

Foster Carers' Charter



FOSTERING
IN OXFORDSHIRE

**Working
together
to change
Lives...**



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**



Working together to change Lives...

FOSTERING

The purpose of the Fostering Charter is:

- To reinforce open and honest partnership working between foster carers, children's social workers and the fostering service.
- To ensure foster carers are supported to care for Oxfordshire Children in Care to be the 'best they can be'.

Corporate Parents

Oxfordshire County Council as the Corporate Parent, through its Fostering Service, will provide stable, high quality and safe foster care for local children in need. Our commitments and responsibilities ensure that children are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. To achieve this, we approve, recruit, train and provide ongoing support to our foster carers. Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect.

What you can expect from the Corporate Parent:

- We will provide a team around the child involved in decisions
- We will value the professionalism and commitment of our foster carers
- We will provide our foster carers with high quality guidance and support
- We will actively seek feedback and listen to what our foster carers say
- We will provide our foster carers with high quality learning and development opportunities
- We will be there when our foster carers and children need us

Foster Carers

Foster carers are at the heart of looking after local children in need. We are assessed, trained and supported to enable us to be well placed to look after children in a family environment. We will provide stable and high standards of care and opportunities for children so that they can develop and reach their full potential. Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect.

What you can expect from foster carers

- We will provide stable, secure and nurturing fostering homes for children
- We will always act professionally and seek to continually develop our skills
- We will value and respect children and go out of our way to understand their needs
- We will help children to develop their identities and aspirations
- We will act as positive role models
- We will communicate at the first sign of challenges that may require additional support



OUR FIVE CORE VALUES & COMMITMENTS:

1. Working in Partnership

The Corporate Parent

We recognise that foster carers are professionals who have the skills to make a big difference to the everyday lives of children in care.

We will:

- Treat foster carers professionally and work with you to provide a team around the child
- Seek your views and opinions, making sure that these are considered as equal to those of professionals
- Recognise that you are the people who live with children every day and know them well
- Get to know you and understand your individual skills and strengths
- Ensure that our fostering service demonstrates a high quality and consistent approach
- Treat you without discrimination
- Respect your confidentiality
- Liaise with agencies, such as health and schools, to let them know what you do and intervene on your behalf if necessary and within appropriate timescales
- Ensure that you and the Fostering Service are meeting the standards set out in Fostering Regulations and OCC guidance

The Foster Carer

We will use our expertise and caring skills to make a big difference to the everyday lives and future chances of the children we care for.

We will:

- Attend meetings about the children we care for as we work in partnership as part of the team around the child
- Work positively and proactively with the agencies involved with the child such as school, health and religious establishments
- Show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child's life
- Meet the standards set out in Fostering Regulations and OCC guidance
- Seek support and guidance from the Fostering Service as needed



2. Respect for the child

The Corporate Parent

We support a vision that every child should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and in achieving their aspirations and full potential.

We will:

- Provide children with a positive and loving experience of family life
- Respect and promote a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage
- Afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own children in accordance with the national minimum standards
- Ensure that children have the right support to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding
- Ensure you feel that you can make everyday decisions that mean that your fostered child is not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family

The Foster Carer

We support a vision that every child should be respected as an individual and be supported by meeting their needs and helping them to achieve their aspirations and full potential.

We will:

- Afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own children, in accordance with national minimum standards
- Ensure that children have the right support to make decisions regarding their own lives, as is appropriate to their age and understanding.
- Respect and promote a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage
- Be part of the discussion and decision- making processes and make sure that our fostered children are not treated differently to their peers and feel part of our family

3. Using Information

The Corporate Parent

We will provide clear and timely information to foster carers about the children they are looking after, as we recognise that this is vital to delivering care that meets the needs of each individual child.

We will:

- Give you all the information you need in order to care safely for children and alert you to any specific needs
- Provide this information in writing prior to placement (except when there are emergency placements)
- And ensure that there is a placement plan that has been drawn up and agreed with you
- Provide you with relevant information relating to financial matters, signposting you to areas where you can receive more detailed support
- Provide clarity about any decisions taken
- Keep you continuously updated about all Oxfordshire County Council and national policies and procedures

The Foster Carer

We will view and respond to information about the children we care for. We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship with both the children and the professionals we work with.

We will:

- Inform our supervising social worker about any important changes in our household
- Inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties or conflicts that arise and that are relevant to the continuation of our ability to successfully care for a child
- Receive information/changes relating to financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements
- Read and respond to all important communications within a reasonable period
- Keep updated about all relevant County and national policies and procedures

4. Learning, Development and Support

The Corporate Parent

We are committed to your continuous professional development and will provide you and your family with relevant high-quality support, development opportunities and training by staff who understand the fostering skills that are expected of you.

We will:

- Make sure that training is engaging and accessible
- Provide you with other development opportunities which make the best use of your skills and expertise, such as mentoring or support
- Respond positively to requests for additional support
- Provide you with monthly supervision and weekly phone contact
- Provide you with access to 24-hour support
- Pay you allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner
- Ensure that there is a local group, recognised by the fostering service, where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families

The Foster Carer

We will access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career to make sure that we have the skills and knowledge necessary to develop our practice in order that we can help transform the lives of the children we foster.

We will:

- Be prepared to develop our skills throughout our fostering career
- Attend relevant mandatory and non-mandatory training
- Take up opportunities offered to us as part of our skills requirements and continuous professional development
- Attend and contribute to local support groups





5. Consultation – giving and receiving feedback

The Corporate Parent

We will regularly seek feedback from carers and listen to what you say. We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to developing good and open relationships.

We will:

- Engage and consult with you in a meaningful way on all matters that affect you
- Facilitate regular communication between you and relevant staff and councillors in the County Council
- Give you honest and open feedback
- Provide you with timely feedback from consultation
- We will consult you before any significant changes to your terms and conditions
- Provide a framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to our agreed timescales
- Ensure that you are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support should you be subject to an allegation

The Foster Carer

We will provide regular feedback to the Fostering Service as we believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to developing good and open relationships.

We will:

- Respond to local consultations and conversations and help to inform the development of the service as a whole
- Give you honest and open feedback about how we feel the service is performing and improvements that could be made
- Meet with councillors, service managers and others in order to promote dialogue and good partnership working



Useful links:

Oxfordshire County Council Foster Carer Handbook

https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/children-education-and-families/fostering/information-our-existing-foster-carers/handbook?utm_term=nil&utm_content=

National Minimum Standards

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards>

HM Government Fostering Services Guidance and Regulations

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/volume%204%20%20%20fostering%20services%202011%20statutory%20guidance.pdf>

The Fostering Network

www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

Oxfordshire Foster Carers Association

www.ofca.info/about-us

Social Work Standards – Social Work England

<https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/professional-standards/>