that impact on our fostering including changes in our household
- inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us
- inform the child's social worker about any concerns we have related to the child
- respect confidentiality

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.

'Be who you needed when you were at school'

We must:

- develop a meaningful relationship with the child - understand their needs, support their growth, become an advocate and champion for them, and endeavour to remain in touch with them when they move on where possible and when circumstances allow
- care for the child in a manner that recognises and respects their identity - including their ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural heritage, disabilities/ special needs, gender and sexual identity
- afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own child
- support the child to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability
- support the child to inform the development of the services which affect their care, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.



Learning, development and support

We must access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career in accordance with the needs of the children we are caring for. 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 and this will be recognised but the payment for skills criteria.

We must:

- be willing and able to develop our skills throughout our fostering career
- attend relevant training
- be willing to attend and contribute to support groups.



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Call Staffordshire

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