



# Therapeutic Fostering



Your guide to becoming a  
Break therapeutic foster carer

**Thank you for requesting this information pack about therapeutic fostering. We are a not for profit Independent Fostering Provider. Break is a long established local charity based in Sheringham in Norfolk and has been providing a range of services for children, adults and families in need for over forty years.**

**Break is a charitable organisation that relies on voluntary contributions to continue its vital work. Break is a professional organisation where quality is paramount.**

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## What is Fostering?

Fostering is when someone offers a home to a child who is not their own when the child is unable to live with their birth family. Children and young people may not be able to live with their family for a whole variety of reasons. These could include parental ill-health, relationship problems, substance misuse and family breakdown, but the most common reason is abuse and neglect.

Children and young people may need to live with foster carers for a few days, a few weeks or for the whole of their childhood. Foster care is different from adoption in that foster carers do not have parental responsibility for their foster child. Foster carers are required to promote and support contact between the child and their birth family because it is usually very important for the foster child. Looked After Children and young people come from diverse backgrounds, therefore they need foster carers from diverse backgrounds too.

Foster carers come from all walks of life, they can be young or old, with or without children, single, in a relationship, or married, irrespective of sexual orientation and from a wide range of different cultures and backgrounds.

Foster carers receive allowances to reimburse them for the cost of caring for a child and also a fee in recognition of their time, commitment, knowledge and skill. Foster carers are supported to care for a child in many ways. They are allocated a supervising social worker to provide them with guidance and support in how to look after the child and fostering providers also offer training and on-going professional development.



## What is therapeutic fostering?

Vulnerable children and young people have complex needs and therefore require the highest quality care. Therapeutic fostering provides the young person with this through a meaningful and enduring relationship with their foster carer. It is the relationship with the foster carer that is therapeutic and at Break we try to preserve this where possible. A key aspect of therapeutic fostering is the foster carer having the ability to understand the impact of the young person's past experiences and how these in turn affect the young person's view of the world, their behaviours and relationships. A foster carer with the right attitude, skills, knowledge and experience is invaluable to a young person in care.

At Break we believe that every young person is unique with individual needs and that all children and young people have suffered trauma and loss before coming into care. At the very least, children and young people have been separated from their birth family, but in all too many cases they have also experienced abuse and neglect. Trauma occurs when children are exposed to repeated harmful or negative experiences and it can affect their ability to make and sustain positive relationships throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

We understand that sometimes young people's behaviour can be challenging to the adults who care for them. At Break we try not to take challenging behaviour personally, it usually occurs when the young person feels threatened or unsafe. Many young people can't tell us what they think and feel, however their behaviour gives us clues as to what might be going on for them.

Young people need to feel understood and accepted for who they are, to have their achievements recognised and to feel supported to make positive life choices. A foster home should be a safe place where a young person can grow, make mistakes and learn from them. In the therapeutic fostering model, foster carers receive regular and ongoing therapeutic consultation and supervision. This allows them to parent the child in a more therapeutic way.



## Who can be therapeutic foster carers?

Being a therapeutic foster carer will be a real challenge, will require a great deal of commitment and will not be for everyone. Applicants will need to have life experience, have made sense of their own 'issues' and be emotionally resilient.

As a therapeutic foster carer you will need to be able to work with others to understand what might be going on for the young person placed with you and together work out parenting strategies that might bring about positive change in the young person. To enable you to do this you must be able to reflect on your own behaviour, actions and thought processes and adapt these when necessary to meet the needs of any young person placed with you. You will also need to have an understanding of what is normal and abnormal adolescent behaviour and be able to think about life from a young person's perspective.

As a therapeutic foster carer you will need the ability to learn and understand models of child development and attachment and be able to apply these. You will be required to work according to the principles established in the young person's care plan and you must have a willingness to be involved in therapeutic intervention as part of a multidisciplinary team. You will also need to be able to set and negotiate boundaries, help the young person to develop positive relationships and most of all provide them with a sense of belonging.

