

ADVICE NOTES

Revised 2015



The preparation and assessment process (fostering)

coramBAAF
ADOPTION & FOSTERING ACADEMY

www.corambaaf.org.uk

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for you if you have decided that you would like to start the process of becoming a foster carer. It assumes that you have chosen a fostering service to work with and have made a formal application to the service which has been accepted. You and they are now ready to embark on the preparation and assessment process. The leaflet describes what this will involve.

If you are at an earlier stage and want to find out about fostering generally and about approaching a fostering service, you will find helpful information in *Fostering a Child* (see the end of this leaflet for details).

Prospective foster carers who are relatives or friends of the child they wish to foster

Looking after a child you are related to or know well is called kinship care, connected persons care, or family and friends foster care. In Scotland, since 2009, the regulations about the care of children “looked after” by the local council include a separate section on kinship carers, recognising them in their own right as distinct from foster carers. In the rest of the UK, you may be assessed as a kinship (connected persons) foster carer in a similar way to people wishing to foster an unrelated child.

Much of the information in this leaflet will be equally applicable to you, although there may be some differences in terms of preparation and training, for example. Also, rather than having general discussions about, for instance, contact with birth parents or different types of behaviour shown by children, you will need to talk about the specific situation you will be taking on.

When they said they were going to assess us to see if we could look after her we thought to ourselves ‘Oh yeah, more red

tape, what do they know?’ but when it came to it, it was that helpful – it got us thinking about what we were doing and how Debbie was feeling.

Relative foster carer, in *Ten Top Tips for Supporting Kinship Placements*

The preparation course

You will be asked to attend a series of preparation and training sessions to learn more about fostering and what’s involved. Other people who are applying to foster will also be in the group. You will have a chance to hear from experienced foster carers and possibly from someone who has lived in foster care and from the parent of a child who has been fostered. (Sometimes this will not be required if you are a relative or friend of your prospective foster child. However, it could also be helpful for you.)

The issues covered are likely to include:

- why children come into care and need to be fostered;
- issues of loss, separation and trauma and how children feel when separated from their family;
- attachment issues and how a poor experience of attachment affects behaviour;
- managing difficult behaviour;
- contact and working with parents;
- child protection issues and how to provide safe care;
- working in partnership with social workers and others as part of a team;
- helping children move on.

These meetings usually take place before the “home study” part of the assessment. The social workers running the preparation group generally prepare a brief report on your participation in the group. You should be able to see and comment on this and it will be part of the information used when the final assessment report is completed.

The preparation group was much better than we'd imagined. It was good to be in the same boat as other people, all of us not really knowing what to expect and being able to talk about things without feeling like you were getting it wrong or asking stupid questions. We've stayed friends with one of the couples we met in the group.

Savita, foster carer, in *Fostering a Child*

Standards for fostering

If you are in England, you will almost certainly be introduced to the Training, Development and Support Standards for Fostering during your initial preparation and training. They give a framework to your fostering service for your ongoing training and professional development. They cover an understanding of the principles and values essential for fostering, your role as a foster carer, health and safety, communications, and understanding of children's development, keeping children safe and development for yourself as a foster carer.

Sometimes you will be provided with a workbook to use with your social worker to complete work on the standards within 12 months of starting work as a foster carer. Achieving the standards is not just about attending courses – examples of meeting everyday challenges can also be used to demonstrate the required skills and knowledge.

Other parts of the UK may not use the same format, but will have their own approaches to ensuring how you as a foster carer will be supported and have access to training, especially in the first year. These will cover very similar aspects to those mentioned in this pamphlet.

I see training as part of my support and I accept that I need all the help that I can get to be able to do my job properly and get the most enjoyment out of it.

Sue, foster carer

The assessment or “home study”

This is the process by which the fostering service gets to know you and assesses your suitability to be a foster carer. It is also how you learn about what will be involved and consider, in partnership with the social workers, whether you have the necessary skills and strengths. You will need to be open and honest with the social workers. They need to know what your limitations are (everyone has some) so that they can make sure that suitable help and support are provided and so that they can match a child or children with you whose needs you can meet.

