



**Orange Grove**

fostercare

support, nurture, grow



# New to Fostering?

Download Our  
Ultimate Guide

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# Welcome to Orange Grove

Hello! Welcome to Orange Grove. We're thrilled that you're thinking about starting your fostering journey with us.

The world of fostering might seem complex at first, which is why we've created this handy guide. From what fostering is and how to become a foster parent to fostering allowances and welcoming your first child, you'll learn everything there is to know about being a foster parent with Orange Grove.

If you have any questions, we're here to help! Just call us on **0800 369 8513** or submit an online enquiry form, and we'll contact you.





# A little bit about us

## Our story began in 1996.

**We were founded by two experienced social workers who understood that connection and collaboration are at the heart of transforming the lives of young people in care.**

For over 25 years, we've been building villages of tailored support around our foster families, which include dedicated professionals who specialise in social work, therapy, education, and more. We work closely with each foster family to help them meet the individual needs of children in their care.

Today, we support around 400 children, helping them heal, build long-lasting bonds and work towards a brighter future. Ofsted has rated all our centres as either 'Good' or 'Outstanding', reflecting our commitment to providing quality care and helping children thrive.

If you join us, you'll be warmly welcomed into our fostering family. We'll really get to know you, ensuring every member of your family feels respected, valued, and heard. We'll be by your side at every stage of your fostering journey, helping you develop professionally and make a lasting difference in the lives of vulnerable children and young people.

"I've been working with Orange Grove for 16 years now, and it's been absolutely incredible. I feel supported, I feel valued, and I know there's always someone I can call on. My social workers have never let me down - they're always responsive to anything I might need or ask for, and they're genuinely interested in our progress as foster parents. That feels pretty good."

Kathy, foster parent





# What is fostering?

When a child or young person is unable to live with their birth family, the local authority becomes responsible for their well-being. They work with fostering agencies like us to find them a safe home until they can return to their families or alternative arrangements are made for their care, such as adoption.

At Orange Grove, fostering is about more than providing children and young people with physical safety. It's about finding them the right home with foster parents who love them like their own and provide a foundation for them to heal from their past experiences, create positive new memories, and begin rebuilding their lives.



# Why do children need foster care?

**Each child's background and story is unique. But the sad fact is that 66% of children who are unable to live with their families have experienced some form of abuse or neglect. This could include having their physical, emotional, or educational needs neglected or being a victim of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.**

**Children move into care if their well-being is at risk, which means there are a few other reasons why a child may need a foster home, including:**

**Family dysfunction:** There may be an ongoing sibling conflict, parent-child conflict, or domestic violence in the home.

**Family in acute stress:** If a family is going through a crisis, such as the death of a relative, homelessness, or financial issues, a child may need temporary foster care while the family recovers.

**Parental illness:** If a parent becomes unwell and needs hospital care but there is no suitable guardian for their child, fostering ensures the child's needs are met while their parent or guardian is treated.

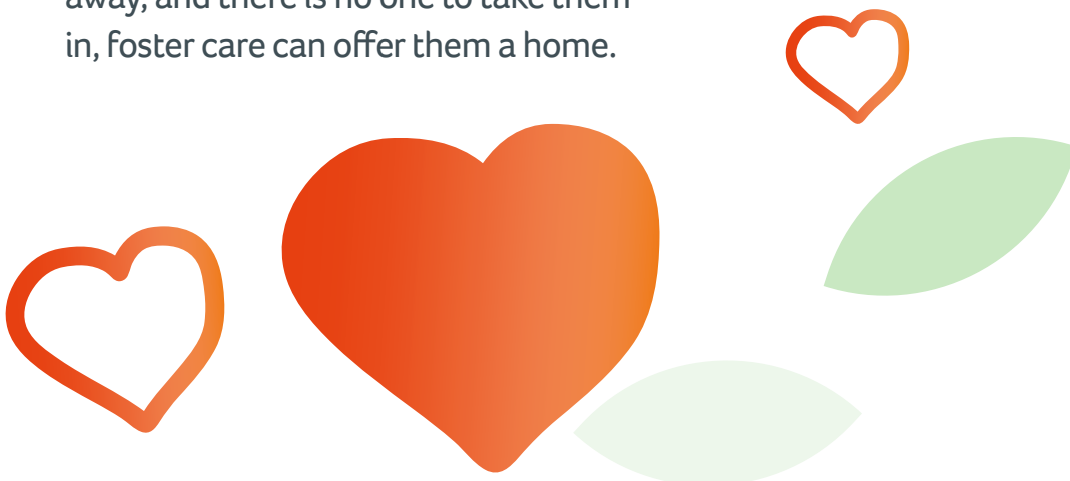
**Death of a parent or guardian:** If the child's parent or guardian has passed away, and there is no one to take them in, foster care can offer them a home.

**Absent parenting:** If a parent is physically available for their child but emotionally disconnected or uninvolved in their life, the child may need foster care to prevent neglect.

