



BECOMING A FOSTER CARER

with the City of Edinburgh Council

www.edinburgh.gov.uk/fostering
0800 174 833

• EDINBURGH •
YOUR COUNCIL - YOUR SERVICES

Welcome



**Edinburgh's Children. Can you care for them?
We think you can. You just don't know it yet!**

In this pack we've included details of how you go about becoming a carer. As you can imagine, children need different things. We need carers who provide different types of care.

In Edinburgh we believe that it's best if families are helped to stay together. However, we also know that there are times when children and young people can't live in their own home – or might need extra help to do so.

Our children range in age from infants to older teenagers. They may need care for a few days, weeks or months. Some will need an alternative family for all their childhood. Some may be adopted and become part of their new family for life. Children need stability and guidance. They need help to understand what's happened to them and reassurance about their future.

Our carers provide these things – you can too.

Once you've read through this pack and watched our DVD, please do get in touch. We're waiting to hear from you. So are the children.



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Team manager

Looked after and accommodated children

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“The support doesn't end with the training, it's great to know there's someone there whenever we need it.”

Alison, who cares for four year old Jack

Who can care

Carers come from all kinds of ethnic, religious, cultural and language backgrounds and as long as you're over 21:

- you can be single, living with a partner, or married
- you may have children or step-children or you may have no children at all
- you may be a tenant or a home-owner
- you may live in a flat or a house
- you may or may not be in paid employment.

Carers for children, whoever you are, whatever your age or living situation, and whatever your background, need a number of qualities.

You must:

- have understanding and enthusiasm for looking after children
- be able to understand and empathise with a child who has experienced neglect or abuse and with a parent who has been unable to look after (or failed to protect) their child
- not demand or expect gratitude from a child you look after
- work as part of a team that can include the child's family, social workers, educators and other professional staff
- not become overwhelmed by children whose behaviour may sometimes be difficult and challenging
- be flexible and non-judgmental
- be able to negotiate and compromise
- have a sense of humour!

For certain care options there are qualities and special requirements needed in addition to these – you'll find these on each individual information sheet.

What you'll do and the help you will receive

All carers need to be committed to providing high quality care and support to vulnerable children. You'll be helping ensure the child is cared for in a safe, stimulating environment so they can grow and thrive as individuals and as part of a family.

Here are just some of the tasks and responsibilities involved in working with children. While there's a focus on foster care, much of the information also relates to the other care options. As a carer you'll need to:

- ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child
- work in partnership with social workers and other professionals
- help children make the most of their education
- promote the physical and mental health of children
- keep information confidential
- provide comfort and reassurance
- acknowledge and respect the child's heritage
- welcome and encourage family contact and visits.

In return, you'll receive:

- individual support and advice from experienced social workers
- comprehensive preparation and training
- fees and any appropriate expenses
- the chance to meet and share your experiences with other carers.

“If you're thinking about foster care – do it. We've had a great time.”

**Stuart, who cares for
12 year old Declan**

“It’s changed my life
for the better.”

Jane who cares for
three year old Stacey.



Fostering

Fostering means providing temporary care for children who cannot live with their own families, sometimes for weeks, months or for the rest of their childhood.

The children

Children who need to be fostered are aged 0 to 18 and come into care for a wide variety of reasons. Sometimes the problems at home can be sorted quickly. For others, it can take a few months or even years for parents to get back on their feet.

Occasionally, the difficulties are so serious that a decision is reached that a child cannot return home. If this happens the child may sometimes remain with their foster carers (although this should not be assumed) or move to permanent foster carers or adopters.

What the children need

Some children come to foster carers at very short notice. Most will need reassurance and support because they have had to leave their own family and get used to unfamiliar people and a strange home. They usually need a lot of time, understanding and good physical care. For most, keeping in regular contact with their parents, brothers and sisters is important.

