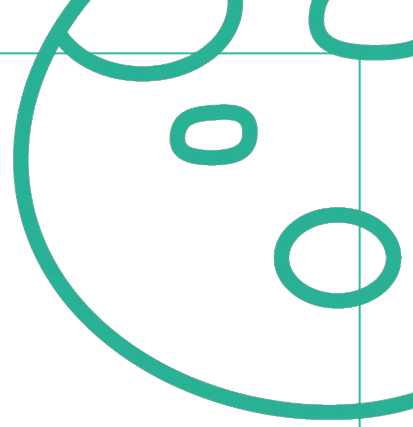


TO THE
MOON
AND BACK

How to choose a fostering agency



It has been reported that approximately 15% of foster carers give up fostering or transfer between fostering agencies every year because the foster carer's relationship with their agency or local authority has become problematic

It is important therefore that people considering fostering are equipped with good information which can enable them to make the right choice when they are ready to choose their fostering agency.

Foster carers are deemed as self-employed and can only foster for the fostering agency who holds their approval. If they feel the need to move to another agency in the future, they may need to go through some, or all, of the assessment process again.

What to think about

There are lots of things to consider when you are deciding about whether or not fostering is for you. There is so much information available about different fostering agencies. This can sometimes feel overwhelming to those starting out.

Consideration should be given to how you intend to combine your life with fostering. Are you intending to work, who will be available to support you, what experience have you had with raising children and what sort of training works best for you as you will be expected to undertake training and look at your personal development during the course of your fostering career.

Some foster carers give up work, some agencies expect you to give up work, some will enable you to combine fostering whilst continuing to work. If you are going to work whilst fostering, it is important that you can evidence your ability to support children if they are out of school and to ensure that you are able to attend meetings related to the child in your care and training provided by the organisation.

You are required to sign up to only one fostering provider. Therefore you have to choose one with whom you feel you will have the best long term relationship and where you feel most comfortable. We believe it is important to be able to trust and build good relationships with everyone in the team and not just the person you make initial contact with.

We have put together a free checklist of the most crucial questions which will help you to evaluate your choices before you decide upon a fostering agency or local authority provider that suits you best.

Asking the right questions

01 **How big is the agency?**

The agency might appear small but find out who owns it. You may find what looks like a small local agency is actually owned by a big multinational company. Start by looking closely at the company website and check out their "About Us" page. We would also recommend to look at 'Companies House' to identify how the shareholding works. [Click here to read all about us and meet our team at To the Moon and back Foster Care.](#)

02 **How local to you is the agency**

A local office is a great indicator, but ask where the training and meetings that you will be expected to attend, are actually going to be held. You may need to consider if you are expected to travel long distances to attend training and support groups.

03 **What is the Supervising Social Worker (SSW) caseloads like, how many families do they support**

This can determine the amount of time you will have with your SSW. The relationship with your SSW is a vital one. Their approach and professional ability will impact on your support and future success as a foster carer. The bench mark tends to be about 12 families per SSW but you may want to consider if these are all local families or if a SSW is covering 12 families over a large geography.

04 **Who is likely to be your Supervising Social Worker**

As we have said above the relationship with your SSW is very important. You have to be able to work well with this person. It's a good idea to see if you could meet the person who will support you once you are approved as a foster carer.

05 **What support is provided for you?**

We believe feeling supported is a result of good trusting relationships with those you work with. Many organisations talk of providing good support but you might want to consider what the support is made up of.

How flexible is the SSW in providing supervision with you

For example accommodating work and other commitments you may have. Will you have access to advice from your SSW outside of the usual working hours. At To the Moon and Back we work to build equal relationships between foster carers and SSW's and determine an individual approach to how best to, communicate, create plans for formal supervision and provide opportunities for learning and development.

Who else can you speak to and gain support from

Are there support networks for you for example , other professional experts in the organisation such as therapists, peer support from other foster carers, organisational memberships that can support you with advice and information. We believe access to a range of information is very important and provide a variety of options for foster carers.

What advice and support is available when the office is closed

In particular the evenings and weekends. Many offer telephone support and this is available over 24 hours. It may not always be the person you are most familiar with, so how does this work.

06 **What kind of Specialist Training is provided for foster carers and the agency staff**

There is training that as a foster carer you are required to undertake in order to become approved, as well as training to be taken during your first year as a foster carer. It is important to ask what other training is available for you. It is important that as a professional foster carer you understand the

development of children and the impact that neglect or abuse has on a child's development.

We believe it is very important that foster carers understand the impact of trauma on a child. We are a trauma informed agency, our foster carer training reflects this. We offer on top of standard training, specialist conferences where we all come together to learn. [Get in touch to find out about our training programme](#)

