

BECOME A FOSTER CARER AND JOIN SURREY'S BIGGEST FAMILY



**Your guide to becoming
a foster carer**

OPEN YOUR HEART AND HOME TO FOSTERING

With over 1000 children in our care, Surrey County Council is recruiting more foster carers. Our foster carers provide children with a stable and loving family environment, where their emotional needs will be supported.

Foster carers make a real difference to the lives of Surrey children.

When someone chooses to foster with us, they're joining Surrey's biggest family and part of a growing support network intent on making the lives of children and young people better.

This brochure outlines some of the support and benefits of fostering with Surrey County Council. It also explores the different types of fostering.

We need foster carers for children of all age ranges and who can offer different types of fostering; however, Surrey has a particular need for foster carers who could care for brothers and sisters so they can stay together. We also need foster carers who could provide care and support for teenagers and foster carers.

**We hope you find
the information that
you need in this brochure
and look forward to
answering any
questions you
may have about
fostering with Surrey
County Council.**



WHAT IS FOSTERING?

Foster carers provide secure and loving homes for children when they can't live with their own families.

This might be for a few weeks, months or until a child becomes an adult, depending on their different situations. Children who live with foster carers may have experienced abuse or neglect or their family may not be able to look after them safely. There are many different reasons why children may need to be fostered. Some examples are a crisis at home which means the children need somewhere safe to live for a while, parents' alcohol or drug dependency or issues around violence in the home. Some parents may need extra support which means they are unable to care for their children and fostering can help with this.

Children of all ages and backgrounds may need to come into the care of the local authority, this includes babies, teenagers and brothers and sisters. We always try to keep brothers and sisters together when it is in their best interests. Sometimes siblings can share a bedroom, this will depend on their age and gender and some other factors too.

It is not appropriate for any children who move to a fostering household to share a bedroom with a child who is not their sibling.

Fostering with Surrey County Council means that we can keep children's lives as stable as possible during what is often an unsettling time for them. By living and fostering in Surrey you can help children stay local to their family, friends and school or nursery.

After a period of time in foster care, many children can return home. Some children may go to live with other family members who are able to care for them rather than going back to live with their birth parents. Sometimes, it is not possible for a child to return to their own family, so we need to find a new permanent home for them to grow up in. This could be with adopters or long-term foster carers, depending on the needs of the children.



WHAT DO FOSTER CARERS DO?

Foster carers provide day-to-day care for children according to their age and development.

The role of a foster carer includes the 'usual' tasks expected of parents and guardians such as taking children to and from school, taking them for medical, dental, and other appointments, attending meetings, visiting friends and supporting the child with any other things they might need.

People with lots of different experiences and in different living situations can become foster carers. Our job is to help you prepare to be a foster carer by providing training, assessment, and ongoing support for you to care for the children.

We give all our foster carers full initial training and continue to provide ongoing training and support throughout their fostering career. You will have a dedicated social worker to support you, who is part of our local team. We have support workers in the team who will be there for you during the more challenging times if you need them. We also have someone available to talk to 24/7 as we know how important it is to support foster carers in the vital role they play in the local community.

Foster carers are part of a team of professionals who help children adjust to a new family life and recover from traumatic experiences they may have had earlier in their lives. We will help you think about whether looking after children for short or longer periods of time works better in your situation. We will explore what sort of age range, behaviours, and backgrounds you feel you could manage. We make sure our foster carers have the skills and support they need to feel confident in their role. We will train and support our foster carers to be able to take a wide range of children. This is because the children we need homes for may have a variety of needs and can be of any age.

Foster carers need to register as self-employed for their fostering role. There are specific tax allowances and arrangements for foster carers which means that most foster carers don't pay tax on their fostering income. Fostering usually does not affect any benefits you receive either.



“I’m a much better person for having fostered. I have a much bigger heart and a broader outlook. The more you give, the more you get back.”

BRENDA, FOSTER CARER



COULD YOU FOSTER?

If you have a spare room, are understanding, resilient and able to develop trusting relationships with children then yes you could!

Our foster carers come from a wide range of backgrounds; some are single, others in relationships or married, some are religious, some are LGBTQ+, some are younger, others older. Some foster carers rent their home, some work and others don't. What they all have in common is the desire to learn about fostering so they can support children and young people in Surrey.

