



Department
for Education

Draft: Foster care standards and guidance

Children and young people's version

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What is this publication

Fostering services are organisations which choose and support foster carers and help children in care. These services have to follow the law. They also have to pay attention to rules the Department for Education makes which explain how the department expect them to do things. Experts come to check how well they are following doing this.

We have written new rules for these organisations and would like to get people's views on them.

Who this publication is for

- Children and young people with lived experience of care and / or fostering.

Summary of the standards

The Fostering Quality Standards - what fostering services should do to make sure children get good care and support.		
1	Finding and Choosing Foster Carers	<p>All children who need a foster carer should have one.</p> <p>Services (organisations which choose and help foster carers) should find foster carers and choose them carefully to make sure they can provide safe and loving homes. The aim is to find the right family for each child.</p>
2	Family and Friends Foster Carers	<p>When children cannot live with their parents, services should first think about whether they can live with relatives or other trusted adults.</p> <p>Living with someone they already know can help children feel safer and more settled. Services should choose family and friends carers fairly and quickly.</p>
3	Identity, Culture and Family Relationships	<p>Children do not stop being who they are when they come into care.</p> <p>Services should help children stay connected to their family, culture, language, faith and community. They should help children understand their story and feel proud of who they are.</p>
4	Knowledge and Skills	<p>Children need carers who understand them and know how to meet their needs.</p> <p>Services should provide good training and learning opportunities so carers can continue to develop their knowledge and skills.</p>

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5	Support for Foster Carers	<p>Children do best when their foster carers feel supported.</p> <p>Services should provide advice, practical help and specialist support when needed. They should work with carers to solve problems early and help children stay settled whenever possible.</p>
6	Everyday Family Life	<p>Children in care should be able to enjoy everyday life like other children.</p> <p>Foster carers should be trusted to make most day-to-day decisions for the children they care for. Children should be able to take part in normal activities, have fun, learn new skills and be involved in decisions about their lives.</p>
7	Listening to Concerns and Treating People Fairly	<p>Children need to know that adults will listen when they are worried.</p> <p>Services should take worries and problems seriously, respond quickly and help keep children safe. They should try to resolve difficulties, support relationships and treat children and carers fairly.</p>

The Foster Carer Development Standards- what fostering services should help carers understand and be able to do.

1	Understanding the Foster Carer Role	<p>Carers should understand their responsibilities and the decisions they can make.</p> <p>They should know when to involve other professionals and work well with everyone supporting the child.</p>
2	Building Safe and Caring Relationships	<p>Strong relationships help children feel safe and secure.</p> <p>Carers should understand that trust takes time. They should be patient, reliable and caring, especially when children find relationships difficult. They should listen, stay calm and help repair relationships when things go wrong.</p>
3	Therapeutic Parenting	<p>Children often show their feelings and needs through their behaviour.</p> <p>Carers should try to understand what is behind behaviour. They should help children feel safe, manage their emotions and learn healthy ways to cope.</p>
4	Identity, Culture and Sense of Self	<p>Every child should grow up understanding who they are.</p> <p>Carers should help children learn about their family, culture, faith, community and life story. They should celebrate what is important to them and help them develop confidence and self-belief.</p>

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5	Keeping Children Safe	<p>Children need adults who notice when something is wrong and take action.</p> <p>Carers should know how to spot signs that a child may be unsafe, listen when children share worries and work with other professionals to protect them.</p>
6	Health, Education and Wellbeing	<p>Children should have the opportunity to be healthy, learn, achieve and enjoy life.</p> <p>Carers should support children's physical and emotional health, education, friendships, hobbies and help them do more things themselves as they get older. They should encourage children to aim high and believe in themselves.</p>
7	Working with Other People Around the Child	<p>Many people help support children in care.</p> <p>Carers should work closely with social workers, teachers, health professionals, family members and others involved in the child's life. They should share information, support important relationships and speak up for children when needed.</p>

Part 1: Introduction

What these new standards and guidance are about

We have written new rules for organisations which choose and support foster carers and help children in care (fostering services). We think that if everyone follows these rules, things will be better for children in care, foster carers and foster families. We call these rules 'standards'.