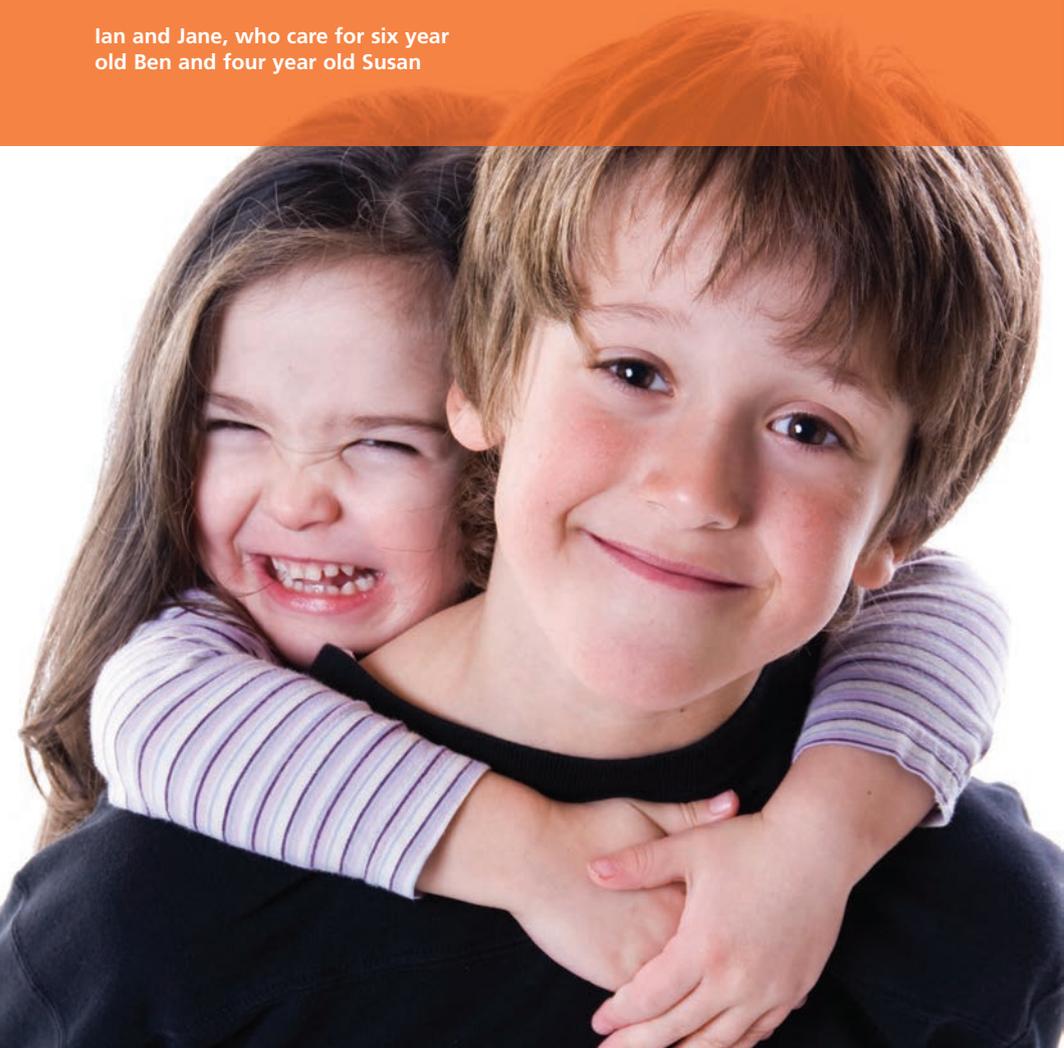
About you

In addition to the general qualities and experience needed for carers, as a foster carer you must:

- have the ability to prepare the child for moving back to live with their family, or to move on to permanent foster carers or adopters.

“ We’re just an ordinary family,
that’s what makes it work so
well for Ben and Susan.”

