

We foster, could you?

A Fostering
Information Guide

Find out more at
fostering.ie

TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

What is foster care?

Foster care aims to provide a safe, secure and stable home environment for children/young people, who are not able to live with their own parents.

Foster care is caring for someone else's child like they are your own in the knowledge that they are not.

Sometimes parents have their own struggles to the point that their children need to live with someone else. Before this happens, Tusla provide supports to families as the first priority is to support children to stay with their parents and remain within their extended family. When this can't happen, foster care is the preferred option of care.

Who can foster?

There is no "typical" or "standard" foster carer – each fostering household is unique and valuable.

Just as there is diversity in children, foster carers come from a variety of backgrounds and have different life experiences, skills and qualities to help them meet the needs of children and young people requiring foster care.

There are few reasons why someone cannot foster. Tusla is open to speaking to anyone who is interested in fostering.



Dispelling myths about who can foster

There are a number of myths about the ideal foster family and many of these are not true.

Often people do not consider themselves eligible to foster because of these myths and so do not make contact with us. We want to dispel these myths and ensure that everyone knows that if you are interested in fostering, it is worth making contact with us. Our priority is to ensure that we have families that meet the needs of children in care, and one size does not fit all.

Did you know that you can apply to foster regardless if:

- You do not own your own home. The most important thing is that your home can accommodate a child/children.
- You and/or your partner work. Fostering is about meeting the needs of the child/children and therefore your personal circumstances are considered before placing a child with a foster carer. If you and/or your partner work, it is still worth having a conversation with the fostering team as not every child requires a parent to be at home in order to meet their needs.
- Regardless of your marital status, religious beliefs or sexual orientation.
- If you have or do not have children of your own.
- Regardless of your age and once you are relatively fit and healthy to care for a child.
- If you have faced challenges or adversity in your own childhood or adulthood, once you have effectively dealt with them and have the ability to provide care for a child/children.



What is essential to be a foster carer?

- You and your family enjoy the company of children and young people.
- You do not have a conviction for violence or sexual offences against a child or adult.
- You are available to meet with and work with all the people involved in the child/young person's life.
- You are willing to participate in a fostering assessment which can take place over a number of months.

Key Qualities

- Ability to develop an understanding and accept a child who has been neglected or abused.
- Ability to provide a warm, caring and supportive home for a child who is likely to have experienced some sort of harm and trauma.
- Ability to accept the child's behaviour as a communication for their feelings.
- Ability to understand and accept the circumstances of the child's family.
- Ability to help the child understand without prejudice, the reason for separation from their family.
- Flexible attitude and non-judgemental perspective on life.
- Ability to negotiate and compromise when faced with change, stress and challenge.
- Openness to training to increase skills and knowledge about how to best care and support the child in placement.
- Openness to involvement with the social workers of the Child and Family Agency, who supervise and support foster care placements.

Types of foster care

There are a number of different types of foster care that are needed to support children who come into care. Each placement is made to meet the needs of each individual child or children. It is important to consider which type of fostering might suit you or your family best!

The types of foster care listed below can be for more than one child at a time. The National Standards for Foster Care state that only 2 children can be placed in a foster care placement at any time, with the exception of 'sibling placements'.

- **Emergency foster care** is where a child needs a safe place to stay in an emergency situation. Emergency care is time limited.
- **Short Term Foster Care:** Short-term foster care provides temporary care for a child who cannot live with their birth family. The child may, after a period, move back to their family or move on to a long-term family or an adoptive family. Short term can be up to six months.
- **Respite:** Short-term care provided to a child in order to support the child, his or her parent(s) or foster carers by providing a break for the child and his or her primary caregivers.
- **Pre Adoptive Foster Care:** To provide care for babies who have been placed for adoption. This may involve attendance at a maternity hospital and the subsequent care of the child until they are 18 months.
- **Long Term Foster Care:** Long term foster care is needed for children who are unlikely to be able to return to live with their birth family. Long term requires a commitment on the part of the foster family for a number of years and is usually required when it is decided by the social worker that it is unlikely the child/young person will return to live with their own family. Many children in long term care become such a part of their foster family that they continue to live with them as young adults.
- **Day Fostering:** Day Fostering is a flexible service which allows children to remain in their own home by night and weekends, while receiving alternative care during the day. Carers who provide day fostering are assessed and approved to foster on a short - term basis too. Day fostering is best suited to those who are open to short daily contact with birth parents, as they drop off and collect their children.
- **Placements for brothers and sisters:** Placement for brothers and sisters requires special consideration, balancing the foster carer's experience of caring for children and the benefits of keeping family groups together. The aim of this type of placement is to keep families together as much as possible once it is in the child's best interests.

