



Department
for Education

Renewing fostering:

Homes for 10,000 more children

February 2026

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Introduction

When children can't stay with their own families, they should still grow up in a loving home. Foster families make that possible because they give children love, safety, and stability.

This document explains what's hard about fostering right now, what the Government want fostering to look like in the future, and what we plan to do to make it better. Our plan focuses on **five** big things:

1. Finding **more** foster families
2. **Working together** across different areas in England
3. Trying **new ideas** to make life in foster families even better
4. Giving foster families **more help**
5. Making the **rules simpler** so **relationships come first**.

We want to ask children and young people what foster care is really like, what they think about our ideas, and what they think should change. That is why we have also made a document called 'Seeking the views of children and young people' which can be found on the GOV.uk website. If you want to tell us what you think, ask a trusted adult to find it for you and help you answer the questions.

Who is this document for?

Children and young people with lived experience of foster care.

Information sharing and support

We want every child and young person who is supporting us to feel safe and supported.

Your views matter, and what you share will help us work out what is working well and what could be improved. You can answer whatever questions you want to - there are no right or wrong answers. We want to know about your experiences, your ideas, and anything you think could help make foster care better for you and for other children like you.

You don't need to tell us your name or anything that would help us work out who you are – so you can be really honest about how you feel or anything you've been through.

We know that some things we ask about may be upsetting or bring back bad memories or feelings. If anything feels upsetting, or answering the questions is too much for you, please know that help is out there. Please make sure you speak to an adult you trust or someone in the list here who can help you if you need to:

- [Childline | Free counselling service for kids and young people](#)
- [The Mix](#)
- [Mental Health Support For Young People | YoungMinds](#)
- [Useful contacts for support - for 11-18 year olds | Mind](#)

Issue date

This document was issued on **4th February 2026**.

Questions

If your question is related to the topics in this document, you can ask an adult to email:

fostering.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk

If your question is related to the website or the process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: coordinator.consultations@education.gov.uk, telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

Our Vision

The most important thing for children in care is to have people who love you and stay by your side to support you through the tough parts of growing up. Fostering is about finding trusted adults who can look after children, help them make friends, help to build strong family connections, and be there for you when life gets really hard or upsetting. When we put relationships first, brothers and sisters can stay together, families get the help they need, and children can have a good start in life.

Every child should have a safe and loving home, including children who can't live with their parents anymore. Sometimes this means living with grandparents or other family members. We know that it isn't always easy to live with the family you have, so sometimes, children have to live with foster carers. When living with family or people you already know can't happen, we need lots of foster families so children can have a choice in who they live with and are able to stay close to their friends, the places they know, and stay at their school.

There are lots of families in England who would be able to foster. We want to make it easier for adults to start fostering and give them the help they need to make it happen.

That's why we want to find **10,000 more foster places by 2029**. This will help more children live in families that suit them best.

We want to improve fostering, and these are the steps we will take to make it better:

1. Finding more foster families

We want to make sure we thank foster carers for everything they do to look after children and help people understand why fostering is **great**.

We want to help more people to think about being a foster carer and help them find the right place to get more information or apply. That's why we will create new adverts and messages for everyone in England. Our messages will help people understand what a foster carer does, how they help children and what to do if they want to become a foster carer.

We will offer different types of fostering, so every child can find a kind and loving family that can look after them. We will help foster carers make their homes bigger so more brothers and sisters can stay together too.

2. Working together across different areas in England

We want children and families to get the best help no matter where they live. To help with this, local areas will work together in bigger teams called fostering hubs. Hubs can share talents and ideas with each other, to help plan better and make sure that every child is in the home that suits them most.

Hubs will also:

- Help find more foster carers
- Check new carers are safe more quickly
- Give carers better training.

3. Trying new ideas

We want to find new and better ways of caring for children. This could mean:

- Helping children stay with adults they trust
- Helping them move safely from 'residential homes' into family homes
- Letting foster carers look after children while still going out to work.