- 07 **How are fees determined for foster carers and what am I likely to be paid**
- The relationships between fostering agencies and local authorities determines the fees for foster carers. Fees are often at varying levels depending on the type of care the child requires. Agencies will advertise fees and it is important to understand how the fee is determined by asking about the levels of care required for children for the level of fee that is advertised. Also you may wish to ask what else is provided to support the financial costs of supporting a child. This varies from agency to agency but might include mileage payments when transporting children, birthday and festival presents and/or clothing allowances. [Get in touch to find out about our fees](#)
- 08 **Does the agency have strong positive links with the local authorities?**
- This is important and can determine types of placements you might be offered depending on contractual arrangements. You can identify positive relationships exists, when looking at Ofsted reports and as part of any inspection report there is reference to feedback from a variety of stakeholders including local authorities.
- 09 **How long is the assessment process taking currently and what is involved?**
- Assessments are undertaken by assessing social workers. Some of these social workers work freelance others work for the agency. The time taken to undertake an assessment is down to the availability of an assessing social worker being able to start on your assessment and the availability of information relating to you. There are many checks undertaken about you and the speed of the checks being returned can vary. We work with approved assessors tried and tested by us. It is a rigorous process and we aim for 12 weeks. The independent panel will determine whether approval can be recommended or not, but this can only be done once everything within the assessment is complete and panel are satisfied that evidence is there for recommendation to be made. [Click here for more information on our assessment process.](#)
- 10 **How soon after being approved can you expect a placement and what is in place to help you with getting ready for your first placement**
- The timing of the first placement after being approved as a foster carer varies from agency to agency. It is worth identifying the average timescale and any reasons for long delays. Most people once approved are keen to foster quickly and delays can be upsetting and frustrating.
- 11 **What support is available if you wish to take breaks or holidays from fostering?**
- This is called "Respite". Agencies will offer respite which can vary. It is usually 2-3 weeks depending on the care needs of the child in your care. This is often established as part of any placement agreement. When children are living with you, it is expected that you will treat them as you would your own children, taking them on holidays with you. Some agencies will offer you financial support to help you fund taking children with you, or paying for children's activities which means you can have a day to yourself whilst the children are having fun. Other agencies have respite carers who will support foster carers by offering holiday stays in their home. This requires lots of planning so children are not having to feel they are being sent to a home that is strange to them. [Get in touch to find out about our support during Respite](#)
- 12 **How long has the Registered Manager been in post**
- The registered manager is the accountable person for an agency and will be the influencing leader of the care team. This can indicate how stable the team is. It is difficult to build long term relationships when staff change frequently. Enquire about the stability of the team, (you can ask or look at the ofsted report).

13 **What is the breakdown rate of placements**

It is important to understand how many placements of children, within the agency, result in breakdown and require children to be removed and placed with other foster carers. This may happen for many reasons, but the matching and placement process of children to foster families is intended to prevent breakdown.

You may want to ask more about the needs of children being typically placed within the agency. You can ask if it is possible to speak with one of the foster carers, thus finding out about their experience.

Ask how the agency obtains and uses feedback, particularly from foster carers and young people, and how that is recorded and evaluated.

It is important that agencies are good at listening to the views of the children and the foster carers. There should be an informal as well as a formal process which allows you as a foster carer to offer feedback and this should inform improvements to be made. This is good governance and a requirement of registration.

14 **Are there activities for families and children including your own children**

It is important that activities are available to families to enable people to build other relationships and to enable fostered children and children of foster carers to come together. We use this as an opportunity to have fun but also to chat about experiences and seek the chance to build support networks and learn about the experience of those using our services.

15 **What is the culture of the agency, how do the organisation maintain and live up to their values**

All organisations regardless of their size has a culture. You can look at their statement of purpose and ask questions related to it. The statement of purpose is a regulatory requirement and has to be included on the agency website so it is easy to for you to read it. [Click here to read our Statement of Purpose](#)

16 **How does the agency positively promote the image of former looked after children**

Often the image is negative as a direct result of poor outcomes but are there people in the organisation that challenge that view. Are there care experienced people working in the organisation and how do they influence the improvement of outcomes for fostered children.

To get more tips, support and advice like these join our facebook members only community at:

[**Moon & Back Foster Carer Support and Advice Hub**](#)

A different kind of fostering agency

To The Moon and Back is the vision of two friends, Angela and Alison, whose background is in social work and caring professions

After working in the fostering field for some time, they both wanted to create a special kind of fostering agency. Their goal was to provide the best possible outcomes for children in their care by putting wellbeing at their core of the agency. This agency would cherish the brilliant foster carers who opened their hearts and homes to children in need of a new start.

We are passionate about providing better outcomes for fostered children. So, we decided to build this new kind of agency from scratch, starting with values based on social pedagogy. This method puts foster carers at the heart of the child care team and recognises the vital role they play in helping children to develop and learn.

Social pedagogy is used in many parts of Europe and is based on holistic learning, empowerment, supporting wellbeing and building trusting relationships.

Using these ideas, our aim is to enable a child in foster care to reach their true potential thanks to the foster carer's resilience, skills and confidence. We listen to and value our foster carers, giving them the chance to affect how our organisation improves. And we provide round the clock support, when needed.



A generous and competitive Foster Care Allowance that could amount to £24,000 per year

Paid respite, so you can take a break

Regular family events, meet-ups and a warm welcome into a network of other local foster carers

A support line open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year

Training that goes beyond the mandatory course, including specialist trauma awareness training

The opportunity to become a fostering mentor

A caring team who listen to your opinions

A dedicated social worker who provides regular supervision

An agency that puts foster carers at the heart of the child care team

Get in touch for a friendly chat

01223 800420 | hello@moonandbackfostering.com

Or visit us at: Future Business Centre, King's Hedges Road, Cambridge CB4 2HY