

Fostering for Adoption

Information for Prospective Adopters



What is Fostering for Adoption?

“Fostering for Adoption combines the temporary placement with the potential to become the permanent placement” (Fostering for Adoption- becoming a carer Baaf June 2013)

Fostering for Adoption was introduced in the Children and Families Bill 2013. It places a child with approved adopters who are temporarily approved as foster carers for that specific child. This is whilst the case is still going through court and decisions for the child have not been finalised, although adoption will be thought to be the likely outcome for the child. The temporary foster placement can later become an adoption placement once the relevant court orders are obtained. This means that the child is placed with his/her future adoptive family at the earliest possible stage.

Common scenarios include when a birth mother has had previous children removed and her situation has not changed, or for a child who has been relinquished for adoption by his/her birth parents.

Fostering for Adoption is not the same as when approved foster carers wish to adopt a foster child that they have been caring for. You may have also heard of Concurrency and Dual approval schemes but these are slightly different from Fostering for Adoption.

What are the advantages of Fostering for Adoption for the Child?

- The child is placed with his/her potential adopter(s) as early as possible, thus providing permanence at an early stage and enhancing the likelihood of him/her developing a secure attachment.
- It allows the early months and years of the child's life to be what most children need and expect
- The potential damage to the child caused by having to terminate his/her relationship(s) with foster carer(s) to whom he/she has become attached is reduced.
- The child experiences the minimum number of placements and changes of carer(s).
- Potential 'drift' is avoided

What are the advantages for the potential adopters?

- The child will be placed at the youngest possible age thus maximising the chance of him/her developing secure attachments.
- The carer(s) will have the opportunity to provide stability and security for the child from an earlier stage of his/her development.
- The carer(s) will be part of the child's early life experiences.

What are the risks for the potential adopter(s)?

- The child is likely to be placed before all the required assessments of the birth parent(s) have been fully completed.
- The child may be placed before all the possibilities for the child being placed within the wider birth family have been fully eliminated.
- In the case of children subject to care proceedings in court- the child may be placed very early on in the legal process and before the relevant court orders are in place, i.e. a care order and a Placement Order, which gives permission for the Local Authority to place a child for adoption.
- The information available about the child at the point of placement is likely to be limited and will not be as full as the information that is usually available for children being 'matched' to prospective adopters. In most cases a completed Child Permanence Report and full medical information will not be available.
- As the child's individual needs may not be fully known at this stage, a full and specific support plan will be difficult to produce.
- The child is likely to continue to have ongoing contact with his/her birth parent(s) and possibly with wider birth family members up until the Final Court Hearing with arrangements then being made for contact to be reduced over an agreed period, in line with the Adoption Plan, rather than the child experiencing an abrupt cessation of contact.
- While placing a child in a Fostering for Adoption placement is intended to avoid the negative impact of the child's attachment to his/her primary carers being disrupted, until the Court authorises the child's placement for adoption via the granting of a Placement Order, it is a temporary placement made under the Fostering Regulations.
- Fostering for Adoption carers have no legal rights over the child if their care plan changes and the child is removed from the placement.

What is the process of making a Fostering for Adoption placement?

If you feel able to provide a Fostering for Adoption placement then this would have been discussed with you over the course of your home study and would be reflected in your prospective adopter report and your approval recommendation.

Fostering for Adoption plans are only applicable for children who do not yet have a Placement Order (this order gives permission for the Local Authority to place the child for adoption). However, once approved as adopters, you can be considered for any child/children within your approval range, whether their plan is Fostering for Adoption or whether the child is already subject to a Placement Order. Your link worker will talk to you about the different children needing adoption and their care plans and you will be supported in deciding which child is right for you.

If a child is identified that you may be suitable for, and their plan is Fostering for Adoption, then you will be provided with any information there is about the child, although this may be limited. You will meet with the child's Social worker and family finder before the child is placed, your link worker should also be present at this meeting to support you.

Once the proposed placement has been formally agreed by the Agency Decision Maker, which will include you being temporarily approved as the child's foster carers, then the child can be placed with you. The child may be in another foster placement, in a mother and baby placement or in hospital. A plan of introductions with the child will take place before the child is placed with you.

Will I be entitled to adoption leave and pay from my employer?

Since April 2015 adopters who foster their child prior to adopting them are eligible for adoption leave and pay. "Changes to Adoption Leave and Pay from 5.4.15, Technical Guidance for Employers, page 8, section on Dual Approved prospective Adopters" (Department for Business Innovation and Skills). A letter can be provided to your employers, if requested, to confirm that a child will be placed in your care with the proposed dates. It is likely that you will be required to leave work at short notice and therefore will need to have supportive employers.

Once the placement becomes that of adoption then a matching certificate will be provided which you can give to your employers.

As a foster carer you will be entitled to a fostering allowance from the Local Authority responsible for placing the child, and may be reimbursed for any additional equipment and expenses required in order to care for the child. This varies according to each Local Authority's fostering payments and allowances policy. This allowance will cease once the placement becomes adoption, although the child may be entitled to an adoption allowance which you would have been made aware of.

What are the expectations of me as a temporary foster carer?