To be eligible to foster you need to:

- ☒ Have a spare bedroom
- ☒ Be able to take children to appointments and school (if applicable)
- ☒ Have time and energy to look after a child
- ☒ Speak and write English well enough so that you can help a child develop and so that you can talk about their needs at meetings and with social workers
- ☒ Have stable and generally good physical and mental health

Other skills and attributes that can help make a good foster carer are:

- ☐ Being a good listener
- ☐ Being understanding of how other people might be feeling
- ☐ Patience
- ☐ A sense of humour
- ☐ Having some childcare experience, through work, family or as a volunteer
- ☐ Being open to getting on with and working with different people



WHY FOSTER WITH US?

Fostering with Surrey County Council means being part of a large, supportive community across Surrey.

There are hundreds of Surrey County Council foster carers and most of them live in the county and its surrounding areas. All our foster carers can access and enjoy regular meetups with other foster carers and social events. Alongside our training package and support provided by the fostering service and your social worker there is also a variety of informal support and social opportunities on offer.

All our foster carers are automatically members of The Fostering Network and New Family Social (a charity for LGBTQ+ carers) and can access their helplines, events, and other activities. We also offer free membership to the National Association of Therapeutic Parents (NATP).

We have a Foster Care Association who provide peer support and advice and arrange lots of local events and activities for you and your foster children.

We run regular virtual and in-person support groups and social events throughout the Surrey area, including one for foster carers' own children during school holidays.

For our newly approved foster carers we offer additional support through a 'buddy' arrangement with an experienced foster carer.

We also use the Mockingbird Family Model™ to deliver our fostering service. This is an innovative method of providing foster care using an extended family model offering sleepovers and short breaks, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities. The programme improves stability and strengthens the relationships between carers, children and young people, fostering services and birth families. You will find more information about the Mockingbird Family Model™ on our website.

Foster carers are a vital part of the team caring for children and are involved not only in decisions regarding the children, but also in how our services are delivered and improved. We actively involve our foster carers in helping us to constantly improve our services for the children and families we work with.



A man with a beard and a young girl are sitting on a light-colored rug, playing with large, colorful plastic blocks. The man, wearing a grey and blue striped polo shirt and teal shorts, is holding a yellow block. The girl, wearing a blue dress with white polka dots, is reaching for a block. The background is a bright, out-of-focus living room with a white sofa.

**“If you’ve been thinking
about fostering; just
go for it. It really is
so rewarding.”**

ROB, FOSTER CARER

TYPES OF FOSTERING

Children in Surrey who need fostering are of all ages and come from a wide range of backgrounds.

The children and young people may need to live with a foster family for a short time or sometimes longer periods of time. The type of fostering you could provide will depend on you, your lifestyle, and the needs of your family.

In Surrey we need foster carers who can offer:

- **Short term fostering**

From an overnight stay to a period of several months or a couple of years. Short-term foster carers provide a safe, loving, temporary place to stay until the child can return home to their own family or a longer-term arrangement can be made.

- **Long term fostering**

Sometimes children will not be able to go back to live with their own families for a number of years, if at all. Long-term fostering allows children and young people to stay in a family where they can feel secure, while maintaining contact with their birth family.

- **Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

These children, who have travelled to the UK alone, need support and advice to help them come to terms with their previous experiences and to adjust to life in the UK. Foster carers will receive additional support and training to meet the needs of these children and young people.

- **Parent and Child fostering**

Sometimes we have to assess a parent's ability to look after their baby or young child. During this time the parent and child will live with you. Parent and child foster carers offer support and advice to help the parent(s) care for their child(ren) whilst a parenting assessment is completed. The foster carer's comments and records will help professionals to reach a decision on the parent's ability to safely care for their child.

- **Short Breaks**

This offers a child with a disability an opportunity to share different experiences and meet different people while still living with their family. A child might stay with a short breaks carer for one or two nights a month giving their family an opportunity to recharge their batteries, safe in the knowledge that their child is enjoying the experience of being with trustworthy people. The child being cared for under the Short Breaks scheme may have a physical or learning disability, or an autistic spectrum disorder. The child will be carefully matched to the foster carer.

• Supported Lodgings

Our Supported Lodgings scheme provides accommodation to young people who are aged 16 to 25 and in care or who have recently left care. You can work full-time as long as you still have time available to support the young person to gain skills for independent living.

• Emergency Fostering

Emergency foster carers need to be available outside of usual working hours to provide a home for a child on a temporary basis until we can make a longer-term arrangement. This is usually for up to 10 days. Emergency foster carers work on a rota basis and are paid a retainer fee with the expectation that they will be available for any child who needs a safe place to stay in urgent and out-of-hours situations.