**Ian and Jane, who care for six year
old Ben and four year old Susan**



Permanent fostering and adoption

Permanent fostering means providing full-time care for children who cannot live with their own families for the rest of their childhood. Adoption means providing a child with a family for life, secured by an adoption order through the courts.

The children

Children who need permanent fostering or adoption will have been looked after by the Children and Families Department and can't go back to their own homes for a range of reasons. They're likely to have had troubled early years and they may have been neglected or abused. They may feel rejected, angry and be lacking confidence or self-esteem. These feelings can make their behaviour quite difficult.

Most of the children are of primary school age or younger and some will need extra support with their education. There are single children and groups of brothers and sisters.

What the children need

The children need stability and security for the rest of their childhood. And they need a family who they can turn to in their adult lives. They also need a family who appreciate that their birth parents may still be important to them and that some contact, direct or indirect, may be needed.

About you

In addition to the general qualities and experience needed for carers, as a permanent foster carer or adopter you must:

- be able to make a commitment to a child for the rest of their childhood and beyond.



“ It gives me a sense of security and belonging somewhere I can be completely myself and loved for who I am.”

Jade, young person in care

Specialist foster care

Specialist foster care involves looking after children with a higher level of need on a full or part-time basis.

The children

Children who need specialist foster care are usually aged seven years or older. They have experienced varied degrees of neglect, abuse and disruption. Some of the children may have lived in residential care. They can present a higher level of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, but, with the right family, the children can grow, develop and thrive. For older children this can mean a better start in adult life.

What the children need

These children need carers who can manage challenging behaviour and who can provide a safe home environment with security, clear boundaries, advice and guidance.

About you

In addition to the general qualities and experience needed for carers, as a specialist foster carer you must have:

- the emotional strength, resilience and enthusiasm to help young people
- an adult at home or available at all times to support the child
- a spare bedroom for the young person in your home
- a commitment to continue with your professional development
- energy, patience, commitment and a sense of humour!

Day care

Day care involves looking after a child or children for a few hours on agreed days, in the day carer's own home.

The children

Day care is provided by local carers for local families. The children are under eight and mostly pre-nursery ages and their families need some help looking after them on a daily basis. The children will have experienced problems at home due to their parents' health or lifestyle.

What the children need

The children need care during the day in the carer's own home. They need help learning to play, read and draw. They need to explore new activities and learn about the world. They also need the chance to meet other children, go to toddlers groups and do everyday activities.

Some of the children need speech therapy and physiotherapy to meet their additional needs. Day carers often help young parents with advice and support.

About you

In addition to the general qualities and experience needed for carers, day carers must be registered childminders www.scswis.com

We would be especially interested in hearing from you if you can provide day care and respite foster care.

“Through befriending I not only got to know April, but her parents too.”

Fiona, who befriends 10 year old April

Respite foster care

Respite foster care involves looking after a child or children for planned overnight care in your own home.

The children

The children are primary school aged or younger. Respite care supports parents or grandparents to continue to care for children by giving them some time and space for themselves.

What the children need

The children need carer families who can care for them for short periods of time. This can allow them to have a break from their parents who may be struggling personal issues or health worries.

About you

In addition to the general qualities and experience needed for carers, you need to be available for several periods of planned respite each month and consider some school holiday support.

“ You can provide enjoyable times for the children while giving their parents a much needed break.”

Chandi, who cares for eight year old Sam and seven year old Jasmine

“ We’ve never been so proud as when Nicky passed his first exams.”

Mike and Claire, who provide care for 15 year old Nicky



Foster care for children with disabilities

Foster care for children with disabilities involves caring for a child with additional needs, either full-time or part-time, for at least two years.

The children

The children are usually aged between two and sixteen and are affected by a wide range of disabilities. Some have difficulty with communication and can show some challenging behaviour. Others may have a physical or learning disability, hearing or visual impairments. Most children live with their families.

