

Thinking about fostering?

Building a brighter future
in Torbay





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You've got nothing to lose by finding out more about fostering. There's lots of support for you. If you give it a go and like it then that is great, but if you decide it's not for you then you can walk away - just don't regret not giving it a try.

Paignton foster carer

Welcome

Torbay Foster Care Service is looking for local carers for local children. If you live in or around Torbay, you have a spare room and you think you have what it takes to care for a child in need, please read on.

This information booklet outlines fostering opportunities with Torbay Council and how you can become a foster carer.

This is a big decision. Take your time to read the information and call us if you have any questions. You can also check out these websites:

www.torbay.gov.uk/fostercare, www.baaf.org or www.fostering.net

If you think fostering could be for you and your family we will take some details from you then invite you to an information evening. If your application is progressed we will assist you through every aspect of the process to ensure that the right decision has been made. We will support and guide you, but you can walk away at any point if you change your mind.

We look forward to meeting you.

The Foster Care Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team, Torbay Council

I think in this day and age it can be a really confusing time for teenagers - they are not kids and the right and wrongs and sometimes young people and their parents just need someone else to hold the hand and take a break from each other and sort things out.

Torquay foster carer

What is fostering?

Torbay children, from babies through to teenagers, require foster placements for a variety of reasons, including bereavement, family breakdown or illness. In some cases, a child may be removed from their family for their own safety. They then become 'looked after' by the local authority.

Whatever the reason, children and young people who require foster care will often be confused, anxious and in need of reassurance from the adult caring for them. We need foster carers to provide a safe, secure and nurturing home to these children and young people.

Fostering is about caring for the child, but it also involves working closely with Torbay Council's Children's Social Care Teams as well as other professionals. Together we aim to support the child's health, social and emotional well-being and their education. Torbay Foster Care Service wants foster carers to encourage children to have aspirations for their future - just as any good parent would.

Foster carers are required to keep detailed, daily records of how the child or young person is doing and of significant events.

The Local Authority has a legal obligation to work with families and to support children returning to live

They are not adults. There are no
reins for a while, so they can

with their families wherever possible, as long as they are satisfied that the child or young person will be safe from harm. Otherwise, the courts may decide a child should be placed for adoption or should remain in what is called long term foster care.

Foster carers are required to support children and young people in keeping in touch with their families. This is important for many reasons. Families must be treated with respect and professionalism at all times and foster carers may have to work hard to put their personal feelings 'to one side' in order to meet a child's needs. The child's needs must always come first.

Foster carers can make a real difference to a child who is going through a difficult time.





Fostering was a really positive experience for me. My foster carers were fantastic, they made me feel safe and supported in their lives; they need to know that they have someone who appreciates them.

Former foster child

Who can be a foster carer?

In Torbay, we are always looking for more foster carers so that we can provide a choice of placements for children who come from many different backgrounds.

We welcome applications from people from a diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, marital status or residential status.

Here are some common questions and answers which may be helpful.

When I arrived I was absolutely terrified, I cried a lot and I felt very alone. My room was not comfortable and at home and safe. A lot of kids have had so much trouble in foster care there for them - no matter what.

Do I need a spare room?

Yes. This is one essential requirement. If you have looked after children they cannot share a room with your children, but they may be able to share with their own sibling if it is appropriate.

What about childcare experience?

You don't need to be a parent already, but it helps if you can demonstrate that you have some experience of caring for or working with children and young people. This may have been paid or voluntary work.

Do I have to own my own home?

No, but if you rent you will need to check that your landlord is happy for you to foster.

What if I have debt?

We will need to know all about your financial situation and if you have outstanding debts these must be managed to our satisfaction.

Are there any age restrictions?

We will consider applications from people over 18. You will need to show that you have some relevant skills and experience and we will explore whether this is the right time for you to foster.

Some of our foster carers didn't start to foster until they were grandparents themselves and some of them just don't want to stop! There is no upper age limit for fostering, as long as you are fit and healthy.

Fostering can be a lot of fun and very rewarding. Empowering young people and giving them the confidence they have heard is fantastic. Just watching a young person develop into their own person is like seeing flowers

Torquay foster carer

What if I smoke?

You will not be able to foster children under the age of 5 if you smoke. However, provided any smokers in your household only do so outside the home, you may be able to foster children over 5 years old.

What about pets?

