



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**

Are you interested in **foster caring?**



It's not just the child's life that changes

Thank you for your enquiry about fostering

There are many children in Western Australia who need safe families to care for them. We are delighted to hear from people like you who are willing to take on this important role.

What is foster care?

Foster care is an arrangement where a family or an individual cares for other people's children in their own home. Foster carers are volunteers who are willing and able to open their homes and include these children and young people as part of their family.

Children are in foster care when they are unable to live at home and are placed in the care of the Department of Communities (the Department) because they have suffered or are likely to suffer harm. Harm can be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and/or neglect. Many children are able to return home after the parents have worked with the Department. Some children need to remain in out-of-home care with permanent carers.

The children and young people are under legal orders, and ages can range from 0-17 years. They need to be supported to keep in touch with their birth parent/s, siblings and other family members. Foster carers work in partnership with Department workers in the best interests of the child.

What do we expect from you?

You need to be able to provide a safe and supportive home for a child who may be troubled or traumatised.

You also need to be prepared to attend training to learn new skills and to keep information about the foster child confidential, even from close friends and family.



We are looking for people who are prepared to work closely with the Department and the child's family to plan and maintain the best care for the child.

Foster carers are also expected to:

- provide emotional support and care to meet the child's everyday needs;
- help the child communicate and behave in positive ways;
- support the child in his/her schooling and recreational activities;
- help the child maintain contact with his/her parents and extended family;
- support the child's cultural and religious needs;
- support the child's reunification with his/her family, when that is the plan; and
- work with all members of the child's care team.

Foster care in the Department

The Department is structured into metropolitan and country districts in addition to a centralised section which coordinates specialist types of care.

Once you are approved as a foster carer, you will be supported by the Department. A senior worker will be responsible for placing a foster child with you, and the child will be supported by his/her own child protection worker who will also work with the child's family and you.

There are Aboriginal practice leaders, psychologists and education officers available to support the cultural, psychological and educational needs of the children.



Providing Care

What types of care can I provide?

From the moment a child comes into care, a clear plan for the child's future is developed which is guided by the need for permanency and stability. The Department's best hopes are that children who come into care are able to return to live at home with their parent/s. If this is not possible, the child is placed in permanent care.

Temporary foster carers provide care where no final decision has been made for the child's legal care future. Temporary foster care also includes emergency care or short-break support care.

Permanent foster carers provide care to a child where a legal decision has been made for the child to live permanently out of his/her parents' care.

Carers will be able to provide both temporary and permanent care for children. In some cases carers may begin as a temporary carer for a child and subsequently become the child's permanent carer.

Short-Break Support

(Carers are located in the metropolitan area only)

Short-break support is often suited to foster carers who work full or part-time and would be able to offer regular weekend care (for example, one weekend per fortnight or month) in their own home. Workers match the primary carer and the child's needs with the experience and skills of the short-break support carer. Carefully planned and regular short-break support allows positive relationships to be formed.

Pre-adoptive Foster Care

(Carers are located in the metropolitan area only)

Pre-adoptive carers provide care for babies while birth parents consider adoption as an option. Babies may remain in care any time from one day to 18 months.

Carers need to be confident in caring for a newborn baby, and one carer needs to be available to the baby on a full-time basis. Carers will need to be flexible about contact visits which are usually in their home (by appointment) and may include extended birth family members. Carers will also be involved in a transition plan when the baby is due to move to a permanent adoptive arrangement.



The Process

How do I become a foster carer?

The process of becoming a carer involves a number of steps and can take six months or even longer as the Department needs to assess safety and competency to foster. The process is fully explained on pages 6-7.

Finding out More

What are foster care Information Sessions?

Information Sessions are an opportunity to hear from skilled Department workers about fostering and for you to have your questions answered. An experienced foster carer will be invited to the session but may not always be available. Information Sessions are offered throughout the Perth metropolitan area and some country districts.

What is an Expression of Interest Form?