A social worker (or possibly two) will visit you at home and also perhaps see you at their office, probably about eight to ten times. They will meet with you individually as well as together, if you are a couple, and will also want to talk to your own children, if you have any. The same social worker will meet and talk with your personal referees. Information from your referees and from other checks, like criminal records and health checks, is an important addition to the information that you give to the social worker and will help them to back up the points that they make in their assessment report.

Why is this process necessary?

All children needing to be fostered will have experienced loss and separation from their family. Many will have experienced further moves and losses and many will also have experienced neglect and abuse. They are, understandably, likely to be challenging and demanding to care for and, for their sake and yours, it is important that you are as well prepared as

possible. You will be given a lot of information about the fostering task and opportunities to learn what will be involved.

The preparation and assessment process should also give you and the service an opportunity to recognise your needs, strengths and limitations. It will explore your experience of being parented and your life experiences since then, which have contributed to the understanding and skills which you bring to caring for a foster child. The process will be intrusive and demanding but should also be thought-provoking and stimulating. It will form the basis on which you and the service decide whether you will be able to foster a child and the support which you will need.

Regulations set out the information which the fostering service is required to gather and the issues it has to address. You can, if you wish, look at these for yourself by visiting the foster care section of www.gov.uk/dfe. Further information about standards across the UK can be found via the relevant government websites. The assessment report which needs to be completed also covers all the issues which have to be addressed, and your social worker can share the format for this with you.

It does feel odd having people ask you so many questions about your life and stuff about your relationships. But if one of my kids was going to someone else, I'd want to make sure they were a hundred-and-ten per cent OK, so I know it's very important that the social workers find out as much about you as possible.

Peter, foster carer, in *Fostering a Child*

How long will it take?

The process, from your formal application to approval by the service, should not normally take longer than about eight months. However, it can

take longer if issues come up which you or the social workers want to take more time to consider. Many social workers will work out a plan of meetings with you, with a pencilled-in final date for panel, at the beginning of the process. This can be helpful. However, you do need to be prepared to accept a degree of flexibility. If the process seems to be too slow or too long, you should discuss this with your social worker and, if necessary, with his or her manager. Some agencies have a routine mid-way review with the social worker and manager to see how the assessment is progressing.

Do I have to pay for the assessment?

There is no charge for the preparation and assessment.

Children who need fostering

As your fostering service has accepted an application from you, it must be optimistic that you could potentially meet the needs of a foster child. As the assessment proceeds, the social worker will talk with you in more detail about the range of children needing fostering. You will learn about the emotional and behavioural needs they will have as a result of the neglect and abuse they may have suffered and the loss, separation and moves they will have experienced. You will learn about the strong ties and the loyalty which most of them still have towards their family and their need, in most cases, to keep in touch with family members.

Many children are placed in foster care as a result of a crisis at home, even though their family may have been known to social workers for some time. They need a period in foster care, which may be days, weeks or months, and sometimes even longer, while work is done with them and their family and while plans are made for their future. Many will return home or go to live with relatives, while others move on to adoption, independent living or long-term foster care. As well as this more temporary foster care, there is also a need for carers who are able to offer planned long-term foster care, usually for older children. Other carers will offer planned short-term breaks, often for disabled children. There is also a need for carers for children and young people with particularly challenging behaviour. There are sometimes

large sibling groups, with three, four or more children who need to be placed together, and fostering schemes for parents and their children.

It would be a good idea to take every opportunity to find out as much as you can from books and articles suggested by your social worker and also to talk to experienced foster carers so that you learn about the children needing foster care and the different sorts of foster care. You will talk with your social worker about the sort of child or children whom you feel you could care for and the sort of foster care you could offer. However, try to keep a fairly open mind until you have learned more about the waiting children and the different sorts of foster care, and have had a chance to reflect on your potential strengths as foster carers.

What sort of people foster?

All kinds of children need to be fostered. Similarly, all sorts of people become foster carers. You can be single or married, an unmarried couple, either heterosexual or gay or lesbian, you can have children (and grandchildren!) or be childless. Foster carers come from a wide variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Some carers have health issues or are disabled. What is important is that you have the skills and energy to care for a child.