4. Giving foster families more help

We want to make it easier for foster carers to do their best, so children can make lifelong friendships and feel part of the community.

Carers sometimes have other carers nearby who help them - almost like a team. We want to make it easier for foster carers to get help from people they trust when life gets busy, and for children to meet, and hopefully make friends with, other children in care – because it's important to have people who understand what you are going through.

We want to make it clear that foster carers can make daily decisions for the children they look after about things like going on days out or having friends over.

We want to make sure children and carers always know who to go to for help as early as they can, so problems don't get too big.

Foster carers should also know exactly what help they can get.

Our dream is simple: more children living with families, carers who know they are trusted and can ask for help, and everyone working together as a team.

5. Make the rules simpler so relationships come first

Children shouldn't have to move homes when they don't need to, and they should have the same people caring for them for as long as possible.

We also want being with a foster family to feel more like 'normal' family life, without lots of extra rules that stop children from doing normal things, like going on day trips or having friends over.

We want a clear, simple way to make sure children are safe, without confusing checks that don't always help.

About the problem

We have collected information from lots of people and thought a lot about what it means. We've also already heard from lots of people who work with foster carers, and foster carers themselves. We have learned:

- Most children who can't live with their family, live with foster families
- There aren't enough fostering families to look after every child who needs one
- Most foster carers are older than 50, and a lot are older than 60 so they may need to stop looking after children soon
- The number of foster carers has gone down in the last 10 years
- Unless more adults become foster carers, there won't be enough people to look after all the children who need help.

This means that **some children don't get a choice about who and where they live**. Some have to move far away from their school and friends. Others live in homes that don't feel right for them, so they might move house and school a lot. These are big changes and can be really upsetting, especially when you aren't able to live with your family anymore.

Because there aren't enough foster carers, more children have to live in **residential** homes, even if these are not right for them. These homes should only be used for children who *need* and *want* them.

It's not only about finding *new* foster carers – **we have to help the carers we already have**. A lot of people stop fostering because they don't feel like they are listened to or can't get the help they need to look after children properly. If we want more children to have foster families, we need to make sure carers get the help they need and know that people will listen. ¹

What a young person in a foster family said:

"They have found the perfect family for me. Now I don't want to leave. If I had the chance, I would stay there my whole life. I see my foster carers as my real parents. Even my social workers as family. Overall, being in foster care is fantastic."

¹ [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2025 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

Lots of people *want* to foster but end up waiting a long time to find out if they are allowed to and give up. We will make it quicker and easier for new people to join.

Children who can't live with their families anymore can sometimes need more help than their friends – every child is different. Families today are very busy at work, usually because they need more spending money. More people could foster if they got more help and it fit more easily into their everyday life.

It's been a really long time since the Government made a plan for every local area to follow. Now it is really confusing for people and not every area does what they are meant to. This means some children can't find a foster home, and some people stop being carers because they don't get enough help.

Some foster carers want to be treated more like people who go to work, but **fostering is meant to feel like *family*, not a job**. We want children to feel loved in a real home, not like they are someone's job.

We are stepping in to fix the problems we know about because it is so important to give children loving, stable relationships. Every day we wait, children are separated from brothers and sisters or moved away from their friends. We won't let that carry on, and we're acting as fast as we can to make things better.

Action Plan

We need to bring more people in to foster and keep helping the carers we already have. Our plan focuses on 5 areas:

- Finding **more foster families** so more children have loving homes
- **Working together** across different areas in England so getting help is **quicker and easier**
- Trying **new ideas** to make life better for children
- Giving **foster families more help** so caring feels easier
- Making the **rules simpler** so **relationships come first**.

1. Finding more foster families

1.1 Finding carers all over the country

We want **more** adults to become foster carers and to celebrate how **amazing** foster carers are, so we want to tell everyone in England about it!

We will show everyone how **talented** and **important** foster carers are and help different areas to find even more carers where they need them.