Therapeutic foster carers need a heightened sense of self awareness, and to possess the ability to be reflective in their practice. Foster carers who can do this will help young people to recover from trauma and learn that the world can be a safe place.

Break foster carers need to be committed to continued professional development. Most importantly therapeutic foster carers will need to demonstrate commitment, perseverance and resilience.

## What does Break offer?

The Break team will provide you with high quality professional support, training and therapeutic input to enable you to care for any young person placed with you, specifically:

- **Excellent supervision and support**

our foster carers will receive fortnightly formal supervision from a named, experienced supervising social worker. All our social workers will have a low caseload to ensure maximum support

- **Therapeutic Support**

specialist placement support is provided via fortnightly therapeutic group sessions from a qualified therapist and individual consultations when required. We will identify a therapeutic care plan for each young person in the scheme. The Looked After and Adopted Children, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team (LAC CAMHs) also provide consultation and placement support

- **24/7 support**

from the Break Fostering team via a team on call system

- **Market leading allowances and fees**

paid to therapeutic foster carers in recognition of the highly skilled and professional care they offer

- **Guaranteed short breaks (respite)**

We recognise that the role of therapeutic foster carer can be demanding for all involved, so regular respite care is provided to allow carers and young people to have regular short breaks. Carers will benefit from taking regular breaks to re-charge their batteries and think about the best way to care for their young person. To minimise disruption and enable continuity for the young person, we aim for this to be provided by a regular, known respite carer, within the service, who will have been carefully matched to meet the young person's needs. Foster carers will not lose any money when they have a short break and if they provide a short break to another young person within the scheme then they will be paid for this at the same rate. There is however an expectation that if foster carers are going away on a family holiday they should bring the young person with them, where possible



- **Planned placements**

our foster placements will always be planned to allow for the best possible matching process to take place. This process is crucial to the long-term success of the foster placement

- **Single Placements**

we recognise that the young people our foster carers will be caring for will need a lot of attention, so we will only place one full-time placement with you. As part of the assessment process we will look to see whether you could also provide short breaks to a young person living with another foster carer within the scheme

- **Placement Stability**

at Break we recognise the therapeutic nature of the relationship between a foster carer and the young person they look after, as this is the most effective tool for creating positive change. Young people need consistency, so we will try to safeguard this relationship wherever possible

- **Excellent Training & Development opportunities**

Break has a well established Learning and Development team which alongside the Fostering Team will deliver most of the training foster carers will need. Foster carers are treated as fellow professionals and will therefore be expected to train alongside other social care staff both within and external to Break. The training is of a high standard from practitioners and trainers with specialist knowledge regarding young people who need a therapeutic placement including the L3 Children and Young People's Workforce Diploma

- **Paid membership of the Fostering Network**

to cover foster carers and their family for comprehensive legal protection, liability insurance, and advice, including a 24 hour helpline

## The role of Supervising Social Worker

Supervising social workers will undertake assessments of new carers, working together with them to gain an understanding of, and to explore the therapeutic fostering role. Upon successful completion, and approval by Break's foster panel, carers are assigned a supervising social worker. This role has many functions, to develop an open and trusting relationship whereby carers can engage meaningfully in supervision, to provide on going support and advice, to manage placements, to provide guidance and ideas about practice, provide access to training and development opportunities and ensure the practical aspects of having young people placed are taken care of.

The process of matching placements is undertaken initially by the supervising social worker in discussions with the young person's social worker. The profile of the child is discussed with carers and careful consideration given to matching issues and planning of placements to be made. The child or young person in your care will have their own social worker to support them and plan for their care and future. The supervising social worker is a key member of the team around the child, providing supervision and support to carers and contributing to the care plans and planning for the young people.



The supervising social worker's purpose is to ensure that the foster placement continues to meet the child/young person's needs and will work closely with the carers to achieve this.. Through both formal supervision sessions and informal telephone contact, they will provide space for carers to explore both the challenges and the rewards of caring for the child/young person in their care. At times foster carers will find this role crucial, at others they may feel frustrated by the guidance of the supervising social worker – but at all times they should feel supported, respected and heard. Supervising social workers will also attend the fortnightly therapeutic support groups that Break's therapeutic foster carers will attend.

