



Room for more

Start your fostering journey with us

Hello

Fostering a child is an incredible thing to do

Our foster families transform lives. These wonderful people – people just like you – give children the love, care and stability they desperately need. This is so important for the children we meet, who haven't always had the best start in life.

You'll read about the incredible difference fostering makes in this pack. You'll also find lots of information to help you start your fostering journey.

Getting it right for you

Fostering is really rewarding. It can be life-changing for you, too.

We know it's a big decision and understand that everyone's situation is different. We're at the end of the phone (or email) if you want to have a chat, ask any questions or find out more.

Email:

fostercareni@actionforchildren.org.uk

Or call:

028 9046 0500


About Action for Children Northern Ireland

We believe that every child and young person in the UK should have a safe and happy childhood.

To make this happen we rely on people like you. With you by our side we can make sure children get the best start in life. We can step in to keep them safe and help those who are having a really difficult time.

Action for Children supported more than 15,500 children, young people and families in Northern Ireland. But there are lots more who need our help.

Choose to foster with us and you could give a vulnerable child a safe and loving home, and the foundations they need to thrive.



“ Being with my foster carers changed my life. Without them I'd hate to think where my life would be. ”

Fostering with us

We find safe and loving homes for children from birth until their 18th birthday.

Every child and young person is unique. We know our foster carers are, too. This is why we always find the best possible match between a child and a family. Doing this builds strong relationships that last.

Most of the children we meet have been through a difficult time. So it's important we give you the skills to look after them.

We have a training calendar, which includes lots of practical and emotional support. We're also here to help at any time of the day or night. You'll get fees and expenses, too, so you can afford to give your child the best possible support.

“ It's a second chance to be part of a family. I'm really lucky that I have my foster family and that they will always be my family. ”



Different types of foster care

Although we find homes for children of all ages, most of the children we support are over five.

Long-term home

We're looking for foster carers who can give children a long-term home until they're ready to live on their own. Wherever possible, the local Trust will try to keep brothers and sisters together. If you have more than one spare room you might be able to foster more than one child.



Planned breaks

Some children need more than one family to meet their needs. Planned break carers offer essential support to other foster families.



Parent and child

We also need foster carers to look after parents who have their own children. This type of fostering usually lasts for three months. You'll work with professionals to help these mums or dads with their parenting skills.



Children with disabilities

We're also looking for foster carers who have the skills and experience to support children who need extra help. You'll get specialist training and supervision based on your child's needs.



Can I foster?

The answer is probably 'yes'!

To foster with us you'll need a spare bedroom. You'll also need to be over 21 (there isn't an upper age limit). It doesn't matter whether you own or rent your home. You don't need to be a parent to foster, either.

Stability is essential so we ask that you haven't been through a significant change in the last year. This includes starting a new relationship, moving house, or a bereavement. You'll also need to be financially secure.

FAQs

37%

of carers have their children* still living at home

*22% of these children are aged 18+

Can I foster if my children are at home?

Lots of our foster carers have children at home. During the assessment, we'll talk about how you'll meet the needs of your own children and a foster child.

Every child needs space so a separate bedroom is a must. If your own children are very young, we might ask you to wait a while before we start the assessment. Please get in touch if you're unsure.

Can I foster if I don't have children?

Yep. We'll talk to you about your experiences with children, your skills and qualities. The most important thing is your ability to meet a child's needs.

Can I foster if I'm gay?

Yes, of course. We welcome potential foster carers from all backgrounds. You can be single, in a civil partnership, married or living with a partner. For us, it's really important that our foster carers reflect society's family structures.

Can I foster if I rent my home?

It doesn't matter if you own or rent your home. But – if you are renting – you'll need to get your landlord's permission. We'll also need to do some home safety checks. You'll need to let your landlord know these. Some of our foster carers get housing benefit. It's worth checking with your local authority to find out if fostering will affect your claim.

1 in 3

people believe if you live in rented accommodation you can't foster

Can I foster if I live by myself?

A quarter of our foster carers live by themselves. Your support network is really important, though, so we'll chat to you about family, friends and neighbours. We offer lots of help, too. This includes a dedicated supervising social worker, 24/7 phone support, groups and a buddy system.

25%

of our foster carers live by themselves

Your commitment

You'll need to be around to settle a young person in and go along to meetings and training. But almost 38% of our foster carers go back to work after being approved. So long as someone is always there for the young person, it's possible. We'll talk about how this might work – and your support network – during the assessment.