The Foster Care Expression of Interest Form provides us with important and relevant information and enables one of our workers to have further contact with you. Metropolitan applicants must first attend an Information Session; country applicants can submit the form without attending an Information Session.

What is Preparation Training?

Preparation Training consists of 19 hours of training covering a wide range of topics to prepare the applicants to work with children who have experienced significant trauma, the Department and biological families. You will receive a comprehensive resource package.

Do I and my partner have to attend all the Preparation Training?

Preparation Training is compulsory for you and your partner in order to be approved as foster carers. This means that no child can be placed in your care until both of you have completed the training.

Metropolitan applicants must attend in person unless there are exceptional circumstances; applicants living in country, rural and remote locations will be offered flexible learning options.

Can I bring my child/children to the Information Session or Preparation Training?

We request that you make alternative arrangements for children at both the Information Session and the Preparation Training. The content presented at both these sessions is not generally suitable for children.

Are there any ongoing learning and development opportunities?

Carers are expected to engage in ongoing learning. The Department provides a learning and development calendar with relevant topics. In the metropolitan area, child minding is provided for workshops held during the day.

About You

Do I need to be married or have a partner? What if I am in a same-sex relationship?

You do not have to be married or have a partner to apply to become a foster carer. You may be in a same-sex relationship and be an applicant. If you are in a relationship, both people will need to be assessed.

I have never had children of my own. Does this mean I will not be approved as a foster carer?

It does not matter if you have never parented children; what is important is that you can relate well to children and young people and are capable of meeting their needs. Consideration is given to a person's maturity, health, lifestyle, understanding of children's needs and an ability to provide a safe and nurturing home environment.



I am pregnant / I have a baby / I have a toddler. Can I foster?

The Department has a duty of care to both the foster child and your child. A foster child has very high needs, and it would be extremely difficult for you to meet the needs of both children during their critical developmental period. For this reason, it is our best practice to place a child who is two years younger than your youngest child and for you to wait until your child is two years of age before you begin your fostering journey.

Can I foster if I am on a fertility program?

The last cycle of treatment must have been completed at least 12 months before you can be assessed as a potential foster carer.

Does it matter how old I am?

What matters is a person's ability to provide care for a child in a way that promotes the child's well-being, ensures that all of his/her needs are being met and protects him/her from harm.

Foster carers need to be 18 years of age; however, your age may affect the decision about which child is placed with you. For example, we would not normally place a teenager with a carer in his/her early 20s or a baby in permanent care with a retired person. For older applicants, the capacity to care for a traumatised child and the impact on a carer's health are taken into consideration during the assessment.

I am not an Australian citizen. Am I eligible to apply?

Foster carers must be citizens or permanent residents of Australia and living permanently in Western Australia.

New Zealand holders of a Special Category visa - subclass 444 - are eligible to apply to be foster carers.

Do I have to own my home to be able to foster?

You do not need to own your home, but if you are renting you will need to check with your landlord about any restrictions on your tenancy agreement.

If you are planning to move soon, we encourage you to wait until you have moved and settled before you commence the assessment process.

Will I be a foster carer for the district in which I live?

You will be allocated to the district in which you live; however, this may change depending on individual circumstances.

Am I able to still work full/part time?

Foster carers can work full time, part time or not at all; however, this will affect the type of care arrangement you may provide for a child. We would not normally place babies and very young children with foster carers who work full time as it is not in the children's interests to be removed from home and then placed in day care. You might like to consider short-break support caring if you work full time.





Step 1	Study the Information Booklet
Step 2	Attend an Information Session
Step 3	Expression of Interest
Step 4	Home Visit
Step 5	Application and Screening
Step 6	Assessment
Step 7	Preparation Training
Step 8	Approval
	Contact Details





The information booklet contains basic information about becoming a foster carer.

At the session you will meet workers from the Department. An experienced foster carer will be invited to attend who can provide information on his/her fostering journey. You will have the chance to ask questions and find out about different types of fostering.