## What is the process of becoming a Break therapeutic foster carer?

### **Registration of Interest form**

When we receive your registration of interest form, we will call you to discuss your interest and answer any immediate questions you may have. If in agreement, we will arrange for one of the supervising social workers to visit you for an initial visit. This should happen within 3 weeks of receiving your form.



### **Initial Visit**

The initial visit is a chance to explore the experience of fostering, how it can impact on your family life, your expectations and the qualities you need to be a therapeutic foster carer. It is also a chance to discuss any reservations you may have.



### **Decision Making**

If after the initial visit it is clear that you have the qualities we need and you feel you would like to progress with your application to foster with Break, you will be allocated a social worker who will carry out your assessment.



### **Skills to Foster Training**

You will be invited to attend the Skills to Foster preparation training which we provide to all foster carers and this is the start of the formal assessment process. The Skills to Foster course is the definitive pre-approval course for foster carers. It focuses on all aspects of being a foster carer and serves both as good preparation for fostering and as a start to your professional development. The course is either offered in the evenings and held either over seven weeks, or over three full days.



### **Assessment**

We will undertake a formal assessment of your suitability to be a foster carer. During your assessment we will conduct thorough background checks including an enhanced CRB check, local authority checks, personal and professional references. Your assessment will take approximately four months to complete



### **The fostering panel**

Once your assessment is complete your social worker will submit a full report to a fostering panel who will consider your suitability to foster. The fostering panel will make a recommendation about your approval to the fostering service



### **Approval**

Based on the recommendations of the fostering panel, the Break therapeutic fostering Service will make a final decision about your approval to foster and your social worker will contact you to let you know the outcome within 2 working days; this will be followed by formal written notification of whether you have been successful with your terms of approval. The whole process, from enquiry to approval should take between four to six months. Break aims to conduct assessments in a timely manner.

## Professional Development

It is a government requirement that all members of the Children's Workforce, including foster carers, residential workers and social workers have a basic level of competence. The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) has developed "Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care" and all foster carers are expected to meet these to ensure that they develop the skills they need throughout their foster care career. Foster carers have to complete the CWDC Training Standards within a year of their approval as carers. We have outlined the CWDC Standards below to provide a clearer idea of what the role of Foster carer entails.

### **Standard 1: Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people**

i.e. Demonstrate that you treat children, young people and their families as individuals, as equals and with respect. Show understanding and respect for diversity (e.g. racial, cultural, sexuality, religious) Demonstrate how you support and encourage children and young people to develop skills to deal with discrimination, enhance self-worth and make a positive contribution.

### **Standard 2: Understand your role as a foster carer**

i.e. Have a willingness to be involved in therapeutic intervention as part of a multidisciplinary team around the child, and maintain appropriate working relationships with: parents and other family members; professionals with a concern for the children's and young people's needs, such as social workers or psychologists; contribute to the care planning for the child; undertake appropriate recording and assessments of the placement.

### **Standard 3: Understand health and safety and healthy care**

i.e. To promote the health and well-being of the child/ young person in your care and to keep the child/ young person safe (emotionally and physically) and protect them from harm inside and outside the home; to balance risk and protection in all aspects of caring for the child/young person.

### **Standard 4: Know how to communicate effectively**

i.e. To understand some of the common difficulties in communicating with children and young people; to recognise that behaviours can be a tool of communication for a troubled child/young person; to be aware of your own methods of communication and adjust them when necessary so that the child/young person can understand you; understand the importance of keeping clear and accurate records and the need for good, open communication with other professionals in the team around the child.

### **Standard 5: Understand the development of children and young people**

i.e. Understand the impact of abuse, separation and loss and how this may affect a child or young person's understanding of relationships; understand the difference between chronological age and stage of development; encourage and support the child/young person to access education appropriate to their needs, insight into early attachment relationships and experiences and how these affect children.

