

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS ABOUT FOSTERING

This leaflet is for you if your child is going into foster care. This may be a very difficult time for you and you may be worried about what fostering means for you and for your child. You can talk to your social worker if there is anything that you don't understand.

What is fostering?

Fostering means looking after someone else's child in your own home, for a period of time and treating them as part of your family. If your child is going to be fostered they will have the benefits of family life even though they are not living with you. Children are fostered when their parents, for whatever reason, are unable to look after them. This may be for a short period or may be longer; it depends on the parents' circumstances. Some parents make their own arrangements for someone to look after their child. This is called 'private fostering'. However, the Council also provides fostering services.

Merton's Fostering Services

The Council's Fostering Services provide **task-based** foster carers who care for children at short notice. They work with the child and parents to enable the child to return home as soon as possible or to move on to permanent carers. For teenagers who may not be able to return home, they will help them prepare for independent living. There are also **respite** carers who look after children at regular intervals, say one weekend once a month, in order to give parents a rest, particularly those with disabled children. The Council also has **long-term or permanent** foster carers who look after children until they become adults. Some permanent carers are known as **kinship** carers because they are related to or already know the child they foster.



Who are Foster Carers?

Foster carers are ordinary people who care about children and young people and help to make sure that they live in a safe and caring environment while they are away from home. The Council's Fostering Services has foster carers from a variety of cultural backgrounds, religions and walks of life. Some foster carers are single, some are married or living with a partner; some have children still living at home, others have grown up children who have left home. All the Council's foster carers go through a thorough assessment, training and a vetting process to ensure that they are able to offer children a good standard of care and that it is safe to place children with them. This process includes checking with a range of people and agencies including the Criminal Records Bureau.

What do Foster Carers do?

Foster carers are responsible for looking after your child as if they were a part of the family. This means they have to feed them, clothe them, ensure their health and education is attended to, protect, guide and encourage them; in fact all the things that any parent would do. Merton's foster carers receive practical and social work support to assist them in their role as well as regular training and advice from Health and Education Services.

Information for Birth Parents about fostering

Will I be able to see my child when they are in foster care?

If your child is looked after by Social Services, then the Council has a legal duty to promote contact between you and your child unless there are concerns about your child's safety. Where and when you see your child or the frequency of your contact will be agreed with you at the start of your child's stay with foster carers. Normally, you will be able to visit your child in the foster home. If Social Services or the Court has concerns about your child's welfare whilst they are with you, your visits may be supervised by a social worker and may take place away from the foster home.



What rights do I have?

As a parent or legal guardian you will always retain parental rights and responsibilities for your child whilst they are in foster care. You will be consulted on all key decisions about your child's life. However, if your child is looked after because a Court has ordered it, Social Services can override your views if these are not in your child's best interest. You will be invited to regular meetings to see how your child is doing and to make plans for the future, including plans for your child's return home. These meetings are called reviews and will be chaired by an independent reviewing officer who

will want to know your views and those of your child.

How long will my child be in foster care?

It depends on your circumstances. If you have asked Social Services to look after your child then your child can return home to you as soon as you want them to. If your child is looked after because a Court has ordered this, then Social Services and the Court will first need to be satisfied that your child will be adequately cared for and safe if they return to you. Social Services will work with you and your child to enable this to happen as quickly as possible.

What if I am not happy with arrangements for my child?

If you are not happy about the care your child is receiving then you should speak to your social worker about this to see if things can be put right. If you remain unhappy, you can make a complaint. You can contact the 'Customer Service Officer' on 020 8545 3509. You can also contact the 'Commission for Social Care Inspection'. They are a national body set up to monitor and inspect all fostering services in the country including local authority fostering services. The address for the local office is: 41-47 Hartfield Road, Wimbledon, SW19 3RG. T: 020 8254 4950.

We hope that you have found this leaflet useful and that it has dispelled any worries that you may have had about fostering. If you have any queries please speak to your social worker or to someone independent like the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

How to contact us:

The Fostering Team, Worsfold House, Church Road, Mitcham
Surrey CR4 3FA. T: 020 8545 4201 E: fostering@merton.gov.uk
www.merton.gov.uk/adoptionandfostering