**Seeking asylum:** Sometimes, children seek asylum without a parent or guardian and need a safe home in the UK.

Every child who moves into care will have experienced some form of loss and grief. Whether it be having their trust broken by those who were meant to protect them, leaving their family behind, or losing a sense of who they are, they need help to pick up the pieces and find the strength to begin again. That's where foster care can make all the difference.

Foster care is about providing a foundation that many of us take for granted – a safe, stable, and loving home where a child's well-being is not only protected but nurtured. A place to call home, where they can be themselves, are encouraged to achieve and are supported on their healing journey.





# Why foster?

During childhood, our time is spent exploring and learning about the world. We rely on our parents to keep us safe, teach us about relationships, and offer comfort when new things feel scary. These early experiences help us understand who we are and where we belong, lighting the way as we grow and look towards the future.

When children receive consistent love and attention, have their needs met and know there is always someone they can turn to, it helps them feel safe to explore the world beyond their family unit and discover what makes them unique and special.

But when a child's younger years are fraught with abuse, neglect, loss, or grief, they may struggle to understand how they fit into the world, where they belong, and who they can trust. They might find it difficult to form healthy relationships or believe in themselves, needing help to uncover their strengths.

As a foster parent, you have a chance to change the lives of children who have had a difficult start and experienced the unimaginable in their early years. By opening your heart and home, showing them that you care, and consistently meeting their needs, you can help them build their self-esteem, learn to trust others, and realise their full potential.

This is what makes fostering one of the most rewarding vocations, and at Orange Grove, we're here to support you every step of the way. Learn more about training and support later in this guide.

**One of the most amazing things is seeing how your foster children grow when they're given the time and the space to settle in and just be themselves. My children have gained so much confidence since they first arrived, you'd really have to see it to believe the difference. You have to be there for them through anything so that they realise that no matter what, you'll be by their side.**

Diana, foster parent





# Types of fostering

Children need foster homes for varying lengths of time, depending on their situations and circumstances. Some may live with their foster families for a couple of days, whereas others may stay until they reach adulthood.

That's why, at Orange Grove, we offer different kinds of fostering to meet each child's individual needs.

As a foster parent, this means you can choose which type of fostering to offer based on your lifestyle, skills, and family. For example, if you have other responsibilities in your life that would make it difficult for you to commit to fostering a child long-term, you could provide respite, emergency, or short-term care.

Regardless of which type of fostering you choose, you'll still be making a positive impact on a vulnerable child or young person who needs a loving home, even if it's only for a few days.

Below are the types of fostering we offer.





## Emergency fostering

Sometimes, children need a foster home at very short notice. For example, if a safeguarding concern has been raised and a child is at immediate risk, or if a parent gets admitted to hospital and there is no one suitable to care for the child.

Emergency fostering typically lasts from one to five nights until a longer-term plan is made for the child, such as returning home if it's safe to do so or moving to a foster family that can provide care for an extended period of time.

If you choose to offer emergency fostering, you'll need to be available at a moment's notice and prepared to welcome a child at the weekend or in the middle of the night.

This type of fostering could be perfect for you if your schedule is flexible, you can stay calm in a crisis and have a home that's always ready to welcome a vulnerable child.

## Short-term fostering

Short-term fostering usually lasts from a few days to around two years and occasionally longer if necessary. There are a few reasons why a child may need a short-term foster home, for instance, if their family is involved in court proceedings or if the child is waiting to be adopted.

Like emergency foster care, short-term fostering provides a safe and supportive stepping stone for children and young people while decisions about their long-term care are made.

If you choose this type of fostering, you'll provide children and young people with stability when they need it most, helping them feel more grounded and hopeful after their world has been turned upside down.

You'll support them as they prepare to return home, move to a long-term foster family, or join their forever family through adoption.





## Parent and child fostering

### Long-term fostering

Some children and young people are unable to return to their birth families due to safety concerns or the death of a parent, so it's just not possible.

Long-term foster parents provide these children and young people with safety, stability and a loving home until they reach adulthood and sometimes beyond.

If you choose this type of fostering, the children you care for will truly become part of your family. You'll provide them with the time and space to put down roots, build healthy relationships, and work towards a future without limits.

If you want to start or grow your family, long-term fostering could be the ideal type of fostering for you. You'll guide a child through transitions like their teenage years, moving to secondary school, and leaving care, seeing the impact you have unfold as you nurture their well-being.

Sometimes, parents need a little extra help when preparing for the arrival of their baby and in the early days of parenthood. While many parents may turn to their friends and families for support, some don't have this option, especially if they've experienced difficult childhoods themselves.

That's where parent and child fostering comes in. If you decide to become a parent and child foster parent, you'll welcome a mum or dad (sometimes both) and their baby into your home and teach them the essential caregiving skills needed to parent on their own.

During their time with you, the local authority will assess the parent's progress to help them make decisions about the long-term care of the child. This type of fostering arrangement can begin during pregnancy, not long after birth, or a bit later if there are concerns about the child's care.

Due to the specialist nature of parent and child fostering, foster parents usually need at least two years of fostering experience and a background with young children, such as raising children themselves or working in a related profession like midwifery.