Metropolitan applicants - If you live in the Perth metropolitan area, you must attend a foster care Information Session. Please refer to the enclosed Foster Care Information Session Calendar or our website to find a session which is suitable for you.

Country applicants - Information Sessions in areas outside of the metropolitan area are variable. Please contact your local district office for further information. A list of all the district offices and their contact details can be found on our website.

Once you and your family have decided to take the next step, please complete and return the enclosed Foster Care Expression of Interest Form.

After you have submitted your Foster Care Expression of Interest Form, one of our workers will call you to make a time to meet you and your family at home or arrange a time for a phone interview. This is a chance for us to learn more about you and have a look at your home. For you, it is an opportunity to hear more about fostering. An application pack may be provided to you following the home visit / phone interview.

Complete the Foster Care Application form and send it to us. The form asks for background details about you and your family.

Part of your application includes giving permission to carry out Police and Department checks, contact referees, and obtain a health report from your doctor. Foster carers also need a Working with Children Card; you will be asked to apply for this if you do not already have one. All adults living in your home require Police and Department checks as well as a Working with Children Card.

If you have completed a previous assessment, we will need permission from you to release your report which will be used to provide evidence required for the current assessment.

The assessment starts after we have received some of the essential screening information. We will visit you and your family several times in your home. With your assessor you will decide what type of foster care you wish to provide, and what age and gender of child would best fit with your lifestyle. The assessor will discuss with you, your skills and experiences related to the following:

- meeting the foster child's emotional, educational, psychological and physical needs;
- providing a safe environment;
- working as part of a team;
- taking the responsibility to learn and develop as a carer; and
- ability to respond to the cultural needs of the child.

The assessment process is very thorough and may, at times, feel intrusive due to our duty of care to you, your family and the children in the Department's care.

During the assessment process, you will need to attend 19 hours of Preparation Training. At these sessions you will learn about why children enter care, their need to remain connected to their birth family and the issues that they may experience, as well as the roles and responsibilities of both yourself and the Department.

Metropolitan applicants must attend in person unless there are exceptional circumstances; applicants living in country, rural and remote locations will be offered flexible learning options.

You will have the opportunity to read the report with the exception of referee comments and your medical report and discuss any concerns with your assessor.

Once the final report has been completed, the assessor will submit the report to the Interim Approval Committee (the Committee) for endorsement and approval. If endorsed and approved you will receive a letter and a Certificate of Approval.

If you want to find out more, you can contact the Child and Carer Connection Hub.

Phone: 1800 182 178

Email: fostering@communities.wa.gov.au

 facebook.com/fostercarewa

Web: www.communities.wa.gov.au

Can I take the child to my place of worship?

In most instances you can take the child along to any family activities. We would encourage you to include the child in all of your family outings and interests; however, if the birth parents have a strong objection to a particular activity, the parents' wishes would be considered and attendance at the activity negotiated. An older child's views must be considered.

Gathering Information

Who will support me?

You will be primarily supported by the child protection worker and other workers from the child's care team. You will be invited to functions by the districts so you can meet other foster carers.

Will I be paid to care for the child?

Foster carers are paid a contribution to the cost of caring in the form of a fortnightly subsidy. You also receive additional payments for clothing, school, medical, and recreational expenses. The amount of the subsidy depends on the age and needs of the child/young person. This subsidy is not taxable as it is a reimbursement for expenses that you have incurred. It is not an income but covers costs for day-to-day living expenses.

If you meet Centrelink criteria, you can also receive an additional payment for the foster child.

Will I get a break?

The Department acknowledges that having a break from the demands of fostering is a necessary support mechanism for children and foster carers. This break will be based on the needs of each child in his/her individual circumstances and may involve the support of family or temporary foster carers for overnight or weekend breaks. Camps may be utilised during school holidays. The goal is to have minimal disruption for the child in your care.

Will damage or loss be covered by insurance?