Many foster carers have pets, but we need to be satisfied that your pets are not a risk to children. For example, we use a 'dog questionnaire' which helps us to identify potential concerns. Certain breeds are classed as 'dangerous dogs' and owning these will prohibit you from fostering. Also, if you have more than two dogs this is classed as a 'pack'. You will need

to demonstrate the dog's ability to cope with children and that you have a responsible attitude and a good understanding of the issues involved. Other animals you keep will be considered on an individual basis during the assessment.

Does someone have to be at home all the time?

It depends on what type of fostering you want to offer, but usually someone needs to be able to attend meetings and care for children if they are ill or not in school or nursery. We will talk to you about whether you have time to foster because no two situations are the same.

confidence to be
a blossom.

What if I have a criminal record?

Obviously we need to know you are a safe and suitable person to care for children. We need you to be open and honest about your past. Some offences, if they were a long time ago, may not prevent you from being considered as a foster carer.





If fostering is for you then you are the kind of person who can handle the ups and downs and open your heart to them. Foster care is a challenge to succeed and you can help them to better understand the world.

Torquay foster carer

Types of foster care

There are different types of foster care which you can be registered to provide. Different agencies may use slightly different terminology, but these are the ones used in Torbay:

- Respite Care
- Emergency
- Short Term
- Long Term
- Parent & Child

person who is willing to support a young person through their
caring provides these young people with stability and a chance
to understand themselves and others.

We also register carers to look after children within
specific age ranges and we work out how many
children you could care for.

Respite Care

Some carers offer to give either families or other
foster carers a break by taking care of a child or young
person for a set period of time, such as a weekend
or a period of a few weeks. Regular breaks with the
same respite foster carer can help families and carers
to continue caring for a child who may be challenging
at times. Together we will work out what kind of
commitment you are able to make.

Emergency

Sometimes a child needs to come into care at short
notice and we may not know much about them. You
will be required to support the child and keep them
safe while we work out what should happen next.
Emergencies can occur during the day and any foster
carer with space may be asked to help, but some foster
carers also agree to be contacted during the night
or at weekends by our Emergency Duty Team. These
placements may last just one night or up to three weeks.

Short term

This can be anything from an overnight stay to a
couple of years. Sometimes that's how long it takes

It takes seconds to say "I care" but years to show it.

Paignton foster carer

for the courts to arrive at a decision about where the child should continue to live. You may be required to support a return to family or perhaps help prepare a child for adoption, sometimes referred to as 'bridging'. Alternatively, some children's needs are best met by remaining in long term foster care, so you may be required to support a move to a long term placement.

Long Term

If children and young people can't go back to family members and adoption is ruled out they will need a long term foster placement. They need carers who will support them through to independence while still maintaining contact with their birth families.

Parent & Child

We need experienced carers to provide specialist short term placements for parents and their young children. For example, this may be a parent with a new baby where there are concerns over the care of the child. The foster carer must offer support and guidance so that the parent can care for their own child. Each parent will need different levels of support and monitoring, which will be made clear to you in advance. You would not care directly for the child except in an emergency or by prior arrangement.



Thinking about fostering?

You need more information
- look online or contact us by phone.
We'll take some basic details about you
before inviting you to an...

Initial visit

A social worker will come to your home to find out more about you

Information evening
- these happen every couple of months

START

Fill in application form,
criminal records checks,
medical check,
references requested

Training

Assessment

Foster Carer Approval Panel
They will read the report
and meet with you

FINISH

A named social worker visits you to assess and prepare you, before writing a report



Go for it! It's brilliant. As long as you have plenty of love and time and patience to make the children feel worthwhile. Having children around the house is great.

Torquay foster carer

Assessment process

Children in local authority care are particularly vulnerable, so it is really important to find foster carers who will keep children safe. They also need to have the skills and ability to meet all the child's needs and to work well with professionals.

These are the different steps that potential foster carers go through.

Information Evening

Once you have contacted us with your details we can invite you to attend an information evening

hosted by a social worker and a foster carer. We run these every couple of months. This informal event is an opportunity to ask questions and find out what fostering entails. If you are still interested after this we move on to the next stage.

Initial Visit

A social worker from the Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team will visit you at home and meet your family. We will talk about your specific circumstances and how fostering may fit in to your lives.

You may complete the formal application form at this stage and we will seek permission to begin the Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks, medical checks

I'm still in touch with my foster carers now because they had that much of an impact on my life - I would say to all those people thinking about fostering - go into it with your eyes wide open, but do such a wonderful relationship with a child and make such a difference to their lives

Former foster child

and take details of at least two referees. You can still choose to opt out at this stage or take more time to think about whether fostering is right for you.