## Respite fostering

Although fostering is rewarding, it can also be challenging, and sometimes foster parents need to take a short break to rest and recharge.

As a respite foster parent, you'll become like the extended family for children living with other foster families, offering them a familiar and comforting place to stay while their foster parents recuperate.

If you want to make a difference but have other responsibilities, which means you can't commit to fostering a child for a lengthier period of time, respite fostering could be the right choice for you.

Respite fostering arrangements are typically planned a few weeks in advance, with children staying from a couple of nights up to two weeks at a time.

## Fostering siblings

Many children who move into foster care are part of a sibling group, but sadly, 37% of them are separated.

For children in care, their relationship with a sibling may be the only stable and loving connection they've known before moving into care. Losing that connection can have a detrimental impact on their mental health and emotional well-being.

When you foster siblings, you help preserve and nurture the sibling bond. You give brothers and sisters the time and space to heal and grow with someone who truly understands their experiences. Moving into care can be an anxious and frightening time, but having a sibling's hand to hold can offer children comfort and reassurance.

Due to the specialist nature of parent and child fostering, foster parents usually need at least two years of fostering experience and a background with young children, such as raising children themselves or working in a related profession like midwifery.



## Fostering teenagers

65% of looked-after children are aged 10 years and over. This means that most of the children who need a foster home are either on the verge of becoming teenagers or are teenagers already.

When you foster a teenager, you have a chance to make a real difference to their outcomes. You'll support them in managing their emotions, helping them build life skills, and guiding them as they explore future opportunities.

Teenagers are still children who need patience, understanding and love to navigate our complex world. They need foster parents who'll believe in them, listen without judgment, and show them that their past doesn't have to dictate their future.

## Fostering children with disabilities

Many children in care are living with disabilities or complex health needs. These children require specialist care from foster parents who understand their condition and can provide the care they need.

If you choose this type of fostering, you'll receive dedicated support and training tailored to the child in your care. We'll make sure that you have everything you need, including access to occupational therapists, local support groups, and education specialists, to help the child in your care reach their full potential.

Fostering a child with disabilities can be more physically demanding and time-consuming but all the more rewarding as you help the child in your care have new experiences, manage their symptoms, and flourish in your care.

# Fostering sanctuary-seeking children

The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving in the UK is increasing. These children have often had no choice but to flee their home countries due to war, persecution, or famine before facing a dangerous journey to safety.

When these children arrive in the UK, they need safe homes with foster parents who can help them navigate a new country, language, and culture.

At Orange Grove, wherever possible, we'll match children with foster families who share the same language, religion and culture. But if we can't, you'll receive training to help nurture these aspects of a child's identity.

When you foster sanctuary-seeking children, you'll help them put their lives back together, providing them the love and care they deserve and a safe haven for them to heal from their past experiences.

## Who can foster?

**You don't need any prior experience to become a foster parent, but there are a few initial requirements. To foster in the UK, you must:**

- Be over 21, there is no upper age limit.
- Have the legal right to live and work in the UK.
- Have a spare bedroom for the exclusive use of a child.
- Be dedicated and passionate about supporting a child in care.

Foster parents can be single, married, or cohabiting, and your sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion, or culture will not impact your application. You can also foster if you have a disability or mental health condition, just as long as it won't impact your ability to provide the best possible care and your well-being isn't negatively affected.





# Role of a foster parent

**One of the most rewarding things about fostering is the transformative effect it can have on a child who has had a difficult start to life. Your dedication, love, and consistent care will not only improve their outcomes but could also shape future generations.**

**Every child will have different needs, but the primary responsibilities of a foster parent include:**

- Helping children heal from their past experiences by providing them with a safe and stable home where they feel understood, heard, and loved.
- Ensuring each child's physical, emotional, developmental, and educational needs are met.
- Collaborating with our village of fostering professionals, such as therapists and education experts, to make sure children in your care receive the support they need.
- Taking children to school, appointments, and meetings.
- Nurturing and preserving each child's relationships by taking them to family time arrangements.
- Working with your supervising social worker, the child's social worker, and other local fostering specialists to help each child thrive.
- Keeping daily logs of each child's behaviour, well-being, and achievements.
- Recording and reporting safeguarding concerns and changes in your household to your supervising social worker.
- Helping children build resilience, self-esteem, and confidence.
- Teaching young people life skills to prepare them for leaving care, such as budgeting, time management, and cooking.
- Advocating for each child and ensuring their best interests are always at the heart of decisions made about their education, care, and family time arrangements.
- Encouraging children to explore their interests and hobbies.
- Helping each child prepare to return to their birth family, leave care, or move to a long-term home.



# The fostering process

The process of becoming a foster parent usually takes between four to six months, giving you the chance to learn more about the role and reflect on whether it's the right decision for you and your family.

At Orange Grove, we've streamlined the fostering process, breaking it down into five simple steps so you know exactly where you are and what will happen next. The five steps are as follows:

## Step 1: Enquiry

The first step to becoming a foster parent is making an initial enquiry. You can either call us on 0800 369 8513 or fill in your details using our online enquiry form, and one of our experienced fostering advisors will be in touch.