I am interested, how do I become a foster carer?

The Fostering Pathway

As every child deserves to be provided with a high standard of care, becoming a foster carer is not a speedy process and there are a number of steps along the way. It is important that at all stages, you share any questions or concerns you have as they arise!

Step 1: Enquiry: this is the first stage, making contact with us. When you make contact with Tusla for the first time, we will ask you a few questions to check that you understand what fostering is and the commitment involved. If you are happy with this, we will organise to visit your home to explain to you the next steps, to explore suitability and decide if you wish to proceed to step 2.

Step 2: This stage focusses on initial checks including Garda vetting, references and personal checks. Sometimes people may have had contact with Gardai in their younger years and express concern about how this might impact on their assessment. The important thing is to talk about this with us as it doesn't automatically rule you out of becoming a foster carer.

Step 3: At stage 3 a pre-approval training course will provide you with a wealth of information about fostering, and an opportunity to meet other foster carers and Tusla fostering staff.

Step 4: This is the assessment stage. It comprises of a number of meetings with you to get to know you and your family or significant people in your life. It also includes meeting with your referees or any other people you think are significant to meet with that will inform the assessment process. The purpose is to get to know you and to explore the strengths and skills you can bring to fostering. It is also an opportunity to explore what you may find challenging in fostering. This process is part of the approval for fostering and the social worker who undertakes the assessment will complete an assessment report that will be presented to the foster care committee.

Step 5: Foster Care Committee Stage. You will be invited to attend the foster care committee with the social worker who completed your assessment. The foster care committee make a recommendation as to whether you are suitable for fostering. Once this recommendation is made you will be informed of the outcome. If a positive recommendation is made you will be approved as a foster carer and placed on the fostering panel as a registered foster carer.

Step 6: Becoming a foster care family. At this stage a matching process will take place with your family and a child/children. This is often done at the foster care committee stage. This happens to make sure that the child/children placed with you will be able to feel welcomed and secure enough to settle with you and your family and your circumstances.

Assessment process

Some of the topics that will be explored/discussed in the assessment process. There is no right or wrong answer in the assessment the purpose of the assessment is to reflect and explore these areas with you.

- Your experience of parenting and looking after children, as well as the needs of any child/young person already in your care.
- Your own childhood and experience of been parented. This will include any challenges you experienced as a child and how you have dealt with them through your adulthood.
- Experiences or challenges that you have faced in your adult life, bereavement, addiction issues, health issues and any other issues that you may have dealt with as an adult.
- The extent to which foster care is the right decision for your own children or other children in the household.
- Your family life-relationships within your family, eg, how decisions are made and how you spend your time. Fostering means changes in the family. We will discuss with you how different people within the family may be affected by fostering.
- The extent to which your accommodation supports you to foster.
- Whether your financial circumstances indicate that you can foster: we provide a fostering allowance that is made in respect of the child, which means it is there to support the child when they live with you. It is not considered an additional income.
- Your relationship with a child/young person's birth parents and extended family and how you will facilitate and support a child to keep in touch with birth family.
- Your openness to the range of backgrounds children come from and your acceptance of the reasons for their admission to care.
- Your ability to accept and understand the range of behaviours children/young people may exhibit arising from their life before care and the impact of the separation from their birth families.
- Your ability to keep a child/young person safe while in your care.
- Your ability to respect a child/young person's culture and identity.
- How you will welcome a child into your family.
- Your motivation to foster and expectations of foster care.
- How you will support a child in education.
- How you will support a child in becoming an independent young adult.
- How it will be for you to work with social workers and other professionals who are involved in the life of the child.



