

# Enquiry pack



East Lothian...

A great place to grow  
A fantastic place to foster

# Welcome

*Thank you for enquiring about fostering in East Lothian.*

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## Why East Lothian needs foster carers

East Lothian Council recognises that children do best when they remain in their local area and retain links with those who are important to them – family, friends, teachers and local clubs. At any one time around 100 of East Lothian's children are looked after by foster carers.

Our mission is to ensure no East Lothian child has to move away simply because there is no local foster care available. We constantly seek to recruit more foster carers to help achieve this.

*At East Lothian Council we pride ourselves on keeping our children within East Lothian wherever possible.*

**We agree with The Fostering Network who say that children need people who:**

- Are always there for them
- Love, accept and respect them for who they are
- Are ambitious for them and help them succeed
- Stick with them through thick and thin
- Are willing to go the extra mile, and
- Treat them as part of their family, or part of their life, and if necessary beyond childhood and into adulthood

# Different types of fostering

We are looking for people who can offer loving and supportive care to a child or brothers and sisters. Fostering isn't a one-size-fits-all career. You can choose to provide a mix of full-time and part-time care.

## Interim Foster Carers

Interim foster carers look after children and young people, from newborn up to age 18, who are temporarily unable to be with their own families and look after them until the situation at home has improved or permanent foster carers or adopters are found. This might be for a few days, for several months or even years. Children who need foster care are likely to have experienced significant losses and neglect or abuse. They need carers who are sensitive to their individual needs and have no other work commitments. Most children have regular contact with their own families. Some interim carers go on to become permanent carers.

## Permanent Foster Carers

Permanent (or long-term) carers look after children when it is clear that they will be unable to return to their own families. Not all children can or want to be adopted, especially if they are older or have regular contact with relatives. These children need foster carers who can accept them into their family and raise them to adulthood. Children brought up by long-term foster carers do best if they have a real sense of belonging within their fostered family, while also keeping links with their birth family. The children are usually school-aged although may be younger if, for example, the child has particular needs or has older brothers and sisters and needs a family where they can be together. Permanent foster carers share the responsibility for the child with East Lothian Council and sometimes the child's parents.

## Continuing Care: Supporting Young Adults

Recognising that many young people are not ready to leave care when they reach their 19th birthday, the Scottish Government has extended the age that a young person can be supported up to the age of 21. Some young people in settled foster placements may choose to remain where they are while others will choose to move on. We are looking for carers who can work with teenagers and young adults to help prepare them for independent living. There may be flexibility with regards to your working arrangements – i.e. depending on your circumstances and the needs of the young person, it may be possible for you to work in addition to providing care.

## Short Break Carers

Foster care doesn't necessarily mean a full-time commitment. There are a different types of respite provided by East Lothian Carers:

- **Respite Carers** look after children for short periods, usually on a regular basis to give their full-time foster carers a regular break or help to cope in an emergency. Respite can vary from an occasional overnight stay or weekend break to longer, two or three-week periods each year. Children benefit from going to the same carer each time and getting to know another family with whom they enjoy spending time. If you are at home during the school holidays and able to look after children for a number of weeks each year during school holiday periods we would be interested in hearing from you.
- **Support Carers** offer regular support to children and young people who are still living at home. Support care can prevent these children needing to be looked after away from home full time. Support carers can be in full-time employment but with space in their lives to offer, for example a weekend a month or some overnights midweek.
- **Share the Care** is our family-based respite service for children and young people with physical and/or learning disabilities. This service provides essential support to young people and their families by offering regular breaks, usually in the home of the carer. This gives the young person the chance to take part in different activities and make new friends, as well as giving parents the opportunity to spend time with others in the family, or just to recharge their batteries. The service aims to be as flexible as possible with respite provided at weekends or midweek, during the day or overnight, term time and/or holidays. Careful matching is very important to take account of the needs of each young person, their families and the circumstances of the carers. If this is the type of care you are interested in, please do tell us about this at the time of your enquiry as the assessment process for this service is slightly different from the process described in this leaflet.