### **Standard 6: Safeguard children and young people**

i.e. To keep the child/ young person safe and protect them from harm inside and outside the home; understand and work within national legal frameworks relating to the safeguarding of children/young people and the policies of Break.

### **Standard 7: Develop yourself**

i.e. Understand the implications of foster care on yourself and your family, and where you can get support and training (potential Break foster carers will need to evidence that they understand and can reflect on their own issues); understand the purpose of and engage in regular supervision and annual reviews and aim to develop a positive and honest relationship with the fostering agency, to access supervision and support and to ensure that any concerns you may have are relayed at the first available opportunity. Contribute to your own professional development via relevant training opportunities; undertake the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care within the first 12 months of approval.



## Frequently asked questions

### What is an Independent Fostering Provider?

Fostering services are provided by both Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Providers (IFPs). Independent Fostering Providers are commissioned to provide foster placements by Local Authorities, but then charge the Local Authorities for providing these services. Independent Fostering Providers can either be commercial companies or from the voluntary sector/charity sectors. Commercial IFPs are profit making private companies, often with a large national presence. Break as a registered charity is a not-for-profit organisation and any surplus Break makes gets put back into the services we provide.

### Can I transfer from another fostering provider?

There is a specific protocol governing transfers. If you are already a registered foster carer with either the Local Authority or an Independent Fostering Provider, then please call to discuss the process of transferring to Break therapeutic fostering. We would always undertake to manage the process so that the transfer proceeds smoothly and with the minimum of delay and little disruption for any young person already placed with you.

### What is therapeutic foster care?

Therapeutic fostering focuses on “therapeutic re-parenting” of traumatised children and young people. The relationship between the child and foster carer is critical because it is the conduit for positive change. Many young people may not be ready, willing or able to access ‘formal’ therapy. With this model the foster carer receives regular and ongoing therapeutic consultation and supervision. This allows them to parent the child in a more therapeutic way and it is within this relationship where positive change can be achieved. Young people who have suffered trauma and loss are likely to take time to be able to achieve positive change, so our foster carers will understand this and be able to be resilient and stick by their young people.

### Who can be a foster carer?

It is important to make every effort to match young people with carers that can best suit their needs therefore a wide variety of carers are needed. Almost anyone can apply to become a foster carer, we do ask that you are at least 24 years of age and physically fit enough to take on the responsibilities of caring for an adolescent. We would expect you to have some relevant experience of working with children and a clear commitment to caring for young people with complex needs and all it entails. As with any profession, foster care suits some people more than others and that is why the assessment process is a two way experience. During this process we will be able to fully explore with you the therapeutic fostering task.

### What qualities does a foster carer need?

Foster carers need to be able to value young people and demonstrate respect for them as individuals as well as respect for, and an understanding of the impact of their past experiences. Acceptance, understanding and self awareness play a large part in this process, but in truth it is impossible to describe the “perfect” foster carer. We would like you to be flexible, able to be reflective, work effectively with others as part of a team to meet the needs of the young person placed with you. We would like carers who are aware that there will be some challenging times, and also many rewarding ones, and who are able to work with the child at their pace.



## Frequently asked questions

### Is there anything that would stop me from being a foster carer?

Some convictions (i.e. those of a violent or sexual nature against children or adults) would prevent an assessment progressing. If we feel that, upon further exploration of the task, you may not be suitable for the task, we would not pursue your assessment. If you smoke we expect you to not smoke inside your home, and refrain from smoking in front of young people when possible. We also have basic health and safety requirements to ensure that your home is safe, and also assess the risks of pets e.g. dogs in the home.

### Is there training and support available to help me in the role?

If it seems you have the right outlook and qualities to become a foster carer, you will be invited to attend our "Skills to foster" course during the assessment period. Once approved as a Break foster carer, you will receive ongoing training and professional development opportunities from the organisations well established Training and Development Programme. Within a year of approval, you will be expected to complete the CWDC Training Standards. Your supervising social worker will provide support and advice to you on how to complete this.