PAYMENTS

As a foster carer in Surrey, you will receive a weekly allowance towards the costs of caring for a child.

You will also receive a weekly fee payment in recognition of your skills and experience.

Fostering income is taxable, however, most foster carers do not pay tax on the payments they receive from fostering.

What you will be paid if you foster long-term, short-term or unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

All foster carers are paid a weekly allowance. With pre-approval training, most of our foster carers will start at payment level 2. Extra training and/or evidence of learning is needed for higher levels.

Level 1

At this level, all the weekly allowance should be spent on the foster child's living costs as well as any activities or hobbies the child may have.

	Child's age			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-13 years	14-17 years
Weekly Allowance	£190.66	£216.25	£288.30	£334.95

Level 2

At this level, you will be paid the weekly allowance for the child plus a skills fee payment of £101.94 per week.

	Child's age			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-13 years	14-17 years
Weekly Allowance	£190.66	£216.25	£288.30	£334.95
Fee paid to foster carer	£101.94	£101.94	£101.94	£101.94
Total weekly payment	£292.60	£318.19	£390.24	£436.89

Level 3

At this level, you will be paid the weekly allowance for the child plus a skills fee payment of £203.88 per week.

	Child's age			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-13 years	14-17 years
Weekly Allowance	£190.66	£216.25	£288.30	£334.95
Fee paid to foster carer	£203.88	£203.88	£203.88	£203.88
Total weekly payment	£394.94	£420.13	£492.18	£538.83

What you will be paid as a parent and child foster carer

Parent and child foster carers are paid two separate weekly allowances, one for the parent and one for their child. This is because you will be looking after two people in your home.

Allowance for baby or child's living costs and activities	£190.66
Allowance for parent's living costs	£334.95
Fee paid to foster carer	£520.00
Total	£1045.61

What you will be paid as a supported lodgings carer

We will pay you an allowance of £210.24 a week, which is for your time spent supporting the young person living with you. Young people living in supported lodgings are charged £70 a week rent. This is paid from their housing benefit or wages, or from a combination of the two. If the young person is sharing the household food, they are expected to contribute £20 per week.

Weekly Allowance	£210.24
Rent from young person	£70
Contribution to food costs (optional)	£20
Total	£300.24

What you will be paid as a short breaks carer

You will receive between £85 and £104.95 to care for a child overnight depending on their age. We also offer a day care rate of between £56.36 and £79.95 and an hourly rate of between £11.27 and £15.99 per hour for shorter sessions. You will be reimbursed your travel expenses at 45p per mile.

	Child's age			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-13 years	14-17 years
Hourly Rate	£11.27	£12.00	£14.06	£15.99
Day care rate (over 5 hours)	£56.36	£60.00	£70.31	£79.95
12 to 24 hours (overnight)	£81.35	£85.00	£95.31	£104.95



FOSTERING FOR SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

In Surrey we want to ensure all our children remain close to their family, friends, and school when in foster care, where appropriate.

By fostering for your local authority, you can give children the best chance to stay in their local community. This greatly benefits the children and gives them stability during what is often an unsettling time for them. Fostering for Surrey County Council means that you will be caring for children from your local area. You will always be our first choice when we are finding foster carers to look after the children who come into our care. We always try to keep children living in Surrey with Surrey County Council foster carers. This means you are more likely to look after local children on a regular basis when you foster with us rather than with an external, independent agency. Surrey Fostering Service is part of Surrey County Council which means we do not make a profit. The investments made into fostering remain within Surrey and benefit local children, families, and the community.

If you would like to find out more about fostering in Surrey, we would recommend attending one of our information sessions, either online or in-person. These are an opportunity to meet a foster carer and a care-experienced young person and hear about their experiences of fostering. You will also be able to meet workers from the fostering service who will give advice and information. You can find all the dates and details at **www.surreycc.gov.uk/fostering**

Thank you for your interest in fostering with Surrey County Council, if you have any questions or feel ready to start your fostering journey, please get in touch with us.

