**My Family and Fostering**

A handbook for children and young people of families interested in fostering for Torbay Council

**Welcome to fostering with Torbay Council**

Having another child come to live with you may feel a little scary, and you probably have lots of questions. That’s why we’ve put this handbook together to tell you more about fostering and what it will mean for you and your family.

We’ll be honest and say, it will involve some changes to your home life, but it’s also really rewarding and exciting to know that you and your family are doing something amazing to help a young person who may not have been as lucky as you when it comes to having parents that can provide a safe and stable home life.

If you still have questions after reading this handbook, you can talk to your parents or us. Even if you think your question may be a bit ‘silly’, the chances are it’s probably not as it’s important to you. The most important thing is that you are fully prepared for when you and your family welcome a new person into your home.

~~We hope that having another child come to live with you is going to be a really rewarding and positive experience, but we also recognise that it will involve some changes, so we want you to feel prepared and ready for what is ahead.~~

~~Please take the time to read on, to find out about how your family can become a family that foster, and what support and guidance you will receive along the way.~~

**What is fostering?**

Children come into our ‘care’ or become ‘looked after’ when they are no longer able to live with their own families. This can be for many different reasons; their parents may be very unwell, there may have been a big disagreement at home, or children may not have been protected and got hurt.

When they are in our care, a person called a social worker has the job of helping keep children safe from any harm and danger. If they feel it is no longer safe for a child to stay at home, they will arrange for the child to live with a foster family.

As you can imagine this can be a very confusing and scary time for a child who is having to go through this. ~~I wonder how we would feel if it was us..?~~

When a child lives in foster care, we ~~Torbay Children’s Services~~ use this time to keep a child safe, whilst a social worker ~~they~~ works with the family to help them sort out any problems they may have. The ~~child’s~~ social worker will also make a care plan that explains what needs to happen next to keep the child safe. ~~also make a care plan that everyone follows. This care plan tells us what needs to happen next.~~

A child coming to live with your family may have a care plan that means they stay with you for just a few days, weeks, months or for their entire childhood. The care plan may involve them going back home, moving to a different foster family, staying with you or being adopted. ~~An older child may even feel they are ready to live on their own – every child’s situation and care plan is going to be different.~~

~~Your parents will have been thinking what kind of child will fit into your family, so it will be a good idea if you talk to them about this so you know what to expect.~~

**Why do people want to foster?**

There are many answers to this question, as people want to foster for all sort of different reasons. Some of our foster carers have told us that they do it because; it makes them feel good, they feel that they are doing something really worthwhile by being able to offer a child a safe place to stay when their family is having problems, or they have experience of being looked after themselves, and know how important it is to offer children who cannot live with their families a safe, kind and friendly foster home to live in.

Foster families tell us that what they do can be very challenging and tricky at times, but that it is also a very rewarding experience.

**How am I involved in fostering?**

You may be thinking what has fostering got to do with me…and the answer is a lot!

It’s ok to feel slightly nervous about a child coming to live with your family, after all it’s only ever been you, your parents and any siblings you may have.

The child that is coming to live with you will also be feeling slightly nervous and will also have many questions running through their mind.

Imagine what questions you may have before you arrived at the front door of a foster home; what do the people look like?, do they have children?, do they have pets?, what will my bedroom be like?, will they be nice to me?

These are just a few examples of what you would probably want to know if you were in their shoes. So many thoughts and feelings will be going through everyone’s mind, hopefully you can help out by giving the child coming to your home a friendly welcome when they arrive.

**Our family want to foster – what happens next?**

A social worker from our fostering team will come to visit you and your parents to collect important information. This will include what kind of parents they are to you, and what skills and experience they have to offer other children. The social worker will also be interested in you, and ask what your thoughts and feelings are about becoming a foster family. We understand that you may have mixed feeling about this, and that is perfectly fine – we want you to be honest, so we can then talk things through and hopefully make everything clearer.

We will also speak to other people that know your family, to find out if they think it is a good idea that you become a foster family. This will include hearing from your school, who will tell us how your parents support you with your education, and how they get on with your teachers.