### How do I become a foster carer?

If you feel you would like to consider becoming a foster carer, then you can contact us via our website or by phone to register an Expression of Interest. We will then contact you to discuss the role further and then one of the team will visit you to discuss the process in full. As you would expect, all prospective foster carers are assessed for their suitability – the in depth assessment will provide an opportunity for both sides to confirm that you are suited to the role.

### How long does it take to become a foster carer?

We aim to proceed with assessments in a timely manner and avoid unnecessary delay. The process of assessment normally takes between four and six months - it may be longer in some instances - but we try to complete assessments as soon as possible. It can sometimes take a little while longer before a young person is placed with you; this is because it is essential to match young people with the carers that will meet their needs best.

### What effect will fostering have upon me and my family?

Fostering a child is a rewarding but demanding job; providing a therapeutic home environment can be even more so. It is necessary to be realistic about the fact that fostering will have an impact on both yourself and your family. It may present additional challenges if you have children who are living at home, but it will also be a rewarding and enriching experience for children of foster carers. Due to younger children being more susceptible to disruption, your own children should be at least nine years of age by the time you are approved as a foster carer. The views of household members are sought as an important part of the assessment process and these issues will be explored. Everyone within the household will have an involvement with the young person in placement and each may have a different response to the experience. This is why, when undertaking an assessment, we involve everyone in your family and ensure that our support services meet the needs of you all. Our supervising social workers strive to establish an open and honest relationship with you, so that you feel valued and able to express any difficulties you may be having and work through them together.

### I don't own my home, can I still foster?

It is not necessary to own your home; as long as it is suitable to meet the needs of a young person. It is essential to have a spare bedroom for the young person to have as their own space. You will need to seek the approval of your landlord that he is happy for the property to be used for fostering purposes. All carers' homes will have their suitability assessed via a 'health and safety checklist' to ensure that your home is a safe and suitable place from which to foster.