If you'd like to learn more about fostering before you enquire, we have lots of information available on our website.

Our foster parent and care leaver stories give you a real insight into what it's like to be a foster parent with Orange Grove, and our blogs share in-depth guidance, advice, and general information about various aspects of fostering. Every week, we also host virtual 'Introduction to Fostering' events where you can ask questions and get to know about the role of a foster parent in more detail.

## Step 2: Home visit

Following your initial enquiry, if you're happy with everything and want to move forward, our fostering advisors will organise a home visit.

A member of the Orange Grove team will either visit you at home or meet with you virtually via a video call. They'll provide a comprehensive overview of fostering, including the challenges and rewards, fostering pay, support, and training.

You'll have plenty of time to ask questions so you can make an informed decision about whether to submit an application.

### Step 3: Application

Now you know exactly what fostering is all about, it's time to submit your application.

The application form is easy to navigate and will ask you to input details such as your basic personal information, other people living in your household, and your reasons for wanting to foster.

Once submitted, our assessment manager will review your application, and if accepted, we'll assign an assessing social worker to you who'll begin your fostering assessment.

### Step 4: Assessment

The fostering assessment makes up the majority of the fostering process, taking three to six months to complete. This may seem like a long time, but we need to ensure every foster parent can provide vulnerable children with a safe, stable, and nurturing home.

The fostering assessment aims to gain a deeper understanding of your life and the qualities that would make you a good foster parent. Your assessing social worker will visit you at home six to eight times to gather information about you and your household to complete a detailed report called Form F.

Don't worry - your assessing social worker will guide you through the assessment, and our recruitment team is always on hand if you have any questions or need advice.



# Background checks

As part of your fostering assessment, we'll complete some checks to gain a well-rounded picture of who you are and your suitability to foster. Foster parent checks are a legal requirement in the UK, helping to safeguard children and ensure foster parents can meet their needs. They include:

## Full Disclosure and Barring Service Check (DBS)

Every household member over the age of 18 will have a DBS check, which includes criminal convictions, cautions and any records held by the police. If a friend or family member is likely to have regular contact with children in your care, they may also need a DBS check. Foster parents who have lived overseas for more than 12 months in the past 10 years may also undergo additional checks.

## Local Authority checks

We'll reach out to the local authorities in areas you've lived over the past 10 years (sometimes longer) to find out whether there have been any safeguarding concerns or contact with social services. If you have children of your own, we'll also talk to their school.

## Medical assessment

Whether you have an existing health condition or not, your GP will assess whether you're medically fit to foster while ensuring fostering won't negatively impact your physical and mental health either.

## Home safety checks

We'll assess the safety of your home, highlighting any issues that may need to be addressed before we can approve you to welcome a child. This includes things like smoke detectors, carbon monoxide alarms, hot tub and pond safety, and storage of medication.



### **Pet assessment**

If you have a pet, we need to confirm that they are safe to be around children and young people. If you own a banned dog breed, we won't be able to continue with your fostering assessment unless you relinquish them.

### **Financial assessment**

Although when you foster with Orange Grove, you receive a generous fostering allowance, we need to be sure that fostering won't put you under financial strain.

We receive hundreds of referrals every day, but you may occasionally experience a gap between placements. We need to know how you'll manage these periods and whether you have any other sources of income to fall back on. We'll also consider any large debts that could put you under financial pressure.







## References

**Along with background checks, we'll also talk to other people in your life to gain a broader understanding of who you are and ask them to supply references. We require each applicant to provide:**

- Two personal references from individuals who've known you for over five years, such as a colleague, friend, or neighbour.
- A reference from a family member – this could be an uncle, auntie, parent, or sibling. However, we don't accept family references from biological children.
- A professional reference from your current employer. If you have been in your current role for less than five years, we'll need to obtain references from any other employers you've worked for during this time. If your work history includes roles involving children or vulnerable adults, either paid or voluntary, we'll also need a reference from these employments.
- References from significant partners. This means relationships that lasted more than two years, where you lived together or shared children. However, we won't contact an ex-partner if it's not in your best interests or would put you at risk. In this case, we would ask you to provide a reference from someone who knew you around the time you were in the relationship instead, such as a relative or friend.





## Fostering assessment questions

As part of the fostering assessment, we'll ask you some questions about your background, lifestyle, and motivation to foster. Your answers will help us understand how you'll manage the challenges that come with fostering and whether you'll need any additional support on your fostering journey. Your assessing social worker will also speak to your children to make sure fostering is right for your whole family.

