Your Guide to fostering in Wirral

Our Foster Carers come from all walks of life
Thank you for your interest in becoming a Foster Carer.

“All children need to be given the opportunity to develop and have support to do so. Knowing that by fostering we can provide them with that extra support, with the break they might need, at a time when they most need it, that is what is important to me.” (Wirral Foster Carer)
What is fostering?

Simply put, fostering is looking after someone else’s child or children in your home for short or long periods of time. Foster Carers have day to day care of the child but the overall responsibility lies with the parents and the Council.

There is no such thing as a typical fostering situation so a child could be any age from new-born to 18 years old, or we may need to find foster homes where brothers and sisters can stay together. Teenage years can be difficult for anyone; we particularly need Foster Carers for teens. This is an important time in their lives and you can help to make a difference.

Children need fostering for all different reasons and for different lengths of time, it can be for just a few days, a few weeks, months or sometimes for several years and sometimes until they are adults.

On a practical level you’ll need to do the school run, help with homework, cook meals, and generally keep your home ticking over as normal. You will also help a child develop their confidence, self-esteem, gain independence and fulfil their potential by encouraging them, listening to their views whilst promoting their growth and development.

Don’t worry you are not alone; throughout it all you will always receive the help, support and advice you need. A dedicated social worker will be there for you throughout the whole time you foster. Children and young people placed also have a dedicated social worker.

If you decide to become a Foster Carer you become a childcare professional. You’ll receive free training, ongoing support, a fee and a financial allowance. The allowance covers the daily costs of caring for a child or young person. Foster carers are rewarded through the payment of a fee that recognises the skills you have.

There is paperwork to keep. It’s not bureaucratic form filling, but written records of how a child is getting on in their school and the child’s care plan. The care plan is drawn up with the child, their parent/s, the child’s social worker and your own supervising social worker.

There are different types of fostering and it’s up to you which type of foster care you can offer. More details on the different types of fostering are provided further on in this guide.
Every year around 500 children and young people are looked after by us. Wirral Council needs to recruit more Foster Carers from across the area in order to meet the needs of children and young people, currently in our care.

We need Foster Carers to provide the stability and family support that a child or young person may need at various points in their life when they are unable to live with their parents or in the family home. This could be due to many reasons and every case is different.

For many children and young people being in care can be a very stressful and uncertain time, but your help and support could make all the difference and really change their life.

The more people who are approved as Foster Carers, the more likely it is that a good match can be found for a child in terms of location, culture, lifestyle, language and interests. This reduces damaging instability and disruption in their lives.

Why do we need foster carers?
Who can foster?

Just as there is no typical fostered child, there is no such thing as a typical Foster Carer they are all different and come from all walks of life.

Some people think that you have to be married with a family, a job and your own home to be a foster carer, it’s not true!

You can be male or female, single, married, with a partner, in a civil partnership, divorced or widowed.

You might live alone or with a partner or family, have young children, teenagers or those who have flown the nest, be from a black, racial minority background or any faith or belief. You may own your own home or rent, and you may have pets. Good Foster Carers come from all different backgrounds.

And don’t let age be a barrier, as long as you are fit and healthy to care for a child we want to hear from you. Your individual qualities are what matter to us and what you can offer to a child or young person.

Our Foster Carers tell us the biggest skill you need is to be able to listen. We’re looking for people who are also understanding, determined and keen to learn, someone who can offer children stability, consistency and a loving family home where they can develop and grow. We are looking for someone just like you!

You must also have space in your home for a child and time to commit to a child.

Read our section, ‘Can I foster’ to find the answers to some of the common misconceptions people have about fostering.
Deciding to foster a child is a big decision. It will not only change the life of the child you foster, but your life and that of your family – in a good way.

The best people to tell you about fostering are our current Foster Carers. We can arrange for you to chat to some of our existing Foster Carers to find out a bit more about the application process, day to day fostering and preparing for your first foster child or any other questions or concerns you may have. If you would like to arrange this please call 0151 666 4510.