In your preparation group, you may meet prospective foster carers who are similar to you. You could also ask your social worker to put you in touch with a foster carer in a similar situation to you, perhaps through the local foster care group. If you feel your particular needs are not being adequately addressed in the assessment, discuss this with your social worker and, if necessary, with his or her manager.

Will my children be involved?

If you already have children, they will be profoundly affected by your decision to foster. They must have an opportunity to think about this, to ask questions and to give their views. Your social worker will talk with you about how you are involving your children and will be able to suggest books and other tools which might be helpful for you and them. The social worker will also want to talk with the children on their own (depending on

their age and understanding) and will discuss with you when and how this will be done. If your children are at school, the social worker will almost certainly want to ask the school whether they have any views on your relationship with your child and on their interaction with other children.

As well as talking with children, young people or adults still living at home with you, the social worker will find it helpful to talk with adult children no longer at home. They may also want to contact children whom you have parented but who no longer live with you but are, perhaps, living with a former partner. They will appreciate that this may be a sensitive issue and difficult to arrange and will discuss each situation with you. It is likely to be essential for them to have some contact with children living elsewhere who visit your home, as these children will be affected by, and will have an effect on, any child whom you foster.

Some fostering services run groups for the sons and daughters of foster carers. These could be useful in this preparation and assessment stage and also offer valuable support once your family starts fostering. You could ask your social worker whether a group like this is available in your service.

What about my extended family?

A child whom you foster will have contact with your extended family and it is important that they are welcomed into the family by these relatives. Both you and the child are likely to benefit from the support and understanding of your extended family, and this will be made easier if they are involved to some extent in the assessment process. You may find it helpful to tell them about some of the issues you discuss with your social worker. Most services like to meet and talk with one or more relatives to get their views on you as a prospective foster carer and to discuss the support they will be able to offer. Some services organise a session for the whole extended family, to tell them about fostering and to answer any questions they may have. You could ask if this is available from your service if you think it might be helpful.

The social worker will need to know if any family member, with whom a foster child could have contact, might pose a risk to the child. This could be because of health or lifestyle issues or a history of criminal offences. You will need to be prepared to discuss this openly with the social worker.

Will my former partners be involved?

Good practice suggests that if you have been involved in jointly parenting a child for a time with a former partner, he or she should be contacted, unless there are exceptional reasons not to. It is helpful when former co-parents are able to comment positively on your parenting skills. However, if negative comments are made, social workers will take account of the anger and bitterness which may still exist after the break-up of the relationship. They will try to check these comments with your personal referees and in other ways, rather than just accepting them at face value.

If you have not been involved in jointly bringing up a child with a former partner, he or she may or may not be contacted depending on whether the social worker thinks that this would be of use, and depending on the policy of that fostering service.

If there are reasons why you think it may be problematic to contact a former partner, such as domestic abuse, for example, you should discuss this with your social worker at an early stage.

What exactly will the assessment cover?

Background information, chronologies and individual profiles

The social worker will want to explore with you your family background, your experience of being parented and your relationship with siblings, if any. As part of this, they will probably ask you to do a family tree, showing your parents and grandparents and siblings. The social worker will help you with this and discuss how to complete it. He or she will also ask you to put together a chronology, or a list with dates, of all the places where you have lived and of the important events in your life. They will also ask for a chronology of your educational history and attainments and of your employment history.

The point of all this is to build up an accurate and factual account of your family and of your life experiences so far. However, in addition to this, the point is to explore with you how your experiences so far have made you into the person you now are and how they are likely to affect the sort of

foster carer you will be. This assessment will probably feel quite intrusive and it may well be painful if, for instance, you have to discuss neglect you experienced as a child or abuse you experienced at any point. However, it is better to have the opportunity, during the assessment period, to discuss and reflect on these experiences rather than to have them brought up unexpectedly during a placement, perhaps by a child whose unhappy experiences trigger feelings about your own. The social worker is not necessarily looking for a problem-free background. In fact, the experience of having worked through earlier losses or traumatic experiences and come through the other side can be an important strength for foster carers. What is important is that the “journey” can be understood and past events have been fully processed or accepted, rather than continuing to affect you in an unhelpful way.