Questions will go into depth, covering every area of your life, including:

- Your reasons for wanting to foster and your understanding of what becoming a foster parent involves.
- Life experiences, including challenges that you've overcome.
- Work experience and transferable skills.
- Any experience you have with children, such as raising your own or helping family members with theirs.
- Living arrangements – who lives in your home, whether you have any pets, and how each household member feels about fostering.
- Childhood experiences and your family background.
- Past and present romantic relationships.
- Your support network, including your extended family and friends.
- Current commitments and whether you intend to work alongside fostering.
- Getting to know your personality, hobbies, and interests a little better.
- Your cultural and religious background.
- Fostering preferences, such as whether you're open to fostering siblings, children from different cultural or religious backgrounds, or particular age ranges.
- How you manage stress and challenges.
- Your physical and mental health.
- Whether you've experienced any significant changes in your life recently, such as a relationship breakdown, a new baby, or job loss.
- Don't worry – fostering assessment questions aren't designed to catch you out. They are a way for us to get to know you better, understand how fostering will fit into your life, and make sure you're ready to start this exciting new chapter.



### Step 5: Fostering Panel

Once your assessing social worker has completed your assessment, compiled the information into your Form F report, and believes you're ready, the next step is to attend your fostering panel meeting.

Your fostering panel meeting may take place face-to-face but is more likely to happen virtually via Teams. Between five and seven independent panel members will review your Form F assessment and ask you some questions to help them better understand the details provided.

We know that this part of the fostering process can be daunting, so we spoke to Jodie, who has been fostering with Orange Grove alongside her wife Holly since 2024, to find out what their fostering panel meeting was like.



**Jodie said, "The panel experience was very nerve-wracking at first, but we had a lot of support from our social worker. She even said, 'These are some areas they may want to probe a bit further,' so we already felt prepared because we had an idea of what might come up."**

**"They asked us a lot of questions about our motivation and why we thought we might be good in the role. They were trying to get a flavour of who we are, touching on things that might have come up during the assessment process as a potential weakness or areas we might struggle with, then seeing how we responded."**

**"The panel were all very friendly. Nobody seemed like they were out to get us, and they were even sharing their own experiences. It just felt like they were trying to understand whether we had fully considered all of the challenges that we might face."**

Once the meeting is over, the panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker about your suitability to foster. Occasionally, they may defer their decision if they need further information before making a recommendation.

The Agency Decision Maker typically has seven days to make the final decision and confirm your approval to foster. You'll then sign a foster carer agreement and meet your supervising social worker if you haven't already.





# Training

**Fostering and parenting your own children have many similarities. But one of the biggest differences is the training you receive when you become a foster parent, especially when you foster with Orange Grove.**

At Orange Grove, our training not only equips foster parents with the knowledge, skills, and tools to foster but also builds confidence, resilience, and understanding to manage any challenges the role may bring.

Our training begins during your assessment and continues throughout your fostering journey, helping you develop professionally, and access training tailored to the needs of each child in your care.

You'll also have the flexibility to schedule training around other commitments with our blended learning approach. We offer a mix of virtual daytime and evening sessions, face-to-face courses, and e-learning modules, giving you control over how and when you learn.

## Pre-approval training

During the assessment stage of the fostering process, you'll attend our 'Prepare to Foster' training. On this 2-to-3-day course, we'll introduce you to key topics, such as child development, attachment, trauma and safeguarding. You'll also meet current foster parents, fostering professionals, and care leavers, giving you a real insight into what it's like to be a foster parent.

## Mandatory training

Once you're officially approved, during your first year of fostering, you'll need to complete our mandatory training to comply with the Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards.

- Mandatory modules include:
- Safeguarding

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Medication and Health Care
- Health and Safety at Home
- PRICE (Protecting Rights in a Caring Environment)
- First Aid
- Safer Caring and Allegations

Some modules, such as Safer Caring and Allegations, First Aid, and PRICE, will need refreshing every three years.

Although this training is a legal requirement, it also benefits you, providing a solid foundation to build further knowledge, skills, and confidence within your role.





## Advanced training

Our advanced training is where you can really start expanding your knowledge.

Whether the child in your care has a specific need or you want to deepen your understanding of a particular topic, we offer a huge range of interesting courses for every stage of your fostering journey.

When you join Orange Grove, you'll have easy access to our library of resources and upcoming training sessions. Just log on and sign up for the courses you feel will be most helpful for you.

We have our own in-house trainers but also regularly invite guest speakers, including care leavers and specialists, to lead training sessions. These sessions are a safe space where you can share your experiences, ask for advice, and learn from others.

Here's a glimpse of the advanced courses we offer:

- The Theory Behind Dishonesty in Children
- Body Image and Perception
- Caring for a Child from a Different Ethnicity, Race, or Religion
- Emotional Needs of Children & Young People
- Gaming and Gambling Awareness and Harm Prevention
- Bullying and Cyberbullying
- Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder



# Support for foster parents

At Orange Grove, you don't walk your fostering journey alone. When you join us, you become part of our fostering family, which means you'll always have someone to lean on, learn from, and share the highs and lows of fostering with.

We have worked hard to build a community that empowers foster families by offering the following support:

**Supervising social worker:** You'll have your very own dedicated supervising social worker. They'll check in with you regularly and visit you at home to see how you're getting on. Whether you need advice, guidance, or just a listening ear, they'll be there for your whole family.