Foster Care Committees

Once you have progressed through the assessment phase, the assessing social worker prepares a report that you will see and this report is presented to the Foster Care Committee.

This report will make a recommendation on your suitability to foster. The role of the foster care committee is to make a decision based on the social workers report and will make a recommendation on your suitability to foster. This recommendation will be either a positive/negative recommendation.

The chair of the foster care committee will communicate the decision to the assessing social worker. You may be given the opportunity to meet with the committee or they may request to meet with you if they have additional questions. If you are unhappy with the outcome of the decision of the committee there is an appeals process that you can use.



What support will you receive when fostering

Tusla value and respect foster carers and the role they provide in welcoming children into their home and caring for them. To this end Tusla want to work in partnership with all foster carers in providing them with the support they need to care for children.

Your main source of support will come from your Fostering Link Social Worker. Their role is to support and supervise the foster care placement. They can offer you and your children support while caring for a child/children in care. The child/children will have a social worker of their own who will offer support to them and work in partnership with you to ensure that the placement is meeting the needs of the child/children. The child's social worker will develop and oversee the child's care plan. The child's social worker will visit them in your home and also meet with them separately. They will link in with you as the foster carers and discuss with you any concerns you may have and also support arrangements for the child in relation to health, education, family contact etc.

All foster carers receive financial support to care for the child/children. This is called the fostering allowance and is for the care of the child. If a child remains with you and is still in education/accredited training over the age of 18, an aftercare allowance may be applied. For details on the fostering and aftercare allowance and other supports, please visit our website www.fostering.ie

Every child in care is entitled to a medical card and this will be applied for by their social worker.

Fostering Teams run different training and support programmes which are aimed to support carers and their families through caring for a child/young person. There are also local support groups to give carers an opportunity to meet other carers in their local area and attend workshops and information sessions.

The Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA) is a national organisation that supports foster families and the wider fostering community. They advance and promote best practice in foster care.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Am I too old to foster?

There are no definitive upper age restrictions. All factors will be taken into consideration including your age, health and capacity to meet the needs of a child/children at different stages of development and your support networks. The child's best interests is paramount in all decision making.

Q. We have dogs in our household, is that ok?

If you have a dog that comes under the remit of the Control of Dogs Regulations 1991, you must agree that your dog will not be in a public place or unsupervised in the presence of a foster child unless the dog is securely muzzled and led by a sufficiently strong chain or leash not exceeding 2 metres in length by a person over 16 years of age who is capable of controlling the dog.

Q. What is the difference between fostering and adoption?

Fostering and adoption are very different. As a foster carer you remain working with Tusla Child and Family Agency in relation to all decisions with regard to the care planning of the child including supporting the child/children to have contact with their family. As a foster carer you cannot give consent on behalf of the child, either the child's birth parents or Tusla Child and Family Agency provide consent for a range of things including foreign travel, medical procedures etc, unless you have applied for enhanced rights through a legal process.

As an adoptive parent you have full legal responsibility as a parent to the child and the child in the eyes of the law is your child. Tusla are not involved to the same extent in your family life unless you have sought assistance or there is a reason that Tusla are required to be involved in your family life.

Q. We are undergoing fertility treatment can we apply to foster?

As this can be a very stressful and emotional time, we recommend that applicants do not apply to foster when undergoing fertility treatment. We recommend that applicants wait 12 months after the treatment to consider fostering as a positive option for them.

Q. We have experienced bereavement in our family can we apply to foster?

We recommend that when applicants have recently experienced a bereavement in their family, they take time to ensure that they have had the opportunity and time to grieve their loss. This can be discussed with the social worker in preliminary discussions about fostering.

Q. Do addiction issues preclude me from fostering?

Experiences of addiction does not preclude someone from fostering however a person must be recovered from these issues for a period of not less than 5 years before applying to foster. This timeframe is recommended to ensure an applicant has had sufficient time in recovery before embarking on considering fostering.

Q. What will the age difference be between my child(ren) and a child placed with me?

The age of a foster carers child is always considered when matching a child to a family. Tusla try and place children with a family where the child in care is 2 years younger than the foster carers youngest child.