I think you need to have experience to be a foster carer. I'm sure there are people who've had a so-called "ideal life" who make perfectly good foster carers, so I wouldn't take that away from them, but I do feel that myself and my partner, we've experienced probably ninety per cent of things that they have experienced when they come to us, either as children or as adults.

Foster carer, in *Who am I and what do I do?*

The social worker will also want to explore with you your experience in school and further education and your experience of friendships and of other influences outside your family. They will discuss with you how you see yourself in terms of ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and religious faith, if any. Experiences of discrimination and racism may have been important for you and will need to be discussed. Even if these haven't been part of your personal experience, what understanding do you have of them? It will

be important for the social worker to talk this through with you. Your views on what can lead some parents to neglect or abuse their children will be relevant, as this may well be the situation from which foster children will come. Finally, the social worker will want to learn about your interests and hobbies and the sorts of things you are looking forward to doing with foster children.

The social worker will probably end up knowing more about you than many of your friends do! They need to, because of the enormous responsibility they have in being involved in entrusting a child to your care.

Current relationship

If you are planning to foster as a couple, the quality, stability and permanence of your relationship will be very important issues which the social worker will want to discuss with you. Fostering a child will put stress on your relationship and you should think about how you will work together and support each other. The social worker will want to talk to you individually as well as together. They will be interested in how you have resolved difficulties in the past and how you communicate when things are not going well. They will also, of course, want to learn about all the strengths in your relationship.

We thought we had an honest, open relationship with no secrecy, but as it turned out we didn't even know what we weren't being honest about. There were some very important things we had never discussed. We're not so smug now, but we are far more open and we're also a much closer family. We value each other more than we did because our relationships have been close to breaking point.

Foster carer, in *Could you be my Parent?*

Family lifestyle – roles and relationships

Every family is different in a lot of ways – family rules and habits, family traditions, ways of expressing views and feelings. For example, do you express feelings very openly or are you quieter and more reserved? There may also be roles that members have taken on in your family, for instance, the joker, the organiser, the disciplinarian, the baby, mum’s helper, etc. The social worker will want to learn about how your family operates and to discuss with you how this is likely to change when another child joins your family. They will want to explore with you how flexible all members of the family are as the impact of a child on your family will depend partly on the needs and personality of that particular child and cannot be foreseen completely. The social worker will want to find out from you what your hobbies are and what you like doing: whether you are active and sporty, musical, like reading and so on. They will want to know what commitments you have in relation to any children already in your family. They will often ask you to write about a typical week or weekend and also to reflect on how this will change when you have a foster child. This will help when considering potential children for placement, particularly if the placement may be a long-term one.

Parenting skills

The social worker will talk with you about your experience with children and about your approach to caring for them. If you already have children, you will have discovered what works for you and how to tailor this to the different personalities of your children. If you don’t yet have children, you may need to have some experience of being with them and having sole care of them for short periods. You may need to seek this experience if you don’t yet have it. Your social worker will be able to make suggestions about how to do this. You may well already have valuable experience of working with children, either on a paid or voluntary basis, so through all this, and through your experience of being parented yourself, you will have views on how you may operate as a foster carer, including how you will set boundaries and the forms of discipline you might use.

A child joining your family may have experienced very poor parenting at home. You will need to discuss with your social worker, and perhaps with other experienced foster carers, how this may have affected their behaviour. You may need to consider new parenting skills to help the child to unlearn the ways they adapted to the poor parenting they received

earlier. The assessment period is a time to talk, read and reflect before the impact of an actual child joining your family. However, this is only the start and you will have opportunities for further input and training after you are approved and after you start fostering.

You will need to discuss with the social worker practical arrangements for caring for a child, particularly if you currently work full time. Depending on the sort of fostering you plan to do and the requirements of your service, you may or may not be able to combine fostering with other paid work.

Throughout the assessment we were treated as individuals, it focused on what we'd done before, the strengths we might have to look after children, as well as the difficulties.