Foster Carer Indemnity Insurance is provided to all approved foster carers. It covers accidental or intentional damage or loss by a child in care to the carers (or any permanent member of the household), house, contents and vehicles. Any damage or loss must be reported immediately.

How much input will I have with the Department?

A care team approach guides the Department's work with all foster carers. The team consists of the child, his/her carers, the birth family, child protection workers and other people significant to the child to work together in the child's best interests.

Foster carers are valued through the principles of respectful working relationships and open communication. They are supported to formally participate as a team member in the assessment, planning and review of the child and in other child-centred decision making.

Who do I contact for additional support?

The Foster Care Association WA

The Foster Care Association WA provides an advocacy service for all foster carers through a 24-hour phone service, giving support and advice to individuals. Members receive newsletters and invitations to special events.

Once you are approved as a Department foster carer, you are eligible for one free year of membership to the Foster Care Association WA. You can obtain a membership form from their website.



Phone: (08) 9242 4222 or
1800 497 101 (free call)

Email: admin@fcawa.com.au

Web: www.fcawa.com.au

Crisis Care

The Crisis Care helpline can offer support on weekends and after hours.

Phone: (08) 9223 1111 or
1800 199 008 (free call).

Counselling

Foster carers and their families have access to a free, confidential counselling service.

About the Child

Confidentiality

Wherever possible, foster carers are provided with detailed information about a child which must remain confidential.

Can I nominate the age and gender of the child I wish to foster?

You can identify the age and gender of a child you think would fit best with your family. Your assessor will discuss this with you.

What happens if the child is sick?

If your foster child is sick, you should take the child to a doctor. You may need permission from the Department for some dental and medical treatments. All children in care receive a Health Care Card. The Department pays all medical expenses.

Will the child go to my local school or stay at his/her current school?

This will depend on the length of the care arrangement and the needs of the child. If the child is staying with you for a short period of time, there will be no change of school so the child can continue to have contact with familiar people and places. For a permanent care arrangement, the Department will consider moving the child to a school in your area.



Can a foster child attend my child's private school?

Most children in care attend government schools. A private school may be considered by the Department if the foster care arrangement is permanent or if there is another significant reason why the child cannot attend a government school. A decision would be made based on the best interests of the child, but this is not the usual practice.

Will I have direct contact with the child's parents?

We need to keep the child as the central focus of our work, and best outcomes for children occur when foster families and birth families can work together with the Department.

Communication between a foster carer and the birth parent is dependent on the needs of the child and safety considerations. The child will usually have contact with his/her parents at a separate venue to your home, but close work between birth parents and carers is an expected part of the care team approach.

All carers are asked to use the Communication Book which is passed between the carer and the parents when the child goes for contact visits. It is used for the carer to give the parent news of recent events and achievements in the child's life and for the parent to communicate family news he/she wishes to share, any concerns or comments to the carer.

Do I have to pay for day care when I am at work?

The Department may pay for day care; however, it may not be in the child's best interest to attend. The child's age and other needs will be considered before the Department will agree to day care. If day care is agreed, carers are expected to apply for any child care rebates.

Can I foster if I don't have a spare room? Can the foster child share a room with my child?

You will need to consider this very carefully as the foster child may have experienced significant trauma and have very different life experiences to your child. You are less able to supervise the children when they are sharing a bedroom. It may be appropriate if the children are of similar age, but the needs of the foster child, as well your own child, must be considered. This is something to discuss with your assessor.

How secure are my personal details?

For your privacy, we do not give your address to the child's family unless you have given permission. Be aware that the child may disclose your address and other personal information.

The Child and Trauma

What may foster children have experienced that has led them to being in care?

The majority of, if not all, foster children have experienced trauma which can be a one-off event or ongoing. It is not only their abuse and neglect experiences, but they are also experiencing grief, loss and dislocation, and are dealing with living in a foster home whilst feeling loyalty to their birth family. They will need your support.

What is the impact of trauma on the child?