## Payments

All foster carers are paid a fee and receive an additional allowance to cover the child's or young person's living costs. Visit [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/fosteringfees](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/fosteringfees) for current fees and allowances.

# What a difference...



"Helping children to laugh, flourish and be all they can be, that's what I do. There is no other job like it, it's a privilege to be part of their journey and help them fly"

# you can make!

"I can tell my carer anything, she really listens to me and helps me make good choices. She is my rock!"

"My foster carers really helped me sort my life right out"

Children come into foster care for a variety of reasons. Offering a stable, caring, familiar environment can help create a positive path with a brighter future.

"If it was not for my foster carers, I would not be the mum I am now, they showed me what love really is"

# Who can foster?

East Lothian is a great place to live, learn, work, play and a fantastic place to foster.

- You can be single, married, in a civil partnership or living together in a stable long-term relationship
- You should have experience of children and young people
- You must be over 21 years of age
- Any working arrangements need to be compatible with fostering
- You need to have patience, acceptance, and empathy
- You must be a team player, and able to work with everyone involved in planning for the child
- You need to be fit enough to meet the challenges of looking after active children
- You must agree that the use of physical punishment is not acceptable
- You must have an inclusive attitude that does not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or disability
- If you are applying as a couple, you will both be assessed. Both of you must be available to attend pre and post-approval training
- Each fostered child will require his/her own bedroom, although sometimes younger brothers and sisters can share
- You will need to provide a safe environment for children
- We will not place any child in a household where anyone smokes in the house
- Dangerous or potentially dangerous animals cannot be kept as pets in a foster home
- We do not assess people who have issues with drugs or alcohol



# What to expect

Caring for someone else’s child is a big responsibility, both for carers and the Council. Because of this we carry out the following statutory checks:

## Disclosure Scotland Check

We need to place children in homes where they will be safe, therefore, with your consent, we will ask Disclosure Scotland (and any other relevant agency) to carry out a **PVG Check**. This will inform us of any convictions you have had in Scotland or elsewhere. Having a criminal conviction does not necessarily mean that you may not care for other people’s children, but it does mean that we will have to discuss your convictions. It would be best if you mentioned anything you are concerned about to us when you begin the application process. We will also carry out **Enhanced Disclosure Checks** on anyone else in your household over the age of 16.

## Medical References

Children need foster carers who are physically and emotionally well. We will ask your GP to complete a **Health Check**. If you are concerned about your medical history please discuss this with us. Everyone else in your household aged 16 or over will also be asked to agree to a **Medical Records Check** with their GP.

## Local Authority Check

We will check if you have had contact with your local authority in the areas you have lived in during the past, and whether this is relevant to your application.

## Employment History and Employers’ References

We will talk to you about your employment history and ask for a written reference from your current employer. If you are not working now, we may ask for a reference from a previous employer, particularly if you worked with children or vulnerable adults.

## Personal References

Your friends and family are the people who know you best. We will take references from people who know you and your family. We will visit some of these referees to discuss the skills that you could bring to fostering.

## Previous Partners

If you have been married before or were in a long-term relationship, we usually contact your former partner to check there is no reason you shouldn’t care for someone else’s child. We understand that this might feel intrusive. If you’re worried about this, please talk to the Social Worker when he or she visits you at home to discuss your application.

## Other checks

We will complete a **Home Health & Safety Check** and where required a Pet Risk Assessment.

Every applicant participates in an assessment known as a **Homestudy**. A social worker will visit you at home several times over a period of up to six months. This helps us to agree whether fostering is right for you and your family and if so for what age range and for how many children.

During the Homestudy you and your social worker will look at the relevant skills, knowledge and experience you bring and which are needed to be a foster carer. We assess your suitability by gathering information about you from a wide range of sources (checks and references) and from the evidence you give us about you and your family.

### The assessment considers a range of factors such as:

- Your life experience
- Your family’s views about fostering
- Your motivation to foster
- Your child care skills and knowledge of child development
- Your ability to work with children’s birth families
- Your ability to work with other professionals
- The safety of your home
- Your wider support network (it’s difficult to go it alone)
- Your commitment to ongoing development and training

At the end of the period of assessment we will draw all the evidence together into a report which is presented to a **Fostering Approval Panel**.