The main idea in these rules is simple: children need strong, lasting relationships. For that to happen, we to help create a safe, stable and loving home.

For every rule we create, we should ask:

- Does this help a child feel safe?
- Does this help them feel part of a family?
- Does this support strong relationships?

If the answer is no, it should not be a rule.

Children have told us there are some things that always matter:

- Building safe and lasting relationships.
- Helping children understand their story and identity.
- Understanding that behaviour is a way of communicating.
- Supporting children's health, learning and rights.
- Working with other people who support the child.

Our standards are about making sure we give children the things that matter to them.

This document is the children and young people's version. The adult version is longer and includes more detail and more words which explain what adults working with children need to do in detail. We have kept the most important bits while keeping this document shorter.

How to think about the standards and guidance

This document brings together 2 sets of standards.

The first standards are called the Fostering Quality Standards. These standards explain what fostering services should do to:

- find the right foster carers
- supporting foster carers
- helping foster carers to develop

There are 7 main topics:

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1. Recruitment, selection and assessment.
2. Kinship carers (family and friends).
3. Identity, culture and family relationships.
4. Knowledge and capability.
5. Support and supervision.
6. Everyday family life and decision-making.
7. Concerns, allegations and fair treatment.

The second are called the Foster Carer Development Standards. These standards explain what foster carers should:

- learn
- understand
- be able to do

If a standard says something about what a foster carer should do, it also means the service should help and support them to do it.

Services should support foster carers to learn these things within their first year. Foster carers should continue still to train and develop their skills after that.

There are also 7 main topics:

1. Understanding the role.
2. Building safe and caring relationships.
3. Therapeutic parenting.
4. Identity, culture and sense of self.
5. Keeping children safe.
6. Health, education and wellbeing.
7. Working with other people around the child.

How the standards and guidance were developed

These standards were created by:

- people with experience of care
- foster carers
- social workers

They are based on:

- research and evidence
- law and policy
- real-life experiences

Part 2: The Fostering Quality Standards

The 7 Fostering Quality Standards explain what fostering services should do to make sure children receive good, supportive care.

Each standard is set out in the same way. It starts by explaining what it means for children and why it matters then it explains what services should do.

In the version for adults it then explains what this looks like in detail. The children and young people's version does not include the detail that is useful for practitioners and adults. This helps keep the document shorter and easier to read.

The most important thing comes first: the child's experience.

These standards apply to all types of fostering.

Standard 1: Recruitment, selection and assessment

Recruitment, selection and assessment means finding and choosing adults who want to foster and preparing them to care for children.

Why this matters for children

When a child needs to come into care, there should be a foster family ready to welcome them.

For this to happen, fostering services need to:

- find enough foster carers
- support them
- make sure they have the right skills and homes for different children

If there are not enough foster carers, children may have to wait for the right home, or they live somewhere that does not meet their needs. This can be especially hard for children who need the most support.

Children describe a good foster carer as someone who:

- helps them feel safe and cared for
- provides a stable and loving home
- stays with them, even when things are difficult
- understands their past and treats it with care
- becomes someone they can trust over time

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Finding the right foster home is very important. If a match between a foster carer and a child is not right, it can mean: the carer cannot meet the child's needs, and the child has to move again.

Each move can mean losing relationships that were just starting to feel safe. Over time, this can make a child feel like it is their fault if things go wrong, even though that's not true.

Getting the match right helps protect children from these feelings.

Services have to be careful about how they choose who can be a carer. They have to understand whether someone can:

- build strong relationships
- support a child through challenges
- provide a safe, stable and loving home

Getting this right is the foundation for everything that follows.

"I would like to get a better relationship with my carer so I feel safer where I live. I would like someone who can understand my thoughts and feelings."