Justin and Dan, in *Recipes for Fostering*

Support networks, using support and problem-solving skills

As a foster carer, you should be given good support by your service. You will have your own supervising social worker, and you will be offered and expected to attend training sessions. There will also probably be a local foster carers' support group which you can join. The social worker will want to discuss with you the importance of working as a member of the team around a child and of using support from the fostering service.

The social worker will also be interested in your own current support networks and in any experience you have already had in accessing and using support from your family and friends and local community. Are you involved in giving a lot of support, perhaps to elderly parents, or to adult children or grandchildren, and how will this be managed when you start fostering?

You may also be asked to work on an ecomap with your social worker. With your name in the centre of a sheet of paper, lines are then drawn to your family, friends and community network indicating the strength of the links; whether they are, in the main, positive or negative; and whether you are

primarily the giver or the receiver. You and the social worker can use this ecomap to discuss what may need to change before a child is placed with you.

Motivation and expectations

You will need to think about and discuss with the social worker your reasons for wanting to foster. Fostering can be a career, based in your own home. However, you need to be aware that it won't provide a guaranteed source of income as this will depend, in the main, on foster children being in placement. If you already have a child or children, you will need to discuss and think about how they and a foster child will affect each other. It will be helpful if you have the opportunity to talk to experienced foster carers and to learn about the particular emotional and behavioural issues which children who need fostering are likely to have, and which may make fostering very different from your initial expectations. You will also need to consider the likely impact on you and your family of the contact and involvement you will have with the families of the children whom you foster.

Strengths and limitations

All prospective foster carers will have a variety of strengths and limitations. The assessment process should give you the opportunity to identify and discuss these with your social worker. He or she will be able to suggest ways in which you can start to address any limitations by, for example, starting to make community links and to develop your support network. It will be important that your strengths and limitations are described honestly in the assessment report. This will help in identifying children whose needs you could meet and will also help in highlighting the kind of placement support which you will need. If you are working with the TSDS Standards, a personal professional development plan will be agreed with you and will be worked on over the first year of your fostering.

If my home-grown children were being looked after by someone else, then I would want the very best for them and that is why it is so important to accept all the

training on offer; we are looking after other people's children.

Chris, foster carer

What are they looking for?

Social workers are looking for people who:

- can make and keep close relationships;
- are open and honest about their feelings and about their limitations as well as their strengths;
- are adaptable and flexible, and willing and able to resolve and learn from difficult experiences;
- enjoy children and are willing and able to put the child's needs first;
- are willing and able to be reflective and thoughtful about foster children's needs and behaviour;
- know that every child, even a tiny baby, comes with a past and a birth family who are important and who are able to work with family members;
- are able to work in partnership with social workers and others as part of a team; and finally
- have "staying power".

How will my health be assessed?

You will need to have a medical examination carried out by your GP. The report of this will be sent to your service's medical adviser who will, with your permission, contact any consultants who have treated you. The medical adviser will advise the service and the fostering panel on the impact your health may have on your suitability to foster. The medical adviser contributes to the decision-making process but does not have a veto.

You should discuss any concerns there may be about your health with your social worker. People with a range of health conditions are approved as suitable to foster. However, if there are health issues, the medical may be arranged at an early stage. The service's prime concern is that you have the health and vigour necessary to meet the needs of a child whom you may foster. Any potentially life-threatening illnesses and medical conditions will be considered in the light of this.

Lifestyle issues which may affect your health, such as smoking, heavy drinking, obesity or anorexia, will need careful consideration. In particular, there is evidence of the damage that passive smoking can do to others, particularly young children. This means that services will often not place pre-school children or sometimes older children with carers who smoke.

Checks and references

When you made the formal application to the service to foster, you will have been asked to give permission for the checks which the service is required to make to be carried out. This is usually done while the preparation and assessment process is happening. It involves checks of criminal records on all members of your household aged 18 or over (16 or over in Scotland; 10 or over in Northern Ireland). Checks will also be made of the local authority where you live and sometimes where you have lived for the last five or ten years (or sometimes longer). Your current employer will usually be contacted, to verify employment dates, your role and whether there have been any relevant disputes or disciplinary proceedings. If you work or have worked with children or vulnerable adults, the social worker may need to contact the employer for more details.