Initially the placement will fall under the fostering regulations and, as a temporary foster carer, you are looking after the child on behalf of the Local Authority and do not hold any Parental Responsibility. The Local Authority and birth parents share Parental Responsibility for the child, and although the Local Authority have ultimate say over the child's care, they have a duty to consult with birth parents and take into consideration their views and wishes and feelings.

You are responsible for the day to day care of the child but you will need to consult with the Local Authority about any important decisions, such as medical care, parental contact and taking the child on holiday etc.

The child's birth name can not be changed and you also need to be mindful how you refer yourselves, i.e. you should not encourage the child to call you "mummy or daddy" whilst it is a fostering placement. A fostering agreement and placement plan will set out the expectations and boundaries of the care that you provide. This will include:-

Contact with birth family

The Local Authority will have a specific plan to try to return the child to its birth family and you will be expected to support this plan, even if you don't agree. Contact between the child and their birth parents and significant family members will be promoted during the care proceedings. As well as serving to retain the relationship between the child and their birth family, it also provides an opportunity to assess the quality of the relationship and the birth parents' parenting skills. The contact will be supervised and a risk assessment should be undertaken. You may be required to transport the child to contact if deemed low risk, or it may be arranged that the supervisor will transport the child to and from contact in order to protect the confidentiality of the placement. A contact book is often used to communicate with birth family and provide updates of how the child is doing.

Meeting with birth parents

Often it is appropriate for the carers (prospective adopters) to meet with the birth parents in a planned and supported way in order to discuss the care of their child. This can be of benefit to the child as well as to both the birth parents and carers. This would only be recommended after a risk assessment has taken place.

Keeping records and providing information

Foster carers are required to keep ongoing records regarding the care of the child and these should be sent to the Social worker as agreed. As a foster carer, you will also be required to complete other paperwork, such as consultation papers for the children's reviews and for their medical assessment etc. You may also be asked to provide information on the child's progress to other professionals who may be undertaking assessments.

Training and support

As a temporary foster carer you will have plenty of support and will be visited on a regular basis by your social worker and the child's social worker. The Local Authority where you were temporarily approved, if different from the agency that approved you as an adopter, may also want to provide you with a social worker from their fostering service. However, in order to avoid too many social workers visiting you, this role is often delegated to your adoption link worker, if appropriate and agreed by everyone.

The agency that is supporting you as a foster carer should provide you with training that is appropriate for your role, and you will also be invited to their support groups. Additionally, you can attend any adoption training and support groups that are relevant during this time. You may also have been allocated a mentor who can offer support during this time.

Meetings, visits and reviews

You will be required to attend meetings in relation to the child, such as Looked After Child Reviews, which occur within the first month of placement and then after a further three months. An Independent Reviewing Officer is charged with ensuring that the placement is meeting the needs of the child and that the care plan is on track. These meetings continue to take place once the placement becomes that of adoption placement and until the adoption order is granted.

There will be regular visits by the child's social worker, as well as your social worker.

What are the timescales?

Courts are required to conclude care proceedings within 26 weeks, although they can sometimes take a bit longer if they are complex. Once a Placement Order is granted, then the adoption match can be presented to panel and the placement will become that of adoption and is subject to adoption regulations. This will mean that you will have some limited Parental Responsibility and can make more decisions regarding the child; you will be regarded as the child's parents, although the child's care is still ultimately the responsibility of the Local Authority until the adoption order is granted.

An application for an adoption order can not be made until 10 weeks after the placement has become that of adoption, although in exceptional circumstances and with agreement from all professionals, it may be possible to submit the application sooner. Once the adoption order is granted then the Local Authority and birth parents will lose their Parental Responsibility and you will be the only person/people

with Parental Responsibility for the child. At this point you will have the same legal rights as any birth parent.

Is Fostering for Adoption right for me/us?

There will be a number of things that you will need to think about regarding Fostering for Adoption. Initially, as a foster carer you are caring for the child under the direct supervision of the Local Authority so you'd need to consider whether this is something you'd be comfortable with. In effect you won't be able to regard the child as your own whilst you are providing a fostering placement for them.

It is highly likely that you would go on to adopt the child but you would have to deal with the uncertainty of this outcome. You would need to think about the possibility of the court not agreeing the adoption plan and the child leaving your care. If you already have a child, whether they are a birth or adopted child, you will need to consider the impact on them as well as yourselves if the child could not remain in your care. Preparation and support to other children in the home is essential.

It is important for you to consider what support you might need, what access you have to support and how you typically deal with stressful, upsetting or painful situations. There will be specific issues to be thought about in Fostering for Adoption placements and you should try to identify what this might mean for you and your family and then discuss this with family members and close friends. You would do this anyway if you were planning to adopt another child but there are specific issues about preparing a child for that period of uncertainty in the fostering phase. They may have questions and views themselves but they should also be an important source of support.

As there will be ongoing Social Work visits and possible birth family contact then the geographical location of the placement will need to be taken into consideration - balanced with the risk of proximity to birth family.

Please discuss all of the implications very carefully with your Assessing Social Worker during your home study. It can be arranged for you to talk to other adopters who have provided Fostering for Adoption placements, to give you more of an idea of how this type of placement may impact on you and your family.

Other organisations that you can contact for advice and information

CoramBaaf -Tel: 020 7520 0300

First4Adoption-Tel: 0300 222 0022

Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service –Tel: 01628683760

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