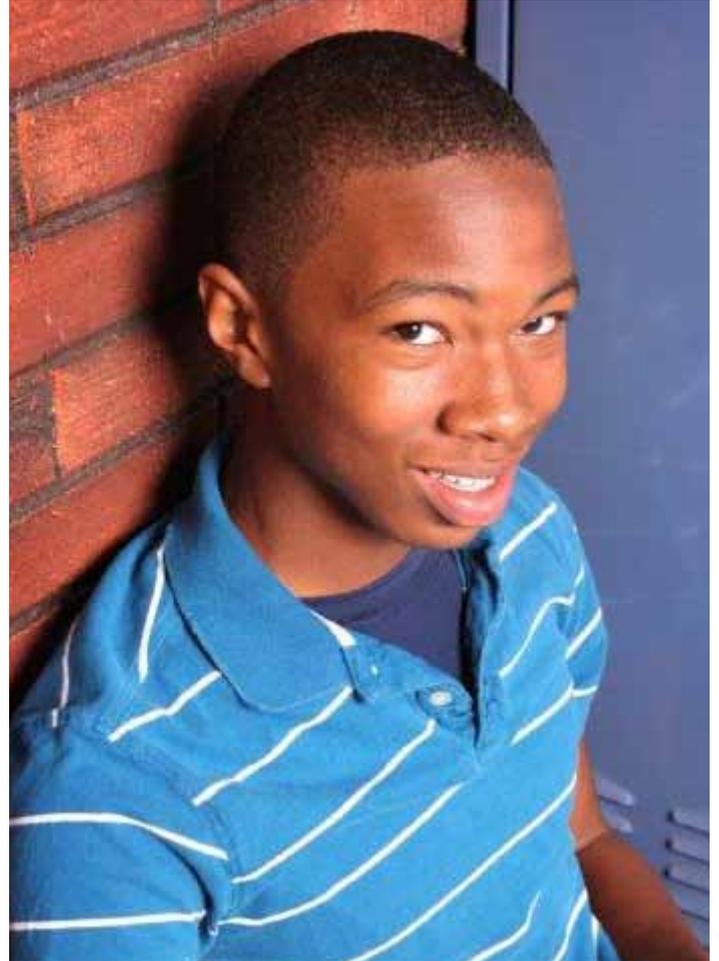
## Frequently asked questions

### Do I have a say over which child/young person is placed with me?

As our placements are planned, there will be an opportunity for you to learn about the individual young person we are considering placing with you. The matching process is essential and it is important to take both the views of the prospective carer and the young person into consideration; therefore, during the matching process we will share useful information with you about the child and vice versa. The young person will also be able to see a 'profile' all about you, which we will work with you to complete, all about your home and your family/support networks, to enable them to have an idea about who you are and about your household. We will also strive to get the best information we can about the child needing a placement. We would never place a child with you if either side had any reservations that could not be resolved during this process. We will work towards planned, gradual introductions to allow both young people and carers to get to know each other. Once a placement is agreed a 'Placement Plan' meeting will be convened, when we will discuss and plan the placement. We hope that this process will lead to better placement stability.

### Do I get paid?

Foster carers will be paid a generous allowance. Break plans to have a simple, carer-friendly payments system, and we will endeavour to ensure that payments are made in an efficient and timely manner. We plan to make payments to carers which will cover such things as pocket money, birthday and holiday money paid for the young person, the cost of covering local journeys, clothing allowance and other costs associated with caring for a young person. Carers will be expected to manage the payments for the young people. A separate allowance will be paid to you which recognises your skills and experience.



### What is my employment status?

Although Break foster carers will be paid by Break, they are not employed by Break. Fostering is classed as self-employed work, but there are generous tax breaks on the allowance they receive. Visit the Fostering Network website for further information.

### Can I work as well?

As a foster carer it is likely that you will need to respond quickly to emergencies and attend meetings with other professionals at short notice. If you are single, fostering will need to be your main occupation and you will need to be flexible if you work part-time. If you are planning to foster as a couple, you will need to ensure that at least one of you is able to be available at any one time.

### Anything else I need to consider?

In order to ensure that the young people placed with Break foster carers have every opportunity to participate, we expect foster cares to have internet access and access to a car.

## Quotations about fostering

‘For children who suffer disorders of attachment, nothing, absolutely nothing, is easy or straightforward.’

Cairns, Kate, Attachment, trauma and resilience (2009)

‘Therapeutic parenting can help prevent the child from entering a negative attachment cycle because it recognises that ordinary parenting is not enough when parenting traumatised children. The traumatised child whose internal working model does not recognise secure relationships within a family will not be able to connect or respond to ordinary parenting methods, which can become punitive because of the lack of reaction given or progress made. Therapeutic care is a way of working which aims to see the child rather than their behaviour.’

Thomas and Philpot Fostering A Child's Recovery Family Placement for Traumatized Children (2009)

‘Caregivers perform vital functions for recovery. They signal unconditional regard by looking past the child's behaviours to their unmet needs and feelings. They support recovery by caring for the child in the face of hostility or over-dependence. They promote autonomy through education and correction, not punishment, as a response to misbehaviour. They build consent, encourage trust and develop the child's self-worth by showing their willingness to change ineffective strategies. They confirm the child's identity and sense of belonging through appreciation of the child's past. They encourage self belief by their commitment to the long game.’

Chris Taylor, A Practical Guide to Caring for Children and Teenagers with Attachment Difficulties (2010)



provides a variety of high quality services for children, adults and families with a wide range of specialist care needs.

Break provides

- Children's Homes
- Short breaks / boarding
- Residential assessments for families in crisis
- Services for women with mental health needs
- Mentoring Services
- Support for young people leaving care
- Support for pregnant teenagers and young parents
- Therapeutic fostering service
- Supported Holidays

If you would like more information about Break or if you might be interested in working with Break, or becoming a volunteer please visit our website - [www.break-charity.org](http://www.break-charity.org)

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