Some of our existing Foster Carers have said:

“I just love it; it gives you a new lease of life. I am able to pass on skills I’ve learnt but I’d say I learn lots from the teenagers too! They keep me young. The support I’ve received from the Fostering team has been second to none, I couldn’t rate them highly enough” (Alf)

“When you can see you are making a difference to a child’s life then it’s all worthwhile. If I couldn’t see that I wouldn’t be doing it.” (All of our Foster Carers)

“Didn’t think it would change our lives as much as it did…but It did and for the better. I’ve got my own children and they are fully committed to fostering too, if they had their way I’d have an extension so we could have even more foster children! They look out for the foster children too.” (Julie)

“Sometimes the changes take a while, seeing a child grow in confidence and the progress they can make every day. You see something new in them; they start to trust you and not just you, but the world around them.” (Tracey)

“My kids had grown up and moved out and my weekends were spare and I missed doing family stuff. I took up fostering at the weekends only. It doesn’t have to be all or nothing, I’d been thinking for years and I finally made the call...they were looking for someone just like me, it all fitted together.” (Sharon)

“For me it’s about seeing the changes made to a young person’s life, seeing how they progress, I’d say well behaved but that’s not always the case lol, but then that’s all children.” (Cath)

Why Foster?

What we do matters, who we do it for matters more.
Types of Fostering

There are different types of fostering available and you will need to consider what option is best for you and your family.

As a Foster Carer you can be approved for one or more types of care. This will depend on your choice and also on the skills and experience you have. All foster carers may be contacted at any time and be asked to offer emergency care.

**Short Term**
This type of placement is temporary. It can mean providing care for a child for a night or a few weeks until a child can return home to their family or a long term fostering or adoption arrangement is made. Short term Foster Carers can prepare children for any future move, this preparation is vital to the success of any future placement.

**Permanent Care**
This care is a long-term commitment to a child or siblings. Sometimes children will not be able to go back to live with their own families for a number of years, if at all. Long-term fostering allows children and young people to stay in a family where they can feel secure, while maintaining contact with their birth family.

**Short Breaks for Children with Disabilities**
Children with disabilities may be given a break with families who will give them time, attention and fun, for a few days each month, usually at weekends. Training is provided if medical knowledge is needed.

**Parent and Child**
Parent and child/children foster care is for children and their parents, either mother or father or both together. This placement offers support and guidance to help build upon their parenting skills.

**Family link care**
Children and parents may need to be given a break from difficult family circumstances that may arise due to a crisis or other stresses that the family are under. The breaks are usually at weekends but are sometimes during the week depending on the availability of the carers. Foster Carers are linked with children for approximately 12 months and may care for them once or twice a month.
**Teenagers**
We are always looking for Foster Carers for teenagers. Teenage years can be difficult for anyone, but for a young person who needs fostering, it can be especially unsettling. They need a Foster Carer who will be there, who is reliable and will listen, someone who can guide them, and help to make sense of any worries they have. This is a critical stage in their lives and you can make a real difference to their lives.

**Sibling groups**
We are always in need of people who can accommodate sibling groups. It is very important to keep siblings together, given their existing relationships with each other, support they may provide each other and their shared experiences. We will always try to keep brothers and sisters together, but to do this we need Foster Carers who are able to take sibling groups.

Fostering sibling groups will mean taking more than one child or young person and the children will be of various ages.
Support for Foster Carers

**Training**
Preparation training is provided during the application process and throughout your time as a Foster Carer. Carers will be able to access training courses that will develop their own skills so they feel they are fully equipped to provide the best care for a child or young person placed with them.

**Ongoing Support**
Foster Carers will have the ongoing support of a Social Worker one for them and also the child’s own Social Worker. By fostering with Wirral Council, you are joining part of a team and will always have the support of the fostering team and other Foster Carers.

**Peer Mentors**
Our Peer Mentors are experienced Foster Carers who offer support to our new Foster Carers. We feel this is an important support option for you as they are best placed to guide you as they understand what fostering can entail as they have experienced it first-hand themselves.

They will help you adapt to your new role and help you to gain a greater understanding of your role and tasks of a foster carer on a day to day basis.

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**Support for sons and daughters of foster carers**
We have a support network for sons and daughters of foster carers who can chat about what it is like to be part of a foster family.