Child, aged 8–10 years old (Bright Spots / 10,000 Voices)

What services should do

- Find enough foster carers for children in their area.
- When choosing carers, focus on whether someone can provide a safe, stable and loving home.
- Choose carers quickly and well.
- Recruit different types of carers, so children can be matched with families who are like them or understand them well.
- Do everything they can to find the right home for each child and put in place the right support for them.
- Be kind and respectful to people who want to become carers.
- Help people who want to be carers understand what to expect and be clear about the help and support they will receive.
- Help carers find adults who will help them when they become a carer.
- Help people who want to become carers understand where they can complain if they don't agree with a decision that the service makes.
- If someone could offer a good home but is not quite ready yet, think about how to help them be ready.
- Make it easier for carers to move between services.
- Keep getting to know carers over time and notice when things are going well and when extra help is needed.
- Keep improving how carers are found and chosen.

Standard 2: Kinship and family and friends foster carers

Kinship and family and friends foster carers mean people who the child already knows or who is part of their family, who choose to become their foster carer. The rules for them are slightly different than for foster carers who the child didn't know before.

Why this matters for children

When a child cannot live with their parents, the first thing people should ask is whether there is someone in this child's life who could care for them. This might be:

- a relative
- a family friend
- someone the child already knows and trusts

Living with someone a child already knows can:

- help them feel safer
- help them keep important relationships in their life
- make big changes feel less overwhelming

Children who live with family or friends often say they:

- feel happy
- have stronger relationships
- feel understood

Usually, family and friends carers (sometimes called kinship carers) already know the child, understand their background and care about them.

Even when someone knows a child, it is still important to make sure that the child will be safe and well cared for if these people become kinship carers. This means looking carefully at:

- what a child has experienced
- what they need now
- whether the person can support the child well

Sometimes, a family member or friend may not meet every rule that applies to other foster carers. But this does not automatically mean they cannot become a carer. Instead, the question should always be: what is best for this child?

“Nanny and Grandad help me with my worries, and they know when I’m sad.”

Child, aged 8–10 years old (Views of Children and Young People in Kinship Foster Care, 2023)

What services should do

- Always check whether a child can live with someone they know before looking at other foster carers.
- Decide whether family and friends (kinship carers) can care for a child in a way that is fair and doesn't take too long.
- Help family and friends (kinship carers) with anything new they are expected to do and need help to learn, in order to look after a child.

Standard 3: Identity, culture and family relationships

Your identity is what makes you, you. It includes things like your name, your family, the things you like, where you live, and what is important to you. Culture is the way people live, celebrate, and share what is important to them.

Why this matters for children

When a child comes into foster care, they do not leave behind who they are. They still have:

- their history
- their culture and beliefs
- their language
- their family connections
- their sense of where they come from

All of these are important parts of who they are.

Children and young people often say it is important to:

- understand their story
- know where they come from
- feel connected to their heritage

This helps them to:

- feel good about themselves
- build confidence
- grow into adulthood with a strong sense of who they are

Sometimes, children may feel embarrassed or ashamed about being in care. This can make it harder to feel confident about who they are.

When it is safe, spending time with family is important. This can include:

- parents
- brothers and sisters

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- wider family members

For many children, their siblings are some of the most important relationships in their lives.

The way adults talk about a child's family matters. Respectful, positive words can help children feel proud of who they are. Negative or dismissive words can affect their confidence and relationships.

For disabled children, understanding themselves also includes:

- how they see and understand their disability
- how others talk about their disability
- whether they feel accepted

Children should grow up feeling that their disability is part of who they are, not something to hide.

Some children come to the UK without their family. These children may:

- have experienced very difficult things and lost loved ones
- have been on dangerous journeys
- have had to look after themselves from a young age
- find it hard to trust adults
- feel unsure about accepting care

These children may be building their story without family or documents that help them understand their past. They might be feeling stressed about their asylum or migration status. These children also need help to understand themselves and feel confident.

"I used to see Mum and my older brother 3 times a week. It has been cut down to once a week and this makes me sad. I don't know why contact was cut."

Child, aged 8–10 years old (Staying Connected, 2022)

What services should do

- Value who each child is.
- Make sure every child's identity, culture, faith, language and family relationships are respected and supported.
- Try to match children with carers who understand them. If this is not possible, help carers learn and give them the support they need to understand the child.
- Support children to spend time with their parents and their brothers and sisters if they have them.
- If spending time with family is not safe or good for the child right now, keep thinking about how to make it safe in future and look for creative ways to maintain important connections.

