



**Tusla
Fostering**

Gníomhaireacht
Altramaíthe na hÉireann
Ireland's Fostering Agency

Fostering Information Guide

Every foster carer started where you are now.

Start with a conversation. [fostering.ie](https://www.fostering.ie)



TUSLA

An Gníomhaireacht 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 and young people who are not able to live with their own parents.

Sometimes, parents go through hard times and cannot look after their children. At Tusla Fostering, our first goal is to help families stay together. When that is not possible, a kind foster home is the best place for a child to stay.

Who can foster?

There is no “perfect” type of foster carer. Every person who fosters is different and brings their own experience and personality to fostering.

Just as every child is different, we need foster carers from all kinds of backgrounds. Your own life experiences and skills can help you understand and care for a child.



Could I foster?

You might be surprised to learn that you can apply to foster even if:

You rent your home: You don't need to own your home. The important thing is that you have a safe space and stable accommodation for a child.

You work: Every child is different and whether you can work and foster depends on a number of things, including the age of the child you wish to foster. It is always worth a chat with us to see what works.

You are single or in a relationship: It doesn't matter if you are married, single or what your sexual orientation or religion is.

You already have children (or you don't): You can foster whether you have raised children before, or not.

You are older: There is no upper age limit, as long as you are fit and healthy enough to care for a child.

Life has been tough: Having a difficult past doesn't stop you from fostering. If you have worked through your challenges, your life experience can actually help you understand what a child is going through.



What is essential to be a foster carer?

- You and your family enjoy the company of children and young people.
- You are available to meet with and work with all the people involved in the child or young person's life.
- You are willing to participate in a fostering assessment.
- You do not have a conviction for violence or sexual offences against a child or adult.
- An ability to understand and accept the circumstances of the child's family.
- An ability to help the child understand, with kindness and care, the reason for separation from their family.
- A flexible attitude and non-judgemental perspective on life.
- An ability to negotiate and compromise when faced with change, stress and challenge.

Key Qualities

- An ability to develop an understanding and accept a child who has been neglected or abused.
- An ability to provide a warm, caring and supportive home for a child who is likely to have experienced some sort of harm and trauma.
- An ability to accept the child's behaviour as a communication of their feelings.
- An openness to training to increase skills and knowledge about how to best care and support the child in your care.
- An openness to involvement with Tusla Fostering social workers who are there to support you and the child or young person in your care.

Types of foster care

Different types of foster care are needed to support children who come into care. Every child is unique and we try to match each child with the right home for their needs. It is worth thinking about which type of fostering feels like the best fit for you and your family!

- **Emergency Foster Care:**

Where a child needs a safe place to stay in an emergency situation. Emergency care is time limited.

- **Short-term Foster Care:**

Children who need temporary foster care until they can safely return to their family or move onto a longer-term foster care. Sometimes, short-term foster carers can be considered for long-term care if the child cannot return home.

- **Respite:**

Short-term care provided to a child in order to support the child, and 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:**

Providing 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:**

Where children may be unable to return to their birth family, foster carers who can offer a long-term, stable and loving environment may be the best option.

- **Day Fostering:**

Children remain in their own home by night and weekends while receiving alternative care during the day. 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:**

Keeping brothers and sisters together is very important to us. They share a special bond and a shared history, which helps them feel safe and less worried when moving to a new home. Whenever we can, we try to make sure siblings stay together so they can support each other.

- **Specific Categories Supported Lodgings (16+ years):**

A supportive home environment to help young people (16+) or young adults learn basic life skills and provide emotional support. This acts as a stepping stone to help them gain the confidence they need to eventually live independently.

- **Separated Children Seeking International Protection:**

SCSIP are children under 18 years, who have arrived in Ireland without a parent or guardian and who have faced hardship such as conflict or persecution in their country of origin. The goal is to provide a safe home environment - through foster care or supported lodgings - where their individual needs are met while they navigate their future in Ireland.

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

Sometimes, foster carers provide different types of foster care at different times, depending on their availability and their circumstances.



I am interested. How do I become a foster carer?

The Fostering Pathway

Because every child deserves a high standard of care, becoming a foster carer has a number of stages, as listed below.

The Six Steps to becoming a Foster Carer

Step 1: Make an Enquiry

Register your interest at www.fostering.ie or contact us on 1800 226 771 to arrange a friendly chat. We will answer your questions and explain how fostering works. If you are happy to move forward, we will visit you at home.