1.2 Making homes bigger to create more space for children

Some foster carers want to look after more children, but their homes don't have enough space. This means brothers and sisters can't always stay together, and sometimes children have to move when they shouldn't have to.

To fix this, we want to give some money to foster carers to make their homes bigger. They might build an extra bedroom or change their house so more children can live with them.

Greater Manchester tried this idea and called it '**Room Makers**'. It created 26 new bedrooms for children who needed a home.

We want to do this across the country so that:

- More children can live with a loving family
- Brothers and sisters can stay together
- Brilliant foster carers can look after more children.

1.3 Helpful online tools

We want to make it easier to become a foster carer. We will make **simple online tools** that explain what to do and show what happens next. We will also make **better computer systems** so areas can keep better **information** about new carers, so we know what everyone needs.

2. Working together across different areas in England

Every child should have safe, loving care close to home. Right now, different areas work on their own, which can make it hard to find the right homes. Some places run out of homes, and others don't have everything they need to plan well.

To fix this, areas across England will make bigger teams called **Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs)**. They will work together to share ideas and plans to make it easier to find the right homes for the children who need them. Two areas are already trying this, and it has helped them work together to find good homes for children.

To find and help new foster carers, we already have **regional fostering hubs**. These hubs are set up in over half of England and are helping more people become foster carers. The problem is, they help people at the beginning of the process, when they're asking questions, but not beyond this.

So now we want these bigger groups to help carers for longer, all the way until they are told they can start looking after children. This year, we will give areas extra money to help the hubs we have get what they need to grow and so that more places can join or make a hub.

3. Trying new ideas

People all over the country are trying new ways to make foster care better. Some of these ideas are working really well so we want to help share these ideas so everyone can try them.

Some ideas help children stay with the same family for longer or move safely from a 'residential home' into a family. When everyone helps each other, children do even better.

We are helping a **new project** to try out different ways of caring for children, so they feel safe, happy, and well looked after. It will test different types of foster care, like:

- Going to stay with the same carer at weekends
- Helping children move from a 'residential home' into a family home
- Homes that are better for older children who want more independence.

We also want more special foster carers who can look after children who need extra help from people like hospitals or mental health services.

We will talk to different groups to find out what old and new ideas work best and share these good ideas with everyone. Any ideas that are **the most helpful for children** will be used in more places.

4. Giving foster families more help

4.1 Training and help for foster carers

We want foster carers to have better training (which is like a class or a lesson) and more help, so they feel better about how to make children feel safe, loved and well looked after.

We will use ideas that are already being used like **Mockingbird** to help plan better. Mockingbird puts foster families into small groups, so foster carers can help each other and children have adults they know and trust around them and can get to know other children in foster care.

New help might include:

- Classes which explain how children might be feeling
- Carers helping each other, like a team
- Clear explanations about what happens if a big worry about how a child is being looked after is mentioned.

We will keep helping people to use **Mockingbird** while we get more information about other, new ideas.

4.2 Change what happens someone reports something about how a child is looked after

Most of the time, children are happy and well looked after in their foster families. Sadly though, we know that sometimes foster carers can upset or hurt the children they look after, and it's *really* important that anyone that knows about this tells another adult they trust. When we get told about a child being upset or hurt by their foster carer, we must check that all the children in the home are safe and well looked after, and this can be upsetting for everyone.

Children's safety will always come first. ***We will ALWAYS check every time we are told about something like this***, but we know that sometimes children are moved away from the foster family they live with when these checks happen, even if they don't want to be.

When this happens, it can be scary for children and for foster carers. To make sure it is fair for everyone, we think carers should get help while we find out all the information about what happened.

We want to:

- Make sure that we listen to what children want and avoid moving them unless we must or they really want to be moved
- Make sure children and carers know what will happen when we check things
- Make sure everyone is treated fairly.

4.3 Money

A lot of the time, foster carers don't have a job so they are able to make sure they can look after the children in their home really well. But foster carers need enough money to make sure the children they look after have everything they need, including nice dinners, new clothes, things for school or new (and fun) toys to play with.