The degree to which trauma impacts depends on the severity and duration of the trauma, support received and the child's personality and age. Trauma from caregivers is the most damaging. Even when the threat has gone, the brain may stay in a constant alarm state. The child will show signs of trauma in situations he/she finds stressful. Carers will need to parent these children in a therapeutic way to help them heal.

How can I help my foster child overcome the trauma he/she has experienced?

It is important to be realistic about expectations of traumatised children. Many of the children are developmentally younger than their chronological age owing to their history of abuse and neglect. Some children may have an intellectual or physical disability.

Carers should be open to the possibility that some children will not only improve but will also develop a heightened sense of both compassion and resilience as they come to terms with their traumatic experiences in a climate of safety, security and loving support.

All carers are strongly advised to attend learning sessions and take advantage of other opportunities to learn more about responding to the needs of a traumatised child. Asking for help and support early is the sign of a good foster carer who is in tune with the needs of the child for whom he/she is caring.

Looking Ahead

What are the types of legal arrangements that give me permanent care of the child and transfer parental responsibility from the Department to me?

Permanent foster care arrangements may be possible if:

- the child is in the care of the Department on a protection order (time-limited or until 18); and
- carers have had the continuous care of the child for at least two years from the time the protection order (time-limited or until 18) was granted.

The following orders transfer parental responsibility to foster carers:

- protection order (special guardianship) (SGO).
- adoption (carer).



What is Special Guardianship?

A special guardianship order (SGO) transfers parental responsibility to you as the foster carer until the child reaches 18 years of age. The foster carer can make a direct application to the Children's Court for the protection order to be revoked and be replaced with an SGO. Discussion with the child protection worker must take place before you apply to the Court.

What is Carer Adoption?

An Adoption Order transfers parental responsibility to the foster carer for the child's lifetime. Birth parents are required to consent to the adoption of the child by the foster carer. Discussion with the child protection worker must take place before this is considered.

Community Services Organisations

If you would like to foster through a community services organisation (CSO), you should contact the CSO directly. Even if you wish to foster with one of these agencies, you are very welcome to attend a Department Foster Care Information Session.

Information on CSOs and their contact details are on our website: www.communitites.wa.gov.au



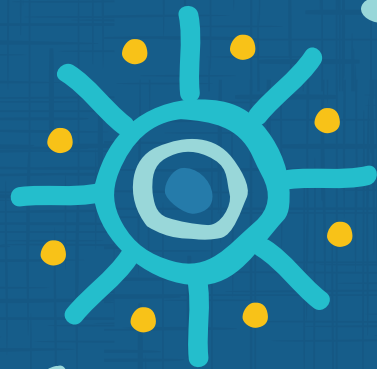
**You won't always see where they go.
But you can help them get there.**

.....
Become a foster carer.
.....

Department of Communities
5 Newman Court, Fremantle WA 6160

www.communities.wa.gov.au

Postal address: Locked Bag 5000,
Fremantle WA 6959
Telephone: 1800 182 178





Foster Care Expression of Interest Form

This form will assist us to progress your interest in foster care. If you have any queries about the completion of this form, please contact the Fostering Team on 1800 182 178.

Metropolitan area only:

You must attend one of our information sessions before submitting an Expression of Interest Form. A list of the dates and venues is included in the information pack or on our website at www.communities.wa.gov.au

Have you attended an information session on fostering? **YES / NO**

If YES, location: _____ Date: _____

There are different types of foster care. You do not have to make a definite decision now, but it would help us to know in which type of care you are interested. Please tick all that apply.

