

It takes a big heart to hold a little hand

By Caoilfhionn Short
Age 9



A child's guide to becoming
a foster family

Foreword

Hi, my name is Caoilfhionn (pronounced Key-Lin).

I bet if you are reading this book that your parents have asked you if you would like to become a foster family...

Or maybe you just want to learn about fostering.

I've been a foster carer for as long as I can remember and I would love to share my experiences with you.

I am nine years old and I have lots of foster brothers and sisters. Some came to stay for a few days and others stayed for a few years!

I consider them all part of my amazing family, even the ones who only stayed for a short while. I have learnt that families come in all shapes and sizes.

So let's start your fostering journey...
here goes!



Table of contents:

Foreword

What is fostering?

What does it mean for you?

What to expect and how to prepare?

Goodbyes

Support



What is fostering?

Sometimes children can't live at home with their mum or dad. This could be for lots of reasons. Maybe their parents are sick or have a problem they need help to fix. Sometimes children aren't safe at home. They might need a break for a little while until things calm down.

If you decide to foster you will be offering to share your home and your family with a child who needs it most.

This child might come to live with you for a few days, months or even years. Some children come straight from the hospital after they are born and stay in foster care until they are grown up.



My baby brother came to live with us when he was three days old. He was meant to stay with us for two months but we have just celebrated his fourth birthday! We have had so much fun and mischief in those four extra years!

Some of my friends ask me if fostering is the same as adoption. It's similar but not the same. With fostering you always hope that things will work out for your foster brothers and sisters and you hope that they get to go home to their birth family someday. With adoption they stay with your family forever. This can also happen in fostering but not always so you have to be prepared to say goodbye.



What does fostering mean for you?

The first word that springs to mind for me is a busy home!

Not only do you get a new foster brother or sister but you also get to meet their family, their social worker, your fostering support worker and lots more friendly faces.

It can feel a bit overwhelming at the start but you will soon get the hang of things and meet some really nice people along the way!

Fostering is about sharing. You share your family, your home, your toys and your friends but you get a lot in return!

Speaking personally, I have made lots of lovely new friends and my family has not only grown bigger but a lot more exciting.

We get lots of new toys to make sure that the new member of our family has nice toys to play with. And the best bit of all is...we have lots of parties to celebrate all the birthdays!!!



What to expect and how to prepare?

Before you can foster your family will need to be assessed. A social worker will call to your home to chat to your family about fostering. They ask lots of questions about you and your parents to make sure you can care for a child, keep them safe and give them lots of love and attention.

As soon as everyone is happy you can start to foster!

And that's when the fun starts! A social worker will phone to say they need a foster family for a child and they feel your family is the right family.

You might be told they are coming that day or you might have longer to prepare. So it's a good idea to be organized!

A foster child needs: their own bedroom, a cot or bed, baby equipment or spare clothes and pyjamas if they are older and also some comforting items.

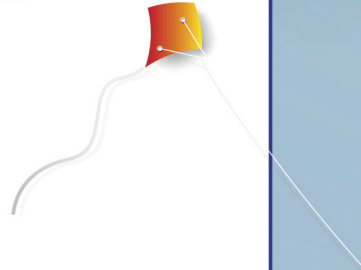
But most importantly they will need a warm welcome and time to settle into your family.



I try to think of a time when I felt frightened or was somewhere new without my family and this helps me to understand how they might be feeling.

They might miss their family or might not know if your family are kind. They might have found family life difficult and it may take them a bit longer to adjust.

But you need to remember that children in foster care are just like you and me. They want to have loving, caring people in their life and that's where we come in!



Goodbyes

One of the hardest things about being a foster carer is saying goodbye when it's time for your foster brother or sister to go home or to live somewhere else. It is a really sad time in my family but I have found some things help to make it less sad.

Firstly knowing where they are going and staying in contact with them makes it easier. I have been able to meet their families and to see where they live after they leave my house.

I feel better when I know that they are still safe and loved and when I see them happy. Mum and dad always let me know how they are and we talk about them all the time.

My baby brother will be leaving soon and we all feel really sad about this. But we have met his forever family and they are really lovely. We are already planning holidays and day trips with them and in a funny way they have become part of my family as well!



Support

Don't worry if you feel sad or worried, you will never be left alone! I talk to my parents and brother if I'm upset or don't understand what is happening.

We also have a brilliant fostering support worker who visits us at home and also brings me and my brother out for a chat. She brought us for pizza and ice-cream and spoke to us about how we feel about our baby brother and the changes happening in our family.

We have also been bowling and to an outdoor adventure centre with other children who foster. I enjoyed this as we had lots in common and are all part of a very special fostering community.

So now you know what fostering is all about and you're ready to start your own journey.

Enjoy!