**Family support worker:** Our family support workers provide practical support, ensuring every family member feels comfortable, valued, and heard within the foster home.

**Education specialist:** We help you meet the educational needs of children in your care by providing in-house education experts who can offer guidance and advice on any school-related issues.

**Therapy services:** We help you take care of your mental health by giving you easy access to a therapist whenever needed.

**24/7 helpline:** No matter the situation or time of day, you can speak to a qualified social worker around the clock.

**Support groups:** We organise regular support groups where you can meet new and experienced foster parents. These groups offer a fantastic opportunity to build friendships, ask questions, and learn from the lived experiences of other foster parents.

Here's what some of our current foster parents have to say about the support they receive from Orange Grove.

"We've been lucky, because we've had the same supervising social worker the whole time. Not only has that been good for us, but I think it's also really beneficial for the children, especially when they've been with you for a long time. They see that same familiar face, which gives them a chance to bond and build a rapport."

"Denise has been on her fostering journey with Orange Grove since 2014, she said, "Orange Grove has given us amazing support."

"Kathy has been fostering with Orange Grove for nearly 20 years, she said, "You know, there are moments when it can feel like a bit of a struggle but I know that I have people that I can call on for help. I feel supported, I feel valued and I know I have someone that I can rely on. My social workers have never let me down, they're always responsive to anything I might need or ask for and they're genuinely interested in our progress as foster parents and that feels pretty good."

Julie has been fostering with Orange Grove since 2022, she said, "You need help along the way. Having a fantastic social worker is absolutely key. Mine is there for me at any time. I mean, it doesn't matter if it's 8:00 in the morning or 8:00 at night – if I need her, she'll be there."



# Foster parent well-being

At Orange Grove, the well-being of our foster parents matters. When you're busy taking care of vulnerable children and young people, we take care of you. We do this by:

Therapeutically training our whole team, who are always available to offer their support.

Regularly organising family fun days and activities where you can take a break from the day-to-day routine and relax in the company of those who truly get it.

Giving you access to a therapist who can provide tailored support.

Providing easy access to workout routines, guided meditations, and nutritious recipes on our foster parent portal.

Offering training sessions on mental health, including our **'Who's caring for you?'** course that helps you create self-care strategies to prevent and recover from burnout and compassion fatigue.

Organising up to two weeks of paid respite care each year so you have time to rest and recuperate.



**"I've had support from a therapist to help me work through my emotions, and they put things in place for me so that I could grieve for my brother. If I have a wobble, I know they're there to support me and to help with my foster daughter."**

**Julie, foster parent**







## Support for children in foster care

Children are at the centre of our community here at Orange Grove. Their well-being, happiness, and healing are our top priorities, and we do everything within our power to help them thrive.

This all begins with matching children with the right foster families. Foster families who help them feel safe, understood, and accepted for who they are and support their long-term development. Learn more about matching later in this guide.

We then surround each child with tailored support that nurtures every aspect of their well-being:

We take the time to understand each child's hopes for the future. Some children have a career in mind or want to pursue a hobby, while others simply want to feel happy and secure. Whatever their aspirations, we work together to build a personalised pathway plan with achievable steps to help them reach their goals.

Every month, a dedicated social worker will pop into your home to see how the child in your care is getting on. They'll listen to their experiences and monitor their progress to ensure it aligns with their pathway plan.

We believe that every child deserves a high-quality education that opens doors and inspires dreams. However, many children in care have experienced some disruption in their education. Our education specialists help children find the right schools and support, working with teaching professionals to create individualised learning plans.

When you welcome a child into your home, they're on a healing journey, and sometimes they need help along the way. That's why we give children access to therapists and counsellors to support their recovery.

Being a child in care can be a lonely experience, which is why we regularly arrange support groups, fun activities, and events to help them connect with children who have similar experiences.



# Support for children who foster

When you foster, so does your family. If you have your own children, it's important to talk to them about how things might change once you welcome a child into your home.

At Orange Grove, we have created a range of resources that can help you start conversations with your own children about fostering so they understand what it really means.

## **We also offer the following support for children who foster:**

**Family support workers:** Our family support workers help children who foster by introducing them to people in their situation or stepping in to care for children you foster so you can spend some one-on-one time with your own children.

**Forums and support groups:** We host regular forums and support groups for the children of foster parents where they can vent their frustrations, share positive stories, and connect with others who truly understand what it's like to be part of a fostering family.

**Recognition and rewards:** Children who foster play a significant role in helping children in care feel at home. We recognise their kindness, compassion, and empathy by celebrating Sons and Daughters Month every year and rewarding them with thank-you gifts and special activities.

At Orange Grove, every voice matters. That's why we ask children who foster to share their feedback so we can improve our support services and make sure they feel valued, heard, and appreciated for opening their homes and hearts to children in care.

Watch Skye discuss her experiences of being part of a fostering family since the age of three, including creating happy memories with her foster brothers and sisters.





# Fostering allowances

At Orange Grove, we value the time and effort our compassionate foster parents put into caring for vulnerable children and young people. That's why when you foster with us, you receive a generous fostering allowance that's far above the recommendations set by the Fostering Network. What's more, it's typically tax-free!