Temporary

Emergency ☐

Short-Break ☐

Pre-Adoptive Care (metro only) ☐

Permanent

☐

Preferred age range of children: _____

☐☐☐☐

APPLICANT ONE	Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> X <input type="checkbox"/>	APPLICANT TWO	Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> X <input type="checkbox"/>
Surname _____		Relationship to Applicant 1 _____	
Given Names _____		Surname _____	
Date of Birth _____		Given Names _____	
		Date of Birth _____	
Previous Name (Maiden etc.) _____		Previous Name (Maiden etc.) _____	
Alias Name/s (if applicable) _____		Alias Name/s (if applicable) _____	
Occupation _____		Occupation _____	
Hours per week _____		Hours per week _____	
Telephone Mobile _____		Telephone Mobile _____	
(H) _____ (W) _____		(H) _____ (W) _____	
Email _____		Email _____	
Residential Address _____			
Post Code _____			
Postal Address (if applicable) _____			
Post Code _____			

Personal Details of Applicant(s)

APPLICANT ONE	APPLICANT TWO
Country of Birth _____	Country of Birth _____
Status	Status
Australian Citizen <input type="checkbox"/>	Australian Citizen <input type="checkbox"/>
Australian Permanent Resident <input type="checkbox"/>	Australian Permanent Resident <input type="checkbox"/>
New Zealand holder of Special Category visa - subclass 444 <input type="checkbox"/>	New Zealand holder of Special Category visa - subclass 444 <input type="checkbox"/>
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander <input type="checkbox"/>	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Are you pregnant, trying to become pregnant, engaged in a fertility program or a surrogacy arrangement?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If you become pregnant during your fostering application process, please inform the Department so we can advise you on the best way to proceed.</p> <p>The last cycle of fertility treatment must have been completed at least 12 months before you can be assessed as a potential foster carer.</p>	
<p>Have you ever applied to foster or adopt before, including in other states or countries? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If Yes, please provide details:</p>	

Children of Current and Previous Relationships

Given Name	Last Name	Gender		Date of Birth	Relationship to Applicant One*	Relationship to Applicant Two*	Currently living with you?	
		M	F				Yes	No

*Please indicate whether adopted/biological/step child

Other People Living in Your Household – Adults and Other Children

(Note: partner living in your home to be listed as applicant two)

Given Name	Last Name	Gender		Date of Birth	Relationship to Applicant One*	Relationship to Applicant Two*
		M	F			

1. Are you in good physical and emotional health, without any medical condition that may affect your ability to care for a child?

Applicant One - Yes ☐ No ☐

Applicant Two - Yes ☐ No ☐

2. Have you had any contact with the Department?

Applicant One - Yes ☐ No ☐

Applicant Two - Yes ☐ No ☐

3. Do you have a criminal record or any pending charges before any court?

Applicant One - Yes ☐ No ☐

Applicant Two - Yes ☐ No ☐

4. Is there a swimming pool and/or spa on your premises?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, is there a compliant barrier in place?

Yes ☐ No ☐

5. Are there dams or other large bodies of water on the property?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, are they separated from the house by fencing?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Some life events may have an impact on your application if they have occurred recently. We will talk to you more about this, but please look at the list below and tick any which have happened to you within the last **two** years.

Please include the date

- Birth of a child
- Marriage or new relationship
- Divorce or separation
- Bereavement – death of a significant person
- Medical treatment (including mental health)
- Moved house
- Change of employment
- Loss of job
- Additional caring responsibilities
- Pending legal matters [including past or currents VROs]

Applicant One

Applicant Two

Availability

Please provide the day and time (Monday to Friday) and the phone number that suits you best for one of our officers to contact you.

Contact name: _____

Day of the week: _____

Phone number: _____

Time: _____ (am/pm)

Declaration

I/We the undersigned declare that, to the best of my/our knowledge, the information I/we have provided on this form is true and correct.

I/We agree to being contacted by the Department.

Applicant One (name): _____

Applicant Two (name): _____

Signature: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Thank you very much for your interest in fostering.

Please return the completed form to:

Foster Care Applications
Department of Communities
Locked Bag 5000,
Fremantle WA 6959

Phone: 1800 182 178

Fax: (08) 8490 5540

Email: fostering@communities.wa.gov.au

Website: www.communities.wa.gov.au



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