**Financial Support**
Foster Carers receive pay based upon the age and needs of the child placed in their care. This will also rise based upon experience and skills. A fostering allowance is for each child, and covers the daily costs of caring for that child or young person.

Help with getting furniture that is necessary is also available for Foster Carers.
Why choose Wirral Council’s Fostering service?

Becoming a Foster Carer with Wirral Council has many benefits for you and more importantly for Children and Young people in Wirral.

**Keeping it local**
We have been praised, as a Fostering service that places Wirral children with local Wirral Foster Carers. This means at a time when a child may be experiencing family problems there will be minimum disruptions for them as they are able to stay within their local community, attend the same school and clubs and don’t have far to travel when visiting their family.

**Peer mentor support from Foster Carers**
We have a network of Foster Carers who work as peer mentors and are there to support and advise you, if you need it. Our peer mentors are experienced Foster Carers who can advise you on preparing for your first foster child, on how they have dealt with different situations and share their experiences with you.

**Support network**
Wirral Council provides high quality, experienced and locally based support to its team of Foster Carers. We have an established support network of existing Foster Carers within Wirral who you can chat to about your foster experiences. We also have a team of specialist Social Workers based in Wirral who will work closely with you as your dedicated support worker.

**Training and personal development opportunities**
Preparation training is provided during the application process and ongoing relevant training is also provided. As part of our ongoing support your training will be delivered in Wirral.

**Receive a financial allowance**
A financial allowance is provided to meet the additional costs of caring for a child.
Can I foster?

Almost anyone can apply to foster! There is no such thing as a typical Foster Carer. Our carers come from all sorts of different backgrounds – with one thing in common; they care about the children they help.

It is important that we have a range of Foster Carers available so that each child, teenagers or groups of brothers and sisters can be offered the right care.

**Myth:** You can’t foster if you are single.  
**Reality:** You can! Single people can and do make great foster carers.

**Myth:** You can’t foster if you are retired.  
**Reality:** You can! There are no upper age limits for fostering, as long as you are fit and healthy to care for a child we want to hear from you.

**Myth:** You can’t foster if you are young.  
**Reality:** You can! You must be over 21 to foster and need to be mature enough to work with the complex needs of children.

**Myth:** You can’t foster if you already have kids.  
**Reality:** You can! Many people who foster have their own children living at home and foster at the same time.

**Myth:** You can’t foster if you haven’t got children.  
**Reality:** You can! We are only interested in your ability to provide a safe, secure and caring environment for a child. You may have experience of caring for young people in your extended family or friends, or through working with young people as part of your job or voluntary work.

**Myth:** You can’t foster if you are gay.  
**Reality:** You can! Your sexuality won’t prevent you from fostering. We consider your ability to provide a safe, secure and caring environment for a child to stay, not your sexuality.
**Myth:** You can’t foster if you have no qualifications..

**Reality:** You can! There are no specific formal qualifications required to foster but you obviously need to enjoy being around and working with children and teenagers. A lot of our Foster Carers say the biggest skill you need is being able to listen.

**Myth:** You can’t foster if you don’t own a house?

**Reality:** You can! Whether you have a mortgage, or are a private or council tenant makes no difference. As long as you have enough space in your home for each young person. This is assessed on an individual basis.

**Myth:** You can’t foster if you have a disability or a health condition?

**Reality:** Your health will be considered when applying to foster and any long-term conditions taken into account. The most important factor is whether you are physically and psychologically fit enough to cope with the demands of caring for a child – this may vary depending on the age of the children that you are approved for and will vary with each potential Foster Carer.

Past mental illness is not a bar to becoming a Foster Carer, in fact there is no diagnosis that can automatically prevent you fostering. You will need to discuss this with us. A medical report is always sought as part of the assessment process for everyone. Get in touch with us to discuss personally your circumstances.

**Myth:** You can’t foster if you smoke?

**Reality:** You can foster but our current policy is that we do not place children under 5 or vulnerable children who have respiratory, heart or other medical conditions in homes where there is a smoker.

**Myth:** You can’t foster if you have pets.

**Reality:** You Can! We just need to make sure that there is no risk to the child and to be aware in case they have any allergies or phobias.