If you know of anything which will be revealed by these checks, it is vital that you discuss this immediately, before the checks are done. Your openness and honesty in doing this and your explanation of the circumstances will be very helpful to the social worker. This will help to demonstrate that you can work well in partnership with the service and that you have the courage to address difficult issues. Any attempt to conceal information will be a cause of considerable concern to the service and may lead them to question whether they can work with you. They must feel confident that they can trust you to be honest and responsible, as you will be caring for vulnerable children on their behalf.

Will they check my finances and housing?

You do not need to be wealthy or to own your home to foster. You could also be receiving state benefits. However, the service will want to check that you are able to live within your means and are not seriously in debt, and that payments on your home are up to date. The social workers need to be as confident as possible that you will not have the stress of serious money worries when a child is in placement, or that there is a risk of you losing your home.

The social worker will do a health and safety check on your home to make sure that it will be safe for a child. Although children can sometimes share a bedroom in exceptional circumstances, in most circumstances a spare bedroom is specified as a requirement for fostering.

Personal referees: who should I choose and what will be expected of them?

All parts of the UK will have regulations and minimum requirements about seeking references. These are immensely helpful in building up a picture of you and the possible impact of fostering on you and your family. Many services will look for more than the minimum. They should explain to you early on about their particular practice – the number and range of referees and what they might expect in writing and through talking to referees. Fostering services in England and Northern Ireland are required to interview two personal referees who are not related to you.

It can be extremely helpful for social workers to have the views of people who know you well and who care about you, and who can give an honest view on how they think you will meet the challenges of fostering and on any particular support which you might need. It is important to choose people who know you well and, if possible, have done so for some time. This is where more than two referees may be needed as it is important to have people who have known each of you for some time, if you are a couple, as well as people who know you both as a couple and people who have fairly frequent contact with you now. It would be helpful if your referees know something of what fostering will involve for you and you

may want to give them some of the written material which the social workers have given you. They will be interviewed and asked about: their relationship with you; the stability and permanence of your relationship with each other, if you are a couple; your experience with children; how you will meet the challenges of fostering in terms of understanding and managing a child's behaviour, and responding to the child's need to remain in touch with their family. They will be asked about any concerns or doubts they may have and about the safety of a child placed with you and about the support they think you may need. The information they give to the social worker may or may not be shared with you.

What if I don't get on with my social worker or want to change service?

It is important that there is a trusting relationship between you and your social worker(s). You and they need to be able to discuss issues, some of which may be painful and difficult, with openness and honesty.

In the majority of cases, with some effort from everyone, this can be achieved. However, if you feel this isn't working, and you have tried without success to resolve the situation with your worker, you could ask for a meeting involving his or her manager. If this doesn't help, you could ask for a change of social worker and this may be able to be arranged. However, the reality is that most fostering teams are quite small and so this may be difficult to arrange or may involve a delay.

A change of service part-way through an assessment is a fairly drastic step, although it can be done. It would involve firstly discussing this with your current service before finding another service able and willing to take up an application from you. It might be possible for some of the work done already to be transferred but it might be that the new service would want to start from the beginning in their work with you. The new service would need to talk with the original social workers as well as with you about why the first assessment had to stop. It is not possible to be approved by more than one service (except in very rare instances in Scotland), although, once approved, children from other services can be placed with you.

A second opinion

Some services routinely have another social worker, often a senior or manager, who will meet with you towards the end of the assessment process. They will discuss further with you any issues which seem to them to be still outstanding or to need further clarification. This is also an opportunity for you to comment on the preparation and assessment and to highlight any further training or input which you feel would be helpful.

The assessment report

A comprehensive written report will be prepared by your social worker – this is usually done on something called Form F (Fostering). Your social worker may well ask you to contribute to sections of the report and to comment on early drafts. You should be given a copy of the proposed final report to read, although there may be aspects which remain confidential to the service. You should be given time in which to comment, in writing, if necessary, on any inaccuracies, anything that you disagree with the social worker about or that you think should be added.

The report (Form F) will include your social worker's proposals as to the terms and conditions of your approval, for example, whether this is for short- or long-term care, the number and age range of children whom you can foster or whether approval is for a specific child or children.