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- Explore how family or friends can help even if they cannot care for a child full-time. For example, they could spend time with the child or have them visit at the weekend.
- Support every child to understand their past, make sense of their experiences and feel proud of who they are.

Standard 4: Knowledge and capability

Capability means being able to do something. It includes the skills, knowledge, and strengths that help you do it well.

Why this matters for children

Children need carers who:

- understand them
- treat them as individuals
- take time to get to know who they really are
- believe they can succeed

Carers need to understand:

- how children grow and develop
- how difficult early experiences can affect them
- how being in care can also impact how they feel and behave

At the same time, children need carers who do not make assumptions about them and see their strengths.

Children need carers who know how to

- set clear rules, and when to be flexible
- understand what a child's behaviour is saying
- not take difficult behaviour personally
- ask for help
- keep children safe
- show children how to cope with difficult things
- help children build confidence and strength
- encourage children to be kind to themselves

Children and young people often say they want carers who:

- understand their personal history
- support their mental health
- listen when they talk about what matters to them

For older children, being able to talk openly with their carer is one of the biggest influences on how happy and well they feel.

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Importantly, carers need to show children things through their actions, not just their words. For example, they need to show children how to deal with strong emotions or worries and how to ask for help.

"People don't do enough to guarantee the emotional wellbeing of that child, and the psychological wellbeing... If they just put more measures in place to make sure kids really understand why this is happening, it's not their fault..."

Female, care leaver (Children's Voices: Children's experiences of instability in the care system, Children's Commissioner for England, 2019)

What services should do

- Make sure every foster carer has the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to provide great care for children.
- Provide learning and training that helps carers develop the skills described in Part 3 of this document.
- Support carers to keep learning after their first year.
- Provide training which reflects the needs of each carer and the needs of the children they care for. This means learning is not one-size-fits-all.
- Make sure training is based on the latest research and evidence and what children and young people say about their experiences.

Standard 5: Support and supervision

Supervision is a chance for foster carers to talk about how things are going at home, get support. It's time to think about what they have learned and how to make everyone at home happy and safe.

Why this matters for children

The relationship between a child and their foster carer is one of the most important things for their wellbeing. Children often say they want a carer who:

- sticks with them
- shows kindness and understanding
- is patient
- takes time to really listen and learn about them

Support for carers matters too. How well a carer can support a child depends on how well they and the whole foster family is supported.

Sometimes, a foster carer may not know how to help and support a child. When this happens, children need to know adults will notice and action will be taken to make things better.

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Services should always aim to:

- support the relationships that matter to the child
- help things improve
- avoid making the child move whenever possible

At the same time, it is important to understand that not every match between a foster carer and child will work, and not everyone is able to care for every child.

Children want stability and to live with the same carer. If children do have to move, this should be planned carefully. If a move has to happen suddenly, the adults around a child should act quickly to help them feel safe and settled again.

Even when a child needs to move home, they still need to keep the relationships with people who matter to them. This can include staying in touch with previous foster carers.

Children also say they do not want to have to work with lots of different social workers or professionals. They want consistency and people who know them well.

“Show me you have listened to me by making a change.”

Young person, aged 11–18 years old (Strong and Loving Relationships, 2024)

What services should do

- Make sure every foster carer feels supported.
- Help carers continue in the role by giving them opportunities to connect with other carers and to rest.
- Support everyone in the foster family, including all children living there.
- Make sure support is provided by someone the carer knows and trusts.
- Talk to the carer about what is happening at home and think through any problems.
- Give carers practical help.
- Give carers specialist help if the child they care for has specific needs.
- Give carers help early to prevent problems getting worse.
- Respond quickly if a child experiences difficulties and help carers to understand why a child is behaving a particular way and how to keep everyone safe.
- Give carers enough money.
- When a child moves on, help carers have a break so they have time to feel sad and miss the child who left and then be fully ready to care for the next child.