We split foster parent pay into two parts:

- **Child's allowance:** This covers the costs of caring for a child, including things like food, clothing, hobbies, travel expenses, and more.
- **Foster parent payment:** This rewards you for your hard work, dedication and experience, ensuring you can foster without worrying about your finances.

## How does fostering pay work?

We keep it simple, providing a clear payment structure based on the age of the children you foster and your level of experience.

## The child's age

The costs to raise a child increase as they get older, so we have three categories that affect fostering pay:

1. **Age 0-4**
2. **Age 5 – 10**
3. **Age 11 – 17**



## Your fostering experience

We are committed to your professional development, allocating a 'grade' of pay that reflects your level of experience:

- **Grade 1:** You're new to fostering and will receive between £390 and £477 per week per child.
- **Grade 2:** You've been fostering for 12 months and completed your Training, Support, and Development (TSD) Standards alongside all mandatory training. Grade 2 foster parents receive between £400 and £487 per week per child.
- **Grade 3:** You've been fostering for 3 years and have demonstrated the positive impact you're having on the outcomes of young people. Grade 3 foster parents receive between £410 and £497 per week per child.

We'll pay you monthly, calculating payments based on the child's age, your grade, and the number of nights the child has been in your care that month.



# Additional rewards and benefits

At Orange Grove, on top of receiving a generous fostering allowance, you'll also have access to some incredible perks, including:

- Additional payments to spend on celebrating birthdays and religious festivals for each child in your care.
- Mileage allowance in case you need to do any extra travelling when caring for a child.
- Two weeks of paid respite each year.
- Free membership to FosterTalk for even more support.
- Access to our foster parent rewards platform, which can save you money on your grocery shop, days out, holidays, and so much more.
- A bonus of up to £3000 for each family you successfully refer to us.

## Foster parent tax relief

One of the great things about fostering allowances is that due to a special tax rule called 'Qualifying Care Relief' (QCR), you often aren't required to pay any tax at all.

There are two elements to QCR:

- Annual tax exemption of £19,690.
- Tax relief for every week a child is in your care – £415 per week per child under 11 years old and £495 per week per child over 11 years old.

These two elements are combined to calculate your QCR for the tax year. If your fostering income is below your QCR, you won't pay tax. The figures above apply to QCR for the tax year 2025/26, and they usually increase annually.



# Paying tax and national insurance contributions

Foster parents are classed as self-employed, so regardless of the type of fostering you provide, as soon as you begin fostering, you'll need to contact HMRC to let them know. From then on, you'll have to submit a tax return every year, even if you don't qualify to pay tax.

When it comes to National Insurance contributions, there are three that apply to foster parents:

## Class 2 NICs

These give you access to contributory-based benefits such as Maternity Allowance and Employment Support Allowance.

Your taxable income is the amount of fostering pay above the Qualifying Care Relief Threshold. If this is between £6,725 and £12,570 (24/25) for the tax year, you won't have to pay because they'll automatically be considered paid.

If your taxable income from fostering is below the Small Income Threshold, which is currently £6,725 (24/25), you don't have to pay Class 2 NICs. But you can still choose to pay them if you want to secure your access to contributory-based benefits if you should ever need them in the future.

## Class 3 (NI Credits)

National Insurance credits make sure you can still receive your state pension by preventing gaps in qualifying years. You can apply for Class 3 NI Credits by submitting a CFA11A form online or via post. You'll need a letter from Orange Grove that proves you've been fostering for the tax years you apply.

## Class 4 NICs

If your taxable income from fostering exceeds £12,570 but is below £50,270 (24/25), you'll pay 6% in Class 4 NICs. If you earn more than £50,270 in taxable income, you'll pay 2% in Class 4 NICs.



## Can I claim benefits while fostering?

Yes, foster parents can claim benefits while fostering, but whether you're eligible depends on your personal circumstances.

Means-tested benefits such as Universal Credit, Pension Credit, and Housing Benefit use your income, savings, and other capital to work out whether you qualify. However, it's important to note that your income from fostering is usually ignored. This means if you were eligible for a means-tested benefit before becoming an approved foster parent, you'll likely still qualify once you start fostering.

You may also qualify for non-means-tested benefits, such as Disability Living Allowance, and you can still claim Child Benefit for your own children.

For more in-depth guidance about tax, national insurance, and claiming benefits while fostering, check out our financial guide.



# Can I work while fostering?

At Orange Grove, we understand that everyone's circumstances are different, and some people prefer to continue working alongside fostering for various reasons. Whether it's possible or not depends on a few factors:

## How flexible is your employer?

Fostering can be unpredictable at times. You may need to take time off at short notice to look after a child in your care, for example, if they are unwell and can't go to school.

## What hours will you work?

As a foster parent, you'll have household tasks, school runs, and appointments on your to-do list, so working part-time may be more manageable than full-time employment.