What the children need

Caring for a child with disabilities can put extra pressure on families. Regular planned breaks provided by trusted carers can make all the difference, allowing everyone to 'recharge their batteries'. This is usually one weekend a month. The children need activities that help them build up their self esteem and give them fun and stimulation. Some children will depend on carers for their physical care. They all need a high level of supervision and care which enables them to reach their full potential.

Some children have very complex medical needs or behavioural difficulties and their families require substantial support. Other children are unable to live at home and need full time care. A few of the children may have experienced abuse or neglect. These children need carers who can understand their individual needs and offer them commitment, consistency and patience. They need a carer who can meet the special challenges that caring for a child with disabilities brings.

About you

In addition to the general qualities and experience needed for carers, you must have an understanding of disability. Carers are given regular support and training in relation to the specific needs of children placed with them.

We particularly welcome carers who live in bungalows or other accommodation suitable for wheelchair access.

Frequently asked questions

I'm on my own – can I still be a carer?

Yes. We'll consider you as a carer, whether you're single, married, divorced or living with a partner.

Must I already be a parent?

No. We welcome applications from single people and couples who don't have children, as well as those who do.

Do I need a big house?

No. It doesn't matter if you live in a flat or a house, or if you rent or own your home. However, it's important that children are able to have privacy so you will need enough space.

I'm in my 50s – is that too old to be a carer?

No. People of all ages make successful carers.

Do we need to be well off?

No. Your ability to be a carer does not depend on the amount of money you may have.

Will I get paid?

Yes, carers get paid as self-employed people by the Council. The amount you're paid depends on the type of caring you undertake and in some cases it can amount to the same as a full-time job.

You would also be entitled to tax relief from the Government. As well as being paid, you would receive a maintenance allowance to cover the costs of caring for the child. Some adopters are eligible for an adoption allowance.

My time is limited – can I still be a carer?

Yes. You don't have to be available on a full-time basis for respite, share the care, befriending children with disabilities or day care.

What ages are children who need care?

All ages. We need carers who can look after children from babies through to adolescents. We also need carers for sibling groups.

Frequently asked questions

How do you get selected?

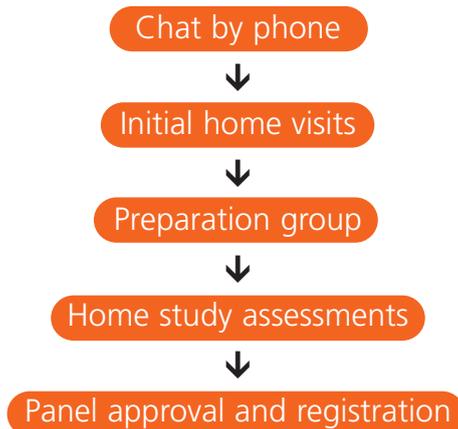
Looking after children is the most important job anyone can do so we take the task of choosing carers very seriously. But we don't make it a frightening experience. There's a series of interviews and visits where you find out more about what's involved and we find out more about you and your home.

The whole process is about finding safe, caring people to look after Edinburgh's children.

How long does it take to become a carer?

It can take between six and nine months to become a registered foster carer. Listed below are the steps involved. Once you decide to become a carer with us, you will be assigned a family based care social worker who will guide and support you every step of the way.

Steps to becoming a foster carer



We welcome your feedback

If you decide to apply to become a carer or adopter, you will be starting an important and hopefully long-lasting relationship with the City of Edinburgh Council.

We will ask for your feedback at the time when the decision is made about your approval as a carer or adopter and then at annual reviews. You can, of course, let us know your views at other times of the year. Approved carers and adopters are all members of the national organisation, Fostering Network. This organisation is also interested in your views.

The complaints procedure

The Council has a complaints procedure that approved carers and adopters can use if they are unhappy about some aspect of the service they have received or on behalf of a child or children for whom they are caring. Further details of the complaints procedure can be supplied on request.



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