We will send you a copy of our record of the visit and if we feel it is appropriate to proceed, you will be invited to attend our foster carer training.

Training and Preparation Group

We call this course 'The Skills to Foster'. Everyone who wants to foster must go to these sessions, so if you live as a couple you will both need to attend. Most of the course is delivered on weekends and evenings. There are five, or sometimes six, separate sessions during the course of one month.

Most people tell us they really enjoy this training even though the material can be challenging.

We will also invite any children of your household to a one-off workshop called 'My Family Fosters', but this will depend on there being adequate numbers.

Assessment

During or after your training course you will be linked with a specific social worker from the Foster Care Recruitment Team who will be responsible for completing the in-depth assessment report, which is known as the 'Form F'.

The social worker will visit your home over a period of several weeks. During the assessment we explore how

*All always be in touch with them.
Don't be afraid. You can create*

you became the person you are today and what skills and experience you have which would enable you to become a foster carer. Some of the work is about us getting to know you and some of it is about preparing you for fostering. We will spend time with each individual in the household, including your children, to make sure that fostering is right for you all.

You are given a copy of your Form F (not including the confidential references) at the end of the assessment and you have the opportunity to comment on it. The social worker will make a recommendation about your registration and the report is then circulated to the Foster Care Approval Panel members.





I get all the support I need from the Torbay Foster they need and having all that helps me to support I've never had to ask twice.

Brixham foster carer

Independent Foster Care Approval Panel

The Foster Care Approval Panel meets once a month. You will be invited to attend Panel when your assessment is complete. We aim to complete assessments and invite applicants to Panel within six months from the date you sign your formal application.

Panel is made up of professionals and lay-persons who have expertise in specific areas related to looked after children. They may wish to ask you some questions or just have a chat about your assessment. They will make a recommendation whether or not to register you as a foster carer, but the final decision is made afterwards by a senior officer of the authority, known as the Agency Decision Maker.

er Care Service; the children get all the support
the children more. In all the time I've fostered

If your application is not successful further discussions will be held with you and your social worker to understand the reasons for this. If you believe you have been treated unfairly you may appeal through the Independent Review Mechanism.

Starting to foster

Once you are approved you will be supported by the Foster Placement Supervision Team and you will be allocated a social worker to guide you when you begin fostering.

A placement can be made as soon as you are approved, but there may be a period of waiting until your skills can be matched with an appropriate child.

Supervision, support and benefits

Fostering isn't a task you do on your own; it takes a network of people behind you to give you the support and guidance to become an effective, confident foster carer.

As a Torbay Council foster carer you can expect the following:

To have an identified social worker from our Supervision Team, who will visit you every month. This worker is there for you and your family,

When my own children were still at home, we offered respite care for the occasional weekend, but more time, we have become long term foster carers for teenagers. You can change your registration situation changes. Fostering really is a rewarding experience.

Brixham Foster Carer

independent of the child you are fostering. This regular meeting is called 'supervision' and it is an opportunity for you to seek advice and support, but we will also try to ensure that the quality of care you provide meets the standards required.

You will be invited to attend a local Foster Carer Support Group where you will meet other carers in Torbay. This enables carers to give as well as receive support from their peers.

The offer of a peer mentor. This will be an experienced foster carer, who you can contact as you begin your fostering career.

A comprehensive package of training, which meets your specific needs and interests.

Membership of 'Fostertalk', an independent organisation providing high quality professional support to foster carers. See www.fostertalk.org

To be invited to a regular therapeutic support group for foster carers. This is facilitated by the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The aim of this group is to offer expert guidance related to specific issues and challenges, which fostered children may bring to your placement.

ow we have
as your own

We pay a weekly allowance for each fostered child. This varies according to their age, but it is not a wage so you won't be taxed on it. We also subscribe to a 'payment for skills' scheme, which means you will get an extra weekly 'top-up' which recognises your skills, experience, professional learning and development. There are three tiers and most new carers start at level one, but it should be possible to progress to level two after about a year.





Contact us

If you are thinking about becoming a foster carer then please get in touch with the Torbay Foster Care Service.

Telephone 01803 207857

Email: fostercare@torbay.gov.uk

You can also visit our website for information about fostering. Go to www.torbay.gov.uk/fostercare



This document can be made available in other formats. For further information please contact 01803 207857.