38%

of our foster carers return to work after being approved

Here for you

You're doing an incredible thing and we want to make sure you're properly looked after.

Your wellbeing

Your health and wellbeing are so important. Feeling valued really matters.

All our foster carers have a dedicated supervising social worker. They'll give you one-to-one help and advice whenever you need it. You can also get in touch with us at any time of the day or night.

We run regular support groups, too. These give you the chance to get together and meet people doing the same amazing thing. Our foster families tell us that these meet ups make them feel part of a bigger family.

All our foster carers are registered with the Fostering Network. This gives you access to support and offers. You'll also be able to use our Health Assured wellbeing package and get discounts on lots of great brands.



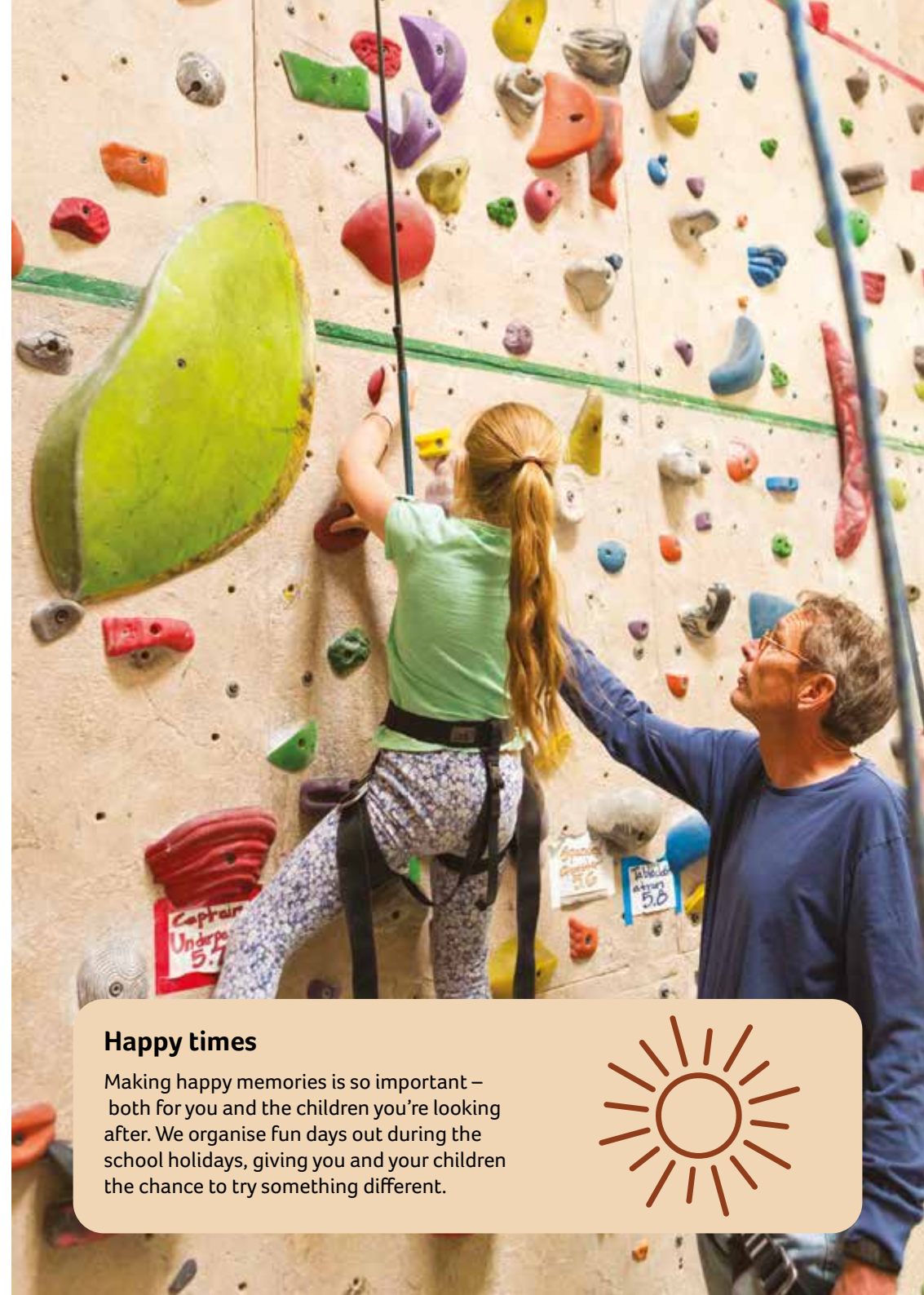
Your training

Everyone who fosters with us follows our annual training calendar. Sessions cover the essentials, like child safety and development, as well as policies and procedures. We also run specialist training and explain some of the issues young people deal with, like bullying on social media and mental health. You'll be given ideas, resources and specialist tools to help you.



