

Empty Nest? Here's Why Fostering Could Be Your Next Chapter

By Marcus T. Blake

Whatever love and nurture you give, you get back. Fostering could be your exciting new chapter.

Considering fostering as an empty nester? Considering fostering later in life? Perhaps you want foster while raising children of your own? Whatever your reason may be, fostering is open to all walks of life. Regardless of your relationship status, background and sexuality, anyone has the potential to be a foster parent. Even if you're over 50, you can still foster, as long as you can fulfil the active side of fostering such as outdoor activities and school runs. All you need is a desire to care, with a room to spare.

Why foster?

For children, it's difficult coming to terms with being separated from their birth families; you can never truly grasp the emotional burdens they're carrying. Fostering provides a nurturing and safe environment; it offers a place of healing and new beginnings, a rich childhood, a difference that lasts a lifetime.

Can you work and be foster parent?

Yes, you can work and be a foster parent. However, there are some factors to consider:

- **Hours you attend to work and the flexibility of your employer**
- **Your support network**- Do you have family or friends you can rely on if you need childcare on short-notice?
- **The type of fostering** you hope to do and **the age of the children you foster**- younger children need more time and attention, the older ones are bit more independent.

Fostering is a full-time job, there must be at least one foster parent available on a full-time basis; the child's welfare and safety are paramount.

Available support

Whether you're new to fostering or have experience parenting, fostering comes with immense support. Through FCA, you'll be equipped with all the training and resources you need to be a confident foster parent such as:

- **High quality training programmes** and an **online portal**- With ongoing training and advice, you'll learn to understand children and young people, caring for them exceptionally. Additionally, there's complementary training offered for greater depth of knowledge and practical application.
- A **supervising social worker** who will organise monthly meetings and support for you whenever you need it.
- **24/7 Support from fostering teams** if you need advice or a helping hand.
- A wide range of **national and local events and activities** for the whole family to enjoy.

Financial support as a foster parent

When you become a foster parent, you are backed with financial support. On average, foster parents receive an allowance of £26,674 per year (tax-free) for each child in their care. This amount can vary on multiple factors such as the region you live in, the type of fostering, the number and the age of the children being fostered.

This foster care allowance is bi-weekly and is split into two parts:

- **Expenses**- this covers the cost of caring for the child along with things like groceries, clothing, personal development entertainment
- **Professional fee**- this rewards you for your dedication and hard work as a foster parent.

For more detail about foster parent allowances, visit: <https://www.thefca.co.uk/fostering-allowances/>

Types of fostering

There are many types of fostering, depending on the needs of the child. You can explore the types of fostering in more detail here: <https://www.thefca.co.uk/about-fostering/types-of-fostering/>

Some common types of foster care include:

- **Short-term fostering**- usually a few weeks, months or up to 2 years depending on the individual's circumstances.
- **Fostering for teens**- helping young people heal from their pasts and cope with newfound pressures.
- **Step down fostering**- helping young people transition from residential care to a family home.
- **Parent and child fostering**- fostering to help young parents nurture and raise their children.
- **Emergency foster care**- temporary foster care placement on short notice, ranging from hours up to a few weeks. For unforeseen circumstances like something happening to the parent or safeguarding issues.
- **Respite fostering**- allows foster and birth families to have a break from childcare. Usually up to a few days to a week.
- **Sanctuary Seeking**- for children who've arrived in the UK without parents or guardians.

How do I become a foster parent?

Firstly, there's criteria that must be fulfilled before the application process starts:

- You must be over the age of 21 (there's no upper age limit)
- You are a British Citizen or have indefinite leave to remain in the UK
- You can provide a stable and loving home with a spare room a child could call their own

It usually takes 4-6 months to become an approved foster parent. The Application process goes as

follows:

1. **Register your interest** by contacting FCA over the phone.
2. **Home visit-** Fostering Advisors will visit to learn more about you, providing more depth on what fostering could look like, what support is available and help you decide if fostering is for you.
3. **Complete Application form-** After completing your form, a social worker will contact you for the fostering assessment, where they'll visit your home 8-10 times to gain a good understanding of your family life. They will observe the skills and strengths that make you an excellent candidate to foster. All this information will be cumulated into a report called 'Form F'
4. **Attend Fostering Preparatory course-** You will learn all about the fostering role and develop skills learning to effectively support the emotional needs of the children in your care.
5. **Fostering Panel-** Your social worker will present the Form F assessment which a panel of experts review, where they'll also ask questions. A final decision will be made by the management team.

For more information visit: <https://www.thefca.co.uk/about-fostering/how-to-become-a-foster-parent/>

Fostering does come with its challenges, however it's a path that's highly rewarding, transforming the lives of children. Even if you feel that you're too late in age, your wealth of knowledge and life experiences can make brighter days.