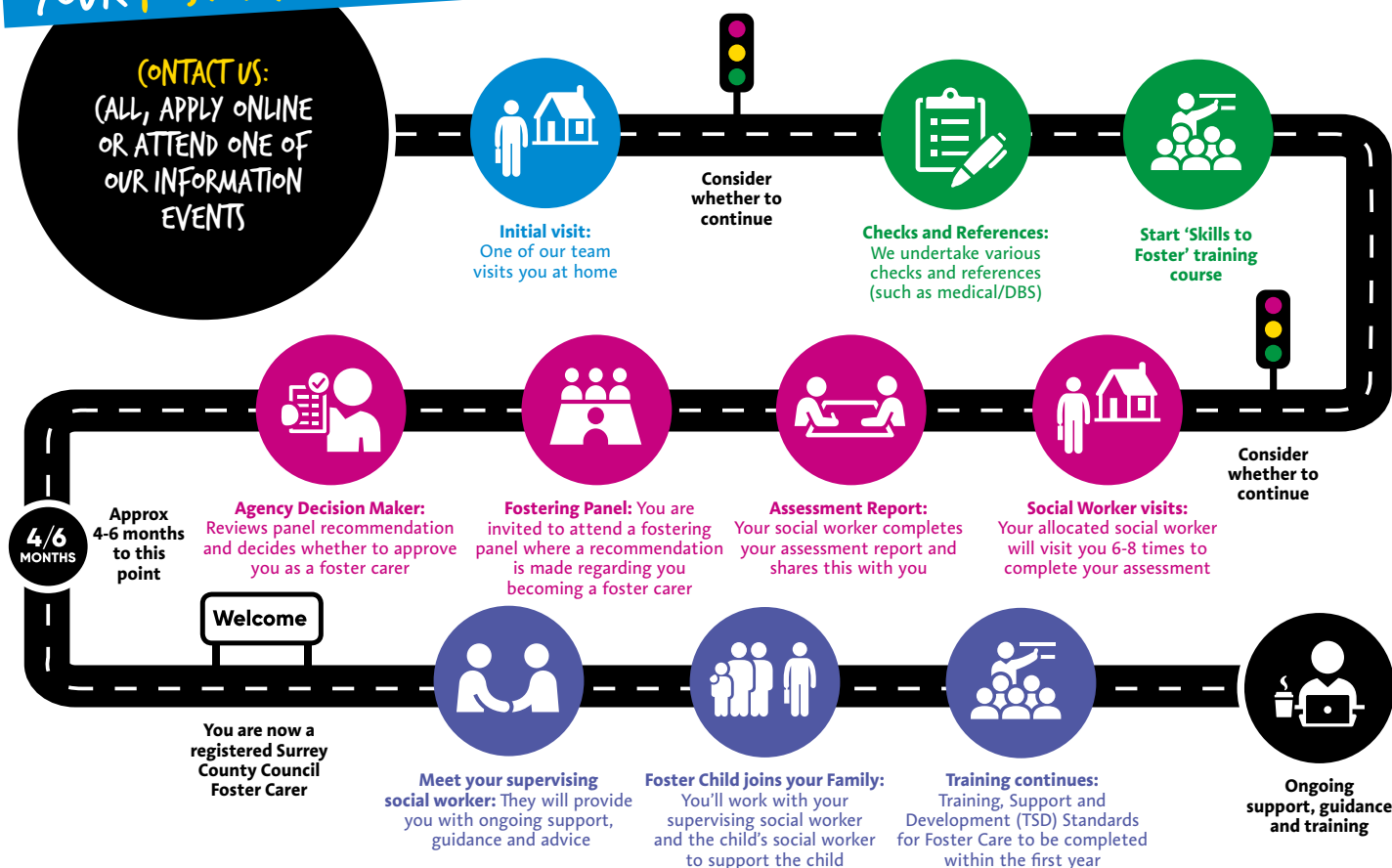
You can call us on
0800 096 9626

Email us at
fostering.recruitment@surreycc.gov.uk

Or apply online at
www.surreycc.gov.uk/fostering



YOUR FOSTERING JOURNEY



WHAT OUR FOSTERED (CHILDREN SAY

Lewis and Megan, two care-experienced young people, explain how their foster carers helped them:

"My early childhood consisted of neglect and physical abuse. But my foster carers were lovely and gave me a real sense of self-worth. They provided me with boundaries that I hadn't had before, giving me the stability I needed to settle away from my birth family."

LEWIS, 21

"Going into foster care aged 15 was really scary at first, but after a few weeks I started to settle in and then everything was perfect. My foster family are still very much part of my life. I speak to them every week, spend Christmases with them and call them up if I need to have a moan about something. They are always there for me! They're my family now, no words can express how thankful I am for them and what they did for me."

MEGAN, 20

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

If you are interested in finding out more about becoming a foster carer, take a look at our website surreycc.gov.uk/fostering or give our friendly team a call on 0800 096 9626