Standard 6: Delegated authority and everyday family life

Delegated authority means that a grown-up has been given permission to make some decisions on behalf of someone else. In fostering this means the foster carer has been given permission by the Local Authority to make decisions for children in their care.

Why this matters for children

Children in foster care want to feel like everyone else.

Much of their life may already feel different, and these differences can feel even more obvious when foster carers have to ask permission for children to do everyday things such as:

- going to a friend's birthday party
- getting a haircut
- joining a sports team
- staying over at a friend's house

When these decisions take longer or need special permission, it can make children feel like they are in a system, not just a family.

Being able to make normal daily choices within a foster family helps children feel:

- included
- part of family life
- the same as their friends

It also helps the relationship between the child and their foster carer. When carers cannot make everyday decisions, it makes it harder for them to build strong, trusting relationships.

All children need:

- guidance
- support
- adults who understand them

Children in care may have different experiences that affect how they see and respond to dangerous situations.

Adults should take time to understand each child and help them build independence in ways that are right for them.

The online world is a normal part of children's lives. Children in foster care should be able to use the internet and access digital platforms just like other children their age. At the same time, all children need support to stay safe online, understand risks and make good decisions.

Children need to feel that their views are heard. But this does not always mean that an adult should ask them directly what they want. Sometimes a child may:

- not have the words
- not fully understand how they feel
- communicate how they are feeling through the way they behave

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At other times, especially when children are older, they will be able to say what they think and feel clearly.

No matter how views are expressed, they should always be taken seriously.

Adults should work together to understand what the child needs. In every situation children's views should be listened to in a way that works for them.

Adults should:

- understand what the child is experiencing
- involve people who know the child well and the child trusts in decisions

The responsibility is on adults to understand children, even when children cannot explain things themselves.

“As a looked after child, be treated equally ... my foster mum choose who is safe for me to stay with, not having to have a DBS to stay with family.”

Young person, aged 12 years old (The Big Ambition, 2024)

What services should do:

- Trust foster carers to make everyday decisions for children.
- Avoid making carers ask for permission for normal activities.
- Only stop carers from everyday decisions on rare occasions, based on a specific child's needs.
- Support carers to keep children safe.
- Support carers to help children try things that are normal for their age, even if there is a small chance something might go wrong.
- Support carers to help children learn and grow and let them enjoy themselves.
- Make any important decisions together with the foster carer and adults who know the child well, who the child trusts.
- Involve children in decisions about their lives when they want to be involved, in ways that suit their age and understanding.

Standard 7: Allegations, concerns and the fair treatment of carers

This is about what happens when someone raises a worry about a carer or a problem, making sure the worry or problem is looked into properly and that the carer is treated fairly.

Why this matters for children

If a child raises a concern (or someone raises one for them), they need to know:

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- they have been listened to
- something is being done

Children should not be left waiting for a long time feeling unsure about what will happen.

What happens next matters. If a concern is very serious, children should be protected straight away.

If it's not clear if the concern is true or if it is less serious, the child still needs to be listened to. Adults should think about why the child said or behaved in a way that showed they are worried. If someone else was worried, adults need to think about how to work together to make sure things are okay.

Children do not think about whether something is a complaint, a concern or an allegation. They just know that they feel worried and uncertain.

Sometimes when children or other say they are worried about a foster carer the children are moved to a different home. Moving to a different home can be very hard for children and they might lose relationships they care about.

"I hate being in care and if I say something that is worrying me, it gets blown out of proportion."

- Young person, aged 11–18 years old (10,000 Voices, Coram Voice and the Rees Centre, 2022)

"I was worried a lot at the time. Because it was unknown to where we would be going, how it would be like."

- Female, 16 years old (Children's Voices: Children's experiences of instability in the care system, Children's Commissioner for England, 2019)

What services should do:

- Be clear that most problems in foster families can be worked through with the right support.
- Help carers to think through why something happened, improve their approach, make things safer for the child and work to repair relationships.
- Make sure the child is listened to and properly understood.
- Think about what can change in the home that is not working well.
- Explore whether a child needs more or different support.
- Increase support to the foster family when concerns arise and continue supporting everyone even if the child has to move.
- If a child has to move, but the carer has shown they can provide good care, they should help the carer return to fostering when possible.
- In the small number of cases where a carer is not able to provide safe care, they should act quickly to protect children.