## Are you applying with a partner?

If you're applying to foster as a couple, it could be feasible for one of you to work full-time while the other looks after children in your care.

## What type of fostering do you want to provide?

If you want to become a respite foster parent, working while fostering will be easier to manage than if you want to foster long-term.

## Do you have an age preference?

If you'd prefer to foster younger children, they require more hands-on care, whereas if you foster teenagers, they tend to be more independent.

## Are you open to fostering children's specialist needs?

If you foster a child with complex needs, they'll need more time and attention. They may also need to attend medical appointments more regularly.

## Do you have a reliable support network?

When it comes to caring for children while working, your support network is everything. At Orange Grove, you can nominate a family member or close friend to become a backup carer. They'll go through a mini-assessment and background checks so they can help you with day-to-day care, including things like school runs and caring for children at your home until you finish work.

During the fostering assessment, we'll talk to you about working while fostering and assess whether it would be feasible for your family. We need to make sure that your employment won't impact your ability to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing home for children and young people.





# Welcoming a child

At Orange Grove, we don't just match children with any family. Every child's background, needs, and personality are different, and improving their outcomes starts by ensuring they live with the right foster family.

That's why we ask for so much detail about you and your family during the assessment. We use this information to create your digital profile, which helps the referral teams quickly assess whether your preferences, skills, and experience align with a child's needs.

## Below is a step-by-step of the matching process.

From referral to matching

### Step 1

If a local authority is unable to find a home for a child within their pool of foster parents, they'll send us a referral. This will include key details, such as the child's age, needs, and reasons for being in care.

### Step 2

Our experienced referral teams will review the referral, using our foster parent digital profiles to find a potential match. They'll consider your location, preferences, skills, and experience.

### Step 3

If the referral teams believe you'd be a good match for a child, we'll contact you to discuss the child, providing as much detail as possible. You'll then decide whether you agree with the match.

### Step 4

If you agree, we'll send your foster parent profile to the child's local authority. They'll compare your profile with those of other foster parents to decide which family is the best fit for the child.

### Step 5

If the local authority agrees that you are the best match for the child, we'll all work together to create a plan to move the child into your care. This will involve us, you, your supervising social worker, and the child's local authority.

### Step 6

Once a match is confirmed and a plan made, if possible, we'll arrange for you to meet the child or young person before they move into your home. However, if you choose to foster a child in an emergency, it's unlikely that you'll be able to meet them beforehand due to the urgency of the situation.

### Step 7

You'll welcome the child into your home. We're here to support you and your family throughout the matching process and will never pressure you into accepting a match.





## Helping a child settle in

**When a child moves into your home, they may feel very anxious and disorientated as they try to make sense of what's happening.**

We encourage all our foster parents to create a family book so a child can learn a little bit about you and your family before they move in. You could include a photograph of you, your children, pets and any other household members, alongside a small introduction.

Here are some other practical tips to help you support a child when they first move into your home:

**Wear name tags:** You can help ease a child's worries about remembering everyone's name by wearing name tags for the first few days.

**Prepare their bedroom:** Make sure their room is ready, but try to keep personal touches to a minimum so the child in your care can make it their own when they move in.

**Create a welcome basket:** Children may turn up with just the clothes on their backs and may struggle to ask for specific items during their first few days. Creating a welcome basket that includes necessities like shampoo, body wash, bottles of water, and snacks could help them feel more at home.

**Cook their favourite meals:** While a child is settling in, cook their favourite meals. The familiar tastes, textures, and smells could provide a sense of normality.

**Let them set the pace:** You and your family may be eager to get to know a child, but having had their whole world turned upside down, they'll need your patience and understanding while they come to terms with their new living situation.

We're by your side throughout your fostering journey. Whether it be your first day or fifth year as a foster parent, if you need advice or have any concerns, we're always at the other end of the phone to support you.

# Foster parent advice for your first day with a child

The best advice comes from those who have first-hand experience of welcoming a child into their home – our foster parents.

“Clear your schedule for the big day. It’s important that you don’t plan to have any visitors, other commitments or other distractions. Plan a nice calm activity, or just let the young person relax and enjoy some of their favourite TV shows. Make sure you’re there for the child as things will be especially tough in those first few days.”

“We like to make sure that we have something nice for dinner, maybe a homemade meal or a take-out. It’s important to give children all the space they need at this early stage and they will need time to build trust, so we don’t pressure them to spend time with us if they’d rather have some time to decompress in their room. Most importantly, smile!”

“Get as much information as you can from a child’s referral so you can help to make them welcome. For example, if I learned that a child loved getting creative, I might leave a notebook and coloured pens in their bedroom as a welcome gift. Be aware that some children may arrive with nothing, so you may need to pop to the shops to grab some essentials.”







# Next Steps

Ready to take the next step and join our incredible foster parents who make a huge difference in the lives of children and young people every day?

Call us on **0800 369 8513** or submit an online enquiry form, and one of our friendly fostering advisors will be in touch.

“Go for it, just have a go. It isn’t an easy journey, but it’s very rewarding.”

Caroline, foster parent

## contact us

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