Right now, different areas give foster carers different amounts of money which can feel unfair and might be confusing. We want to learn more about who gets what and what this means for foster families.

5. Making the rules simpler so relationships come first

Some of the rules for fostering are old and don't show what children today need most. This means that sometimes foster carers and social workers have to do things that they don't really need to anymore.

We will change the fostering rules, so they focus on what matters most:

- Children feel safe and connected to the people they care about
- Relationships come first, not paperwork for foster carers
- Rules are simple and easy to use
- Children and foster carers feel supported, not held back.

Some rules may need new laws, which might take some time. A lot of the problems will be fixed by **changing old habits** that stop carers from doing the best thing for the children in their care.

5.1 Finding the right carers

A lot of people ask about fostering but not many people go on to become foster carers. This is worrying as we need **more** foster carers to look after children.

We've learned this happens less if people:

- Get quick replies
- Have one helpful person to talk to
- Know how long it will take
- Go to good classes, so they know what fostering involves
- Get enough help when being matched with a child.

Some people are told they can't foster if they have to work Monday to Friday, if they have small health problems, or if they aren't married. None of this is true.

Fostering is for **all** kinds of people who can look after children and keep them safe. Every child is different, so we need different kinds of carers.

We want checks on foster carers to be done in **less than 6 months**, just like when a child is adopted. This is so children can move into family homes more quickly.

5.2 Trusted adults to help foster carers, and letting foster carers make choices for the child

Being a parent is amazing, but it can be **tiring** too. All parents need trusted adults, like friends or family, to help them look after their children. This is the same for foster families too.

When their foster carer is having a rest or is extra busy, children tell us they want to stay with **people they know**, just like in any family.

Ideas like **Mockingbird** and **Weekenders** (where you stay with a different foster carer at the weekends, but the same each week) make sure children can stay with people they know. But ideas like this are not used everywhere yet.

New rules will make sure every foster family across the country have people they trust near them, like **close friends and family**, who they can ask for help.

The law *already* says that foster carers should be able to decide things like letting a child go to a friend's house, go on a school trip, or get a haircut. But sometimes the people who help them say they should ask first, but this means children miss out on experiences that their friends have.

In the new rules **we want to make sure that foster carers are allowed to make day-to-day decisions**.

Children should always have a say in important decisions and should be invited to important meetings. **Carers know the child they care for really well. They must also be invited to important meetings**, so they can say what the child has told them and make sure that plans fit the what the child really needs and wants.

Foster carers say that being left out of decisions makes them feel ignored and unimportant, and some even stop fostering because of it. We want this to change.

New rules will also **get rid of unimportant paperwork** foster carers have to do, like writing down everything a child does each day, so carers can focus on looking after children.

5.3. Keeping children close to people and places they know

We try to keep children living with people they know and trust (like grandparents, aunts, teachers). This is called **kinship care**.

Kinship carers already know the child, so the process for agreeing they can be foster carers should be **quicker and simpler** than other types of fostering.

If a child can't live with family or someone they know, they should still stay **close** to safe, important people who understand them. This might be a favourite teacher or friend's parent. There should be a meeting to find out who matters most to them and how they can see these people — through visits, sleepovers, or holidays.

Sometimes the rules make it hard to find and help family members who can look after children. We are learning what works best by listening to experts and we will use what we learn to make the rules simpler.

5.4. Adults working as a team to help children

Every family is different and sometimes need extra help. Children may need emotional and practical help from lots of different people — like social workers whose job is to help children and families, and mental health experts who help children with difficult feelings.

New rules will help all these adults work together as a team as well as make it clear that carers can ask for someone to speak up for the children they look after, called an **advocate**. This makes sure people listen to what children and carers say and get the help they need.

For some children, it can be better for them and their carer to have **only one** social worker to help them. We want children and carers to have to talk to fewer adults but feel closer and receive better help from the ones they do have so children and carers don't have to say the same thing over and over.



Department
for Education

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