**Myth:** You can’t foster if you work.

**Reality:** You Can! But this will depend on the age and circumstance of the children/teenagers you are fostering, the type of fostering placement and on the hours you work as to whether you can combine the two. Like having your own children you will need to be available to care for children, support contact between a child and their family. If you are part of a couple of course only one of the carers need be at home, so the other can work.
**Myth:** I won’t get any support or help after I become a Foster Carer.  
**Reality:** You will! Our support doesn’t stop once you become a Foster Carer. Ongoing you will be provided with support training and receive a paid allowance.

Specialist support is also available for the young person’s educational, leisure and health needs.

We have highly experienced staff who can answer any questions you may have and you can be allocated a peer mentor; this is an experienced Foster Carer who knows what it is like to first start out on your fostering journey. They will offer support, advice and just be a listening ear.

**Myth:** I can’t afford it.  
**Reality:** We pay all Foster Carers an allowance based on the age and needs of the child(ren) they are looking after and an additional fee dependent on skills and experience.

**Myth:** The application process is too complicated and will take forever.  
**Reality:** The assessment process usually takes around six months. The process may seem daunting but we have staff who are able to help you through the process.

Matching you with a child may take longer, but it really depends which children you would consider making part of your family.

**Myth:** I need a car to foster.  
**Reality:** You don’t need to have your own car but you do need to be able to get a child to school or nursery. The child will stay at the school they already attend to keep life as consistent as possible. You will also need to take children to see their family if parents are not visiting children in the foster home.
How do I become a foster carer?

Get in touch
When you first contact us we will ask you some questions to check if you are likely to be suitable to become a foster carer. There is an online form that you can complete at www.wirral.gov.uk/fostering or call us on 0151 666 4510. There are quite a few questions to complete but this is so we can start to get to know you. We do not discriminate against new applicants on any basis.

If you are unable to get online, please complete the paper form enclosed.

Once you have completed the online form if you are suitable, we will arrange to visit you to undertake a Fostering Initial Assessment.

A member of our fostering team will visit you and they can talk you through the whole process in more detail and answer any questions you may have.

The application process
Your whole family will be involved in the assessment process and training is available for sons and daughters of Foster Carers.

The assessment process usually takes approximately six months but can take longer to match you up with a child.

Assessment
You will be required to undergo checks, which will be done by a supervising Social Worker. This is in order to assess your suitability for becoming a Foster Carer. All of these questions are vital to ensure that we place children and young people with the right Foster Carers in an environment that best suits their needs.

The checks are things such as:
• Your health - A medical report is always sought as part of the assessment process for everyone.
• Criminal record
• References
• The accommodation you have available
• Home health and safety check
• Previous employment

We will also discuss with you:
• Your family profile
• Check what fostering means to you and what type of fostering you are interested in and is best for you/your family
• Language and literacy
• Relationships
• Time available to foster
• Views of your own children
• Your support networks
• Your lifestyle
• Pets
• Your views on discrimination and diversity
**Fostering Panel**

After all checks have been done, the supervising Social Worker will go to a fostering panel with a report. From this the panel will make a decision on whether to approve you as a register Foster Carer. You will be invited to attend the panel and may be asked to give more information about yourself.

If you are approved this will be put into writing and you will be asked to sign a Foster Care Agreement.

**Things to consider**

Becoming a foster carer will have a huge impact on everyone living in your home.

Everyone in your household needs to be committed to fostering. If you have a partner and sons and/or daughters of your own, make sure you discuss the idea to foster with them and involve them in the decision to apply.

- Consider your availability, your own family’s circumstances and views.
- Have you decided what age range would be best suited to you and your family?
- Consider what types of fostering you would like to do and what would work best in your current situation.
- Would you accept a sibling group to help keep children together?
- Would you foster teenagers?

It’s true fostering does mean taking on a tremendous responsibility and will change practically every aspect of your everyday life, but our current foster families say that change is “the best thing we’ve ever done and they wished they had done it sooner!”.
Take the next step

To find out more about fostering or to take that step and apply to become a Wirral Foster Carer visit wirral.gov.uk/fostering or call 0151 666 4510.

We look forward to welcoming you into our fostering family.