The panel process and approval

The Form F will be presented to your service's fostering panel for their recommendation on your suitability to foster a child. This is a group of people which, as well as social workers, includes independent members, such as a foster carer or someone who has experience of being placed with foster carers. You will be invited or required to attend the panel; most prospective foster carers do attend. Many are very nervous but find the actual experience less daunting than they feared. Panel members find it extremely helpful to meet foster carers and to have the opportunity for a brief discussion with them.

The panel will sometimes make a recommendation to the service on the terms and conditions of your approval, for example, whether this is for short- or long-term care, the number, age range, sex, likely needs and background of children whom you could foster or whether approval is for a specific child or children.

Occasionally the panel will postpone making a recommendation, while they ask the social worker to gather more information or conduct more checks. You will need to clarify exactly what is being asked for and by when.

After the panel has made its recommendation, a senior officer in the service (the decision maker) considers whether or not to approve you as suitable to foster a child and the terms and conditions of your approval, if any. (Practice varies slightly in Northern Ireland.) The large majority of carers who get to this stage of the process are approved by the service. However, if the decision maker writes to you informing you that he or she is not proposing to approve you, you can accept this and withdraw, or ask the decision maker to review the proposed decision, or apply, if your service is in England or Wales, for an independent review.

Independent review

If you receive written notification from your service that it proposes not to approve you as suitable to foster, and your service is in England or Wales, you have 28 calendar days to decide whether to apply for an independent review. An Independent Review Mechanism – Fostering (IRM) operates in England, and a separate IRM in Wales. It is only the proposal not to approve you as a foster carer which you can ask to be reviewed at this stage, not any terms or conditions of your approval. If you apply, arrangements will be made for your case to be considered by an independent panel, which will make a recommendation to your service about your suitability as a foster carer. The decision maker must consider this carefully before making his or her final decision. In other parts of the UK, services have procedures to review an adverse decision if you request this.

What next?

Being approved to foster after a lengthy assessment is the end of one part of the fostering process. However, it is the start of the exciting process of being considered for children who need fostering and of having children placed with you. Your work as a foster carer and the support and training you have received from your service will be reviewed annually after your initial approval. There is more information on this in *Fostering a Child* (details at the end of this leaflet). Good luck!

Useful organisations

CoramBAAF

41 Brunswick Square
London WC1N 1AZ
Tel: 020 7520 7517
www.corambaaf.org.uk

Fostering Network

87 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8HA
Tel: 020 7620 6400
www.fostering.net

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

Unit 4, Pavilion Business Park
Royds Hall Road
Wortley
Leeds LS12 6AJ
Tel: 0845 450 3956
www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) Cymru

Children in Wales
25 Windsor Place
Cardiff CF10 3DZ
Tel: 029 2034 2434
www.irmcymru.org.uk

Further reading

All the titles below are available from CoramBAAF. Visit www.corambaaf.org.uk or call CoramBAAF Publications on 020 7520 7517 to order.

Henrietta Bond (2004) *Fostering a Child: A guide for people interested in fostering*

Henrietta Bond (2005) *If you don't stick with me, who will? The challenges and rewards of foster care*

CoramBAAF (2007) Practice Note 51: *Reducing the Risks of Environmental Tobacco Smoke for Looked After Children and their Carers*

Hope Massiah (ed) (2005) *Looking after our Own: The stories of black and Asian adopters*

Leonie Sturge-Moore (ed) (2005) *Could you be my Parent? Adoption and fostering stories*

Andrea Warman (2007) *Who am I and What do I do?*

Andrea Warman (2009) *Recipes for Fostering*

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Paul Adams, Julia Brown, Elaine Dibben, Marjorie Morrison, Frances Nicholson, Mo O'Reilly and Teresa Vickers for their helpful comments.

Written by Jenifer Lord

© CoramBAAF 2015

CoramBAAF
41 Brunswick Square
London, WC1N 1AZ
Tel: 020 7520 7517
www.corambaaf.org.uk



A company limited by guarantee 9697712
Registered charity 312278

The paper used for this booklet is FSC certified and composed of 80% recycled post-consumer fibre.