Q. How much information will I be given before the child/children are placed with me?

The Child and Family Agency social workers will provide you with as much information as is possible before any child is placed in your care. The purpose of this is to allow you and your family to make an informed decision on whether or not you are able to meet the child's needs.

You need to be aware, however, that in emergency situations Tusla may only have limited information on the child in the very initial stages of the placement. As information is gathered it will be shared with you.

Q. What contact will I have with the child's family?

Research shows that children in foster care do much better when their foster carers and birth parents can get along reasonably well.

Levels of contact between children and their birth family vary as each child's needs are individual. The details of these arrangements are agreed at meetings which are called child in care review meetings which foster carers attend to support planning for the child. The venue of contact, duration and type of contact are also agreed at these meetings. One of the qualities we seek in foster carers are those who feel they can support children/young people with contact with their families, friends or extended community.

This can include transporting children to and from contact visits, religious and cultural events; treating birth parents with respect at all times. It is very important that foster carers are positive about birth parents to the children in their care.

Q. Can I choose the age group that I can care for?

Yes, you can. However, this may depend on varying factors which will be discussed during your assessment such as your accommodation, age of your own children, your availability, your parenting experience and the child's needs.

Q. What if I can't manage a child's behaviour?

It's important to remember that not all children in foster care will display behavioural problems; however, many children who are received into Child and Family Agency care have all experienced some type of trauma or loss. Many children are resilient and, with a loving and stable environment, will thrive in foster care. Some children, may find it a little harder to adjust to their new environment. It is important for foster carers to display patience, understanding and commitment in helping children overcome adversity. With support for both the child and the foster carer many of these issues can be resolved.

It is important that you discuss any difficulties you may experience with the child's social worker and your link social worker so that supports can be put in place early; this may include additional training. Foster carers need to display patience, understanding and a commitment to helping children overcome adversity.

Children can experience difficult times while in foster care but with good supports and committed foster carers these difficulties can be managed.

Q. Are there any medical conditions which prevent me from fostering?

Significant health issues can impact upon your ability to provide safe and stable care for a child may preclude you from fostering a child. However, there will be instances in which approval will be possible. This will be guided by medical experts. If you have any concerns, please discuss with the assessing social worker or fostering link worker.

Q. What happens when the young person reaches the age of 18 years?

There are many options available to young people who turn 18 years of age in care. Some young people move on and live independently of their foster carers and pursue third level education or accredited training, others may pursue employment and some will struggle with adulthood more than others. All of these young adults who have spent 12 months in care during their lives between their 13th and 18th birthday will be entitled to avail of an aftercare service that is specifically designed to support care leavers. The aftercare service will begin working with young people before they turn 18 years and assist them in planning for their future.

Foster carers are part of these plans and many young people who turn 18 years remain living with their foster carers for a period of time. This can be discussed more with your fostering social worker.

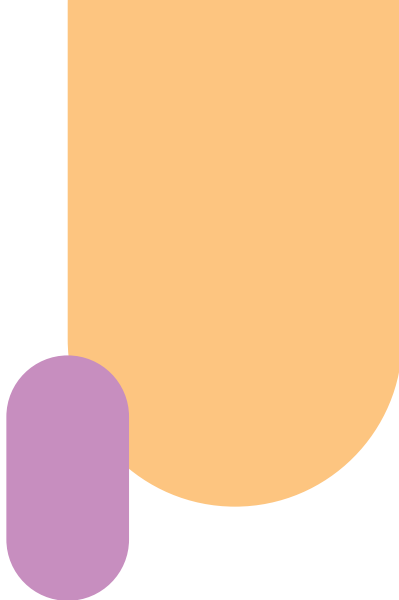
It is important to know that Tusla provide financial assistance to young adults ranging from setting up home grants, paying deposits for new accommodation and also financial support if in education/ accredited training.

Next Steps

Now that you have read the information on fostering, please take some time to consider whether fostering is right for you and your family.

For further information, you can check **www.fostering.ie** where you can make an online enquiry.

You can also email
tusla.fostering@tusla.ie
or call freephone
1800 226 771



fostering.ie    

Freephone: 1800 226 771 **Email:** tusla.fostering@tusla.ie

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