Your money

We want you to know that you can afford to care for a child. You'll get fees and expenses to support yourself and the children living with you.



Happy times

Making happy memories is so important – both for you and the children you're looking after. We organise fun days out during the school holidays, giving you and your children the chance to try something different.



Lissie's story



Safe & loving home

Lissie was inspired to become a foster carer by her mum. She saw the incredible difference a safe and loving foster home made to vulnerable children – and is now following in her footsteps.

Seeing the impact mum had on children inspired me. I think foster carers are important for so many reasons. They provide stability and offer a loving home. It's also up to us to give children things that their birth families couldn't, and perhaps find them a new pathway to follow.

“ Every young person deserves to be supported, loved and have a stable home. ”

When I learn about some of the things these children and young people have been through – neglect, abuse, violence – it's heartbreaking. But I've seen the transformation that can take place.

With a lot of the young people that come into foster care, simple things like praise can have such a deep impact. It's something they're just not used to getting. They don't know how to react if they're given encouragement when they've done well.

“ Life as a foster carer is busy, hectic and good fun. Really just like family life as normal. ”

I looked after one young person who had never eaten at a dining table. He insisted on having his dinner on the floor. For the first few days, I sat with him because that was what he was used to doing. After a while, we gently suggested sitting at the table. From that point it was small steps of encouragement. This was such a huge thing for him to do. For these young people to open the fridge and have food available when they're hungry isn't something they're used to, either.

A foster carer has lots of roles. It isn't necessarily just being a parent; it's being an advocate, a supporter, and someone a young person can depend on.

“ Seeing the difference in the young people who have lived with me is incredible. ”

They discover a new sense of self and flourish, becoming young adults. ”

What happens next

Your fostering journey starts here...

- 1 A quick chat on the phone**

The first step is a short phone call. We'll ask you about your circumstances and how fostering might work for you. It's the perfect time to ask us any questions. This is an informal chat that'll hopefully give you a better idea about whether fostering is right for you.
- 2 Visiting you at home**