Step 2: Essential Checks

We do some essential checks, like talking to people who know you (references) and standard Garda checks. If you are worried about something from your past, just talk to us. It doesn't always mean you can't foster.

Step 3: Learning More

Attend a pre-approval training course to get helpful information. It is a chance to meet other foster carers and Tusla staff.

Step 4: The Assessment

A social worker will meet with you, your family and significant people in your life to get to know you. This is to see what strengths you bring to fostering and guide you through the realities of fostering. A report will then be written for the Foster Care Committee.

Step 5: Decision Time

The Foster Care Committee will look at the report to see if fostering is right for you. You will be invited to this meeting. If everything goes well, you will be approved as a foster carer.

Step 6: Welcoming a Child

The final step is finding the right match between you, your family and a child. This matching process is an ongoing conversation with your social worker, ensuring that the right child is placed in your care.

Assessment process

The purpose of the assessment process is to make sure fostering is right for you and your family and identify which type of fostering may work well for you and the children you may look after.

Topics we will explore

- Your experience of parenting and looking after children and the needs of any child or young person already in your care.
- Your own childhood and experience of being 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, such as bereavement, addiction issues, health issues and any other issues that you may have encountered with as an adult.
- The extent to which foster care is the right decision for your own children or other children in your household.
- Your family life, including how you make decisions and spend time together. Fostering brings changes, and it's important to discuss how it might affect everyone in your home.
- The extent to which your accommodation supports you to foster.
- Your financial circumstances are part of the conversation to ensure you feel stable and ready to foster. We provide a fostering allowance specifically for the child's needs and well-being while they are in your care. This allowance is only for the child and is not a personal or additional income.
- Your relationship with a child or 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 and 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 or young person safe while in your care.
- Your ability to respect a child or young person's culture and identity.
- How you will welcome a child or young person 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 you work with social workers and other people 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 worker's report and 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 decision of the committee, there is an appeals process you can use.

What support will you receive when fostering?

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

As a foster carer, you will have a Fostering Link Social Worker as your main point of support, guiding both you and your children through the fostering journey. At the same time, the child in your care will have their own social worker who focuses on their personal care plan and well-being. They will visit your home and work closely with you as a team to handle things like school, health, and family visits, ensuring everyone feels supported and heard.

All foster carers receive a fostering allowance to support the child's needs and welfare while in your care. 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.

We're here to support your whole family with a range of helpful resources. You'll have access to experienced carers to help you settle in, along with counselling, ongoing training, and around-the-clock help whenever you need it. We also offer support groups and training for your own children, so they feel supported and included in the journey too.

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 are paramount in all decision making.

Q. We have dogs in our household. Is this a problem?

Many foster carers have dogs and other pets. Safety for children and animals is the priority. Carers with dogs under the remit of the Control of Dogs Regulations 1991 are subject to certain conditions which a social worker can explore with you.

Q. What is the difference between fostering and adoption?

Fostering and adoption are very different. Foster carers take care of children in partnership with Tusla, while the child's parents are often involved and keep contact with the children. As a foster carer you cannot give consent on behalf of the child. 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.

This is different from adoption. As an adoptive parent, the child is legally yours and you have full responsibility.

For information on Tusla Adoption Services, please visit www.tusla.ie

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 if fostering is the right 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 five 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 carer's child is always considered when matching a child to a family. Tusla tries to place children with a family where the child in care is two years younger than the foster carer's youngest child.

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

Tusla Fostering 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.

Sometimes, like in emergency situations, we may only have limited information. As more details become known, these will be shared.

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 get along reasonably well.

Every child is different, so the time they spend with their birth family will depend on what they need. You will be invited to participate in child in care review meetings to help plan these visits, including where and when they happen. We look for foster carers who help children stay connected to their family and friends.

This can include transporting children to and from contact visits, religious and cultural events, and 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 various 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 the child's behaviour?

While many children do well in foster care, most have gone through a hard time or lost someone they love. With a stable, loving home, many children will thrive, though some may need a little more time to feel safe. We look for foster carers who are patient and committed to helping a child through these tough times. If things get difficult, our social workers are always there to help you with advice or extra training.

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

The most important thing is that foster carers are well enough to provide a safe and stable home and meet the child's needs. If you have a health concern, medical experts can provide guidance. Please feel free to chat about this with your social 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. 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 begins working with young people before they turn 18 years and assists 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 provides financial assistance to young adults ranging from setting up home grants, paying deposits for new accommodation and providing financial support if in education/ accredited training.



Next steps

**Start with a conversation.
fostering.ie**

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

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