When the social worker visits, they will ask you and your parents to think about how your family works – or to put it another way the family ‘rules’ that you live by on a day to day basis. You probably know many of these ‘rules’ without even having to talk, or really think about them too much. This will be because your parents have taught you them from a young age, and will remind you about them if needed– this is what parents are meant to do. Children coming to live in your home, may not have been given rules, or they may be different to yours, and they will need to learn about all of this quite quickly, and may not always get things right.

We also have some rules, and when you are a family that fosters, you will have to think about how your family works and will probably need to make some changes. You may feel annoyed at the thought of having to do this, but this is not the purpose of our rules. They are in place to make sure that everyone is kept safe, and knows what they have to do. You can talk this through with your parents and the fostering social worker if you have any worries about this.

We run some training for people thinking about fostering called ‘Skills to Foster.’ Your parents will go on this, along with other adults interested in fostering. You will also be invited to come along to our special group for the children of people wanting to foster. The group will give you the chance to meet other children in the same boat as you, as well as children from families that are already fostering with us.

~~We hope that you will find this group good fun, and that it will give you the chance to meet other children in the same boat as you, and also to meet children of families that are already fostering with us. You will receive a certificate at the end of this.~~

The fostering social worker takes a few months to get to know you and your family properly, to talk to everyone about what fostering is all about, and collect all the information they need. All of the information is then put in a document called an assessment which is shared with foster carers, teachers, social workers, nurses and adults that were in foster care themselves as a child. This group of people are called a Fostering Panel.

Fostering is a very important job, and the Fostering Panel will decide whether they think your family has the right skills to become a registered foster family for us. You do not have to meet the Fostering Panel - your parents and the social worker will do this.

**So now you are a registered foster family – what’s next?**

Before a child comes to live with you, your parents will have spoken with their social worker and been given some information about the child and why they need to be looked after. Sometimes this happens quite quickly in an emergency, and sometimes this happens in a more planned way.

It is important you ask your parents questions at the time so you feel ok about this**.**

**Sharing**

Sharing is a big part of becoming a family that fosters – and we understand that sometimes sharing can sometimes be difficult. Maybe you have already had lots of practice doing this with your brothers and sisters, or your friends and family, or perhaps this is a skill you have still got to learn or get a bit better at. In fostering this will involve; sharing your parents, your home, maybe some of your toys and your pets, to mention just a few things.

We understand that you may have mixed feelings about this change in your life, and we will encourage you to talk about this with your parents, social worker and also during the Skills to Foster group you attend. Other children have found it really helpful to talk about this subject as part of a group with children who may have similar thoughts and questions on the subject as you**.**

**Support for you**

You are a very important part of your fostering family, and we show our thanks to you in a few different ways.

We offer you the chance to attend our one day training group ‘Skills to Foster’, where you will get the chance to meet other children who foster, ask lots of questions, and share any thoughts and feelings you may have with people who will really listen to you. At the end you will get a certificate and a voucher for coming along and taking part.

As a family that fosters you will be able to get some discounts on some local clubs and attractions, in the past we have also been able to offer free tickets to fun events such as the Christmas train of lights, pantomime and Torquay United football games.

You will also be invited to become part of our Support Group for children of foster carers. This is a really great day out, run by adults working in the fostering team. You will get to do activities such as bowling, climbing & treasure hunts. The Support Group meets during every school holiday, and is open to children aged 8-18 years. This is our way of not only saying a big ‘thank you’ for your part in fostering, but also an important time for you to meet up with other children who understand just what being a fostering family is all about. Here you will be able to chat to them about your experiences, and maybe get some handy tips and advice too.

At least every month your parents will be visited by their fostering social worker, whose job it is to help and support them in their fostering journey. This also involves them making the time to check in with you, and to ask you how you are finding living in a fostering family.

How do I tell my friends that we are a fostering family?

We hope you have found this handbook useful, but please remember there are always people who are more than willing to talk to you about fostering too.