You will be invited to attend the Panel along with your social worker.

The Panel will recommend whether your application to become a carer should be accepted. If approved, we will ask you to sign a Fostering Agreement and you will receive ongoing support and training. Each step of the process is shown later in this leaflet.



## Local support, every step of the way

At East Lothian Council, we are aware that fostering is a huge commitment, full of rewards and challenges. We value our foster carers and provide a comprehensive support package throughout assessment, approval and your fostering career.

### Why foster with East Lothian Council?

Because we offer:

- **Professional local support** from our friendly fostering and social work teams
- **Competitive rates of pay** and allowances including our **12 week Retainer Fee** which is designed to cover any gaps you may have between placements
- **21 days paid annual leave** or the financial equivalent if you don't use it
- **Excellent training** throughout your fostering career
- Experienced foster carer buddies
- Monthly local support groups
- Social events for foster families across the county
- Discounted entry to East Lothian leisure facilities for you and your family
- Free membership to The Fostering Network

Visit [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/fosteringfees](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/fosteringfees) for current fees and allowances

If you are already fostering with another agency, and would like to transfer and benefit from local support, please get in touch.

# Assessment process

The key steps to becoming a foster carer are:



## Initial enquiry

**The first step is to give us a quick call on 01620 827643.**

A member of the team will be happy to answer any questions you may have and discuss your interest in fostering. From here we can arrange a home visit.

## Home visit

A member of the team will visit you at home to discuss your circumstances and interest in fostering in more detail. Following this visit we will agree with you whether it is the right time for you to proceed to the next step of attending a fostering preparation group.

## Preparation group

We provide a series of training sessions about fostering – usually these are run over 6 evenings, or 3 full days and involve around 8–15 other people interested in fostering. After the preparation group, if we agree with you that you are ready for the next step, we will commence your fostering assessment.

## Homestudy

You will participate in an assessment, called a *Homestudy* where you are visited at home by a social worker several times over a period of three to six months. At the end of this assessment you and your social worker will complete a detailed report, recommending whether you should be approved as a foster carer, for how many children and their age range. You will decide together whether you wish to present this report to the panel.

## Fostering panel

You and your social worker will present your report to a fostering panel (4–5 people) who will talk to you about your assessment and your interest in fostering. The Panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker about whether you should be approved and the terms of your approval.

## Agency decision

Within two weeks of your fostering panel you will receive a letter from the Agency Decision Maker informing you of the decision on your application to foster. If you have not been approved as a foster carer you may request a review of this decision.

## Become a foster carer!

Once approved you will sign a Fostering Agreement and we can then start to discuss children who are awaiting foster care. Once a child is placed with you, you will meet regularly with the social workers involved to help support you and the child. You will be asked to attend regular reviews of your approval to foster (the first review will take place within 12 months). As a new carer you will attend post-approval training one evening per month.

## Further information

It's really important to include everyone in your household in the decision to apply to foster as they will all be involved in the assessment process. Fostering can be both challenging and rewarding and sons and daughters play a vital role in its success; sharing their parents, toys and friends, as well as coping at times with challenging behaviour. Being part of a foster family often has a really positive impact and improves our understanding of others.

We encourage you to take foster children on holiday with you. However we do recognise that from time to time you may need time out from fostering for yourself or your family. As an East Lothian Council foster carer you can claim up to 21 days paid annual leave for such times, or the financial equivalent if holidaying together.



**We'd love to hear from you**

**Call 01620 827 643 today**  
**www.eastlothian.gov.uk/fostering**

or email us at: **fostering@eastlothian.gov.uk**

 **@fosteringandadoptioneastlothian**

**East Lothian Council**  
**Fostering & Adoption**  
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Versions of this leaflet can be supplied in Braille, large print, audiotape or in your own language. Please phone Customer Services if you require assistance on 01620 827199