

Family Plus Team

What is family and friends foster care?

Family and friends foster carers provide care to children and young people who are related to them through family or friendship connections and who are in the care of the local authority. These can be grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, neighbours or friends.

Children/young people can be placed with family and friends in an emergency or in a planned way. In Islington we regard family and friends foster carer as a temporary arrangement as we feel children are best looked after in permanent arrangements such as residence orders, special guardianship orders or adoption if they are unable to return to their parents care.

Why family and friends foster care?

It is recognised that children and young people who cannot live with their parents are best cared for within their extended family and community networks where possible. Local Authorities have a duty to look at the possibility of children being cared for by family or friends before placing them with foster carers who are not known to them.

Helping care for children who you are related to by blood or friendship is nothing new. However, where children are in the care of the local authority, we are required under the fostering regulations, to assess family and friends carers in a similar way to other foster carers.

What does the process involve?

You may feel that you can offer to care for a child related to you who is or is likely to become looked after by the local authority. If you come forward as a possible family and friends foster carer, a process of assessment will take place. This gives the local authority an opportunity to consider your suitability to care for the child or young person.

Criminal Records Bureau checks will need to be undertaken. Not all offences will rule out the possibility of someone becoming a family and friends foster carer but we need to be satisfied that a child/young person will be safe with you and your family so it is best if you tell us about anything which will come up. All members of the household who are over the age of 16 will require a Criminal Records Bureau check as well as anyone in your network who would care for the child in your absence.

We will ask you to have a medical with your GP which we will pay for. Again this is so we can be satisfied that you are in reasonable health and that caring for the child /young person will not put your health at risk if you have or are prone to illness. If you have children of school age we will contact their schools to ask for a reference from them, and we will also ask the health visitor if your child is under five.

We will ask you for the names of two personal referees who are not related to you and have known you for more than two years. We will need to speak with these referees.

A health and safety check will be undertaken of your home to ensure it is a safe environment for any child/young person placed with you.

Further to the above, the family plus social worker carrying out your assessment will meet with you to discuss your family background, employment, relationships, your experience of parenting and any other relevant information about you and your family. We will also want to meet with your children to talk about the child/young person coming to live in your family. We will talk with you about how you will keep the child safe, work in partnership with the local authority and support contact for the child/young person with his/her parents and people who are important in their lives.

A report will be written and presented to the Fostering Panel who will make a recommendation in relation to your approval. The final decision about your approval is made by the Agency Decision Maker who in Islington is the Director of Child Protection. You will be invited to attend the panel when your full assessment report is presented. If the child is in the care of the local authority and is placed with you at short notice e.g. in an emergency, the assessment will be finalised within 16 weeks of the placement, or 24 weeks in exceptional circumstances, or the child will have to move.

At times you might find the assessment process very detailed. However, children in 'public' care are often extremely vulnerable and it is our duty to satisfy ourselves that the child/young person will be safe in your care and provided with a good standard of care.

Supervision, Support and training.

We have a small team of workers [Family Plus Team] who are dedicated to helping family and friends foster carers understand their role and meet the needs of the children in their care.

As a family and friend foster carer your care will be monitored under the Fostering Regulations and the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care. An allocated social worker from the Family Plus team will visit you regularly to advise you about meeting the needs of the child/ren in your care and identify any support or training needs you might have. Your approval as a family and friends foster carer will be reviewed every year until a permanent decision about the child/ren's care plan is made. This may mean that the child/ren remain with you under a special guardianship order, a residence order or perhaps adoption.

We offer training to our family and friends foster carers and we have a support group for family and friends carers where family and friends carers meet to share experiences. We also put family and friends foster carers in touch with other organisations that may be helpful e.g. Family Action, Grandparents Association, Family Rights Group.

As a family and friends foster carer you will receive a maintenance allowance for the expenses involved in caring for the child. These allowances and other payments are set out in the attached document including extra allowances for birthdays, winter festivals and summer holidays. We would want you to save a sum of £12.50 per week out of these allowances for the child's future when they leave you. These allowances should not be taxed or deducted from any benefits you receive. For more information about fostering fees and allowances please see the Council's fostering website and our Friends and Family policy.

We realise that becoming a family and friends foster carer may be confusing for relatives who have already been involved in the child or young person's life. We hope this information is helpful. If you need further advice or information you can call our duty line on 020 7527 1012 [Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons] or the manager of the Family Plus team on 020 7527 4131 or the Deputy Manager on 020 7527 4408.