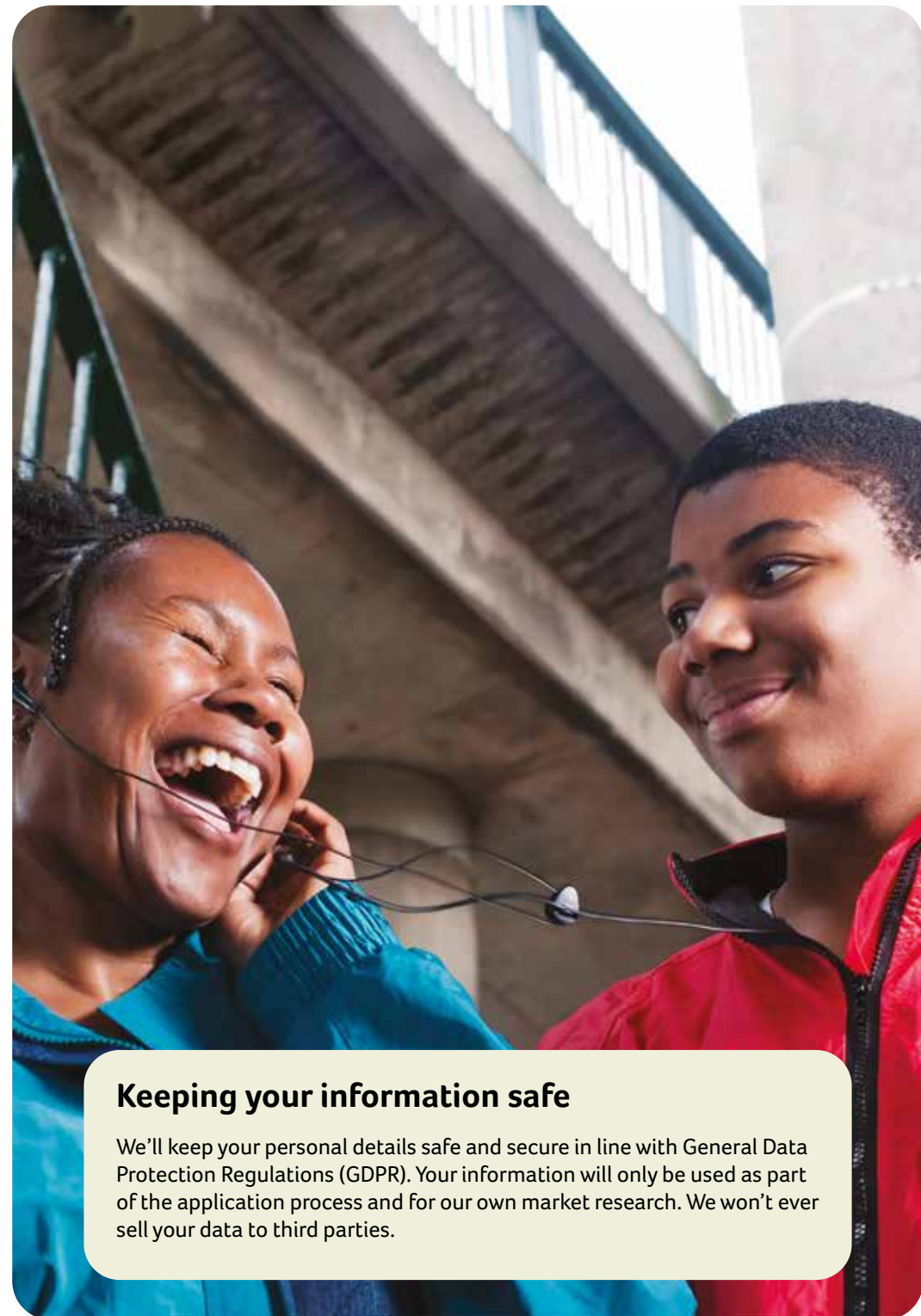
Next, we'll come and visit you (and your partner, if you're in a relationship) at home. We'll have a chat about the practicalities of fostering. This is a great opportunity to get to know you and your situation a bit better. After the visit, we'll get together and decide what happens next.
- 3 Preparation to Foster training course**

All our potential foster carers are invited to complete a Preparation to Foster course. The training covers the essentials, helps you prepare for fostering, and raises questions that we'll talk about during the assessment.
- 4 Filling in a form**

The next step is to fill in an application form. This is the basis of your assessment.
- 5 The assessment**

We'll try to complete your assessment in four to six months. You'll get regular visits from a social worker who'll assess your skills to be a foster carer. There are standard checks to go through too, including a police check and a medical. We'll also need references from people who have known you for three years, and a current or past employer.
- 6 Final approval**

Your assessment will be presented to a panel who'll make a recommendation about your suitability to foster. Once this is done, we'll ask for approval from our agency decision-maker. We'll look into matching you and a child as soon as your application's approved.



Keeping your information safe

We'll keep your personal details safe and secure in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Your information will only be used as part of the application process and for our own market research. We won't ever sell your data to third parties.

In the know

Here's what some of our young people have to say...

“ I can't put into words how proud I am of my foster carers – they've helped me and taught me a lot of things that I'm going to use in the future. ”

“ They always welcome me home. ”

“ It's a family environment, something I haven't had since my dad passed away, and I get on with everyone and I feel accepted. ”

“ I have developed a very strong bond with my foster parents and I feel like we understand and respect each other. ”

“ My foster carers always listen to me and do whatever they can to help. ”

“ My life constantly has great stuff going on thanks to my amazing foster mum and dad. I can't thank them enough for everything they've done for me. ”




Safe and happy childhood



Action for Children protects and supports children and young people, providing practical and emotional care and support, ensuring their voices are heard, and campaigning to bring lasting improvements to their lives.

 /AFCNIFostercare

 @Actn4ChildrenNI

 @actionforchildrenni

Action for Children
Registered charity nos. 1097940/SC038092
Company no. 4764232. © Action for Children
2021. 1014.

fostercareni@actionforchildren.org.uk
028 9046 0500
actionforchildren.org.uk