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- Keep clear records of worries that were shared and what happened in response to them so that they can spot patterns over time, identify problems early and improve how they work.
- A named person in the service should look at all the worries raised about and by carers and think about how the service needs to improve to stop problems from happening in future.

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Part 3: Foster Carer Development Standards

The Foster Carer Development Standards explain what every foster carer should know and be able to do within their first year of becoming a foster carer.

Fostering services should:

- provide the right training
- offer ongoing support
- help carers develop the skills they need to care for children well

Choosing and training foster carers

Choosing the right carers and helping them learn the right knowledge and skills are part of the same journey.

Choosing carers involves understanding whether someone has the values and qualities to become a foster carer.

Learning is about helping carers build the knowledge and skills they need over time.

Some things are difficult to teach and need to be explored before a foster carer is chosen, such as:

- kindness and empathy
- wanting to care for children for the right reasons
- wanting to learn
- being able to manage emotions
- being able to build strong relationships

Other things can be learned, including:

- the laws and rules around fostering
- understanding how children grow and develop
- how to support a child's understanding of themselves and help they feel they belong
- how to create the right rules and when to be flexible
- working with other adults in a child's life

Children are supported by a team

Foster carers play an important role, but they are not expected to meet a child's every need on their own.

Children in care are supported by many different people and services. This may include:

- social workers
- teachers and school staff

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- doctors and health professionals
- mental health services
- special educational needs services
- advocates
- Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)
- family members and kinship networks
- faith and community groups

Together, these people help children receive the support that they need.

Foster carers should develop the knowledge and skills described in these standards.

At the same time they should understand that:

- they cannot do everything alone
- some needs require special help
- asking for help is a strength, not a weakness

Not every child has the same needs

Children's needs can be different and change over time. This means carers should continue to learn and develop, especially when caring for a child with needs that they have not supported before.

Services should help carers by:

- giving them training and learning opportunities
- giving them advice and guidance
- helping them get support from experienced people
- letting them know how they can ask for help
- helping with practical things

Services should also recognise that some carers bring valuable experience from previous roles and from their work life. What the carer learns should build on their existing strengths and knowledge.

The Development Standards describe what carers should learn in their first year. But they are not the end of learning.

Children's needs change, new research becomes available, and laws and guidance can be updated. Because of this, carers should continue to learn things.

Training should be high quality and should be based on what carers say works for them. Carers should have opportunities to learn with support from others.

Training should be based on the type of care someone is doing and the needs of the children they care for.

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Every foster carer should have an annual learning and development plan that is based on what the carer and the children they care for need.

Partners of foster carers should take part in first-year learning so that they understand fostering. After that, training expectations should reflect how involved they are in caring for children.

How we decided what to put in the training standards

Foster carers should be supported using the best available knowledge about what helps children thrive. This means services should:

- use approaches that are supported by strong evidence
- keep up to date with what research tells us helps children and foster carers
- choose learning and support that best meets the needs of the children and carers they work with

At the same time, evidence does not only come from research studies. Services should also value the knowledge and experience of:

- care-experienced children and adults
- foster carers
- families and communities

The Development Standards set out what services and carers should be doing across England. However, children's lives and communities are different across the country. For example, carers in different areas may experience:

- different risks to children
- different local services and support networks
- different community resources
- different ways of accessing health, mental health or special education needs and disabilities support

Because of this, services should adapt learning and support to reflect local circumstances.

What this means for services

The carer is expected to meet the standard, but it is the service's responsibility to help them get there.

Services should provide training and development that gives carers the knowledge and skills they need to meet these standards.

Training should never be separate from a child's day-to-day experiences. Services should make sure that:

- learning is based on the needs of the children a carer is looking after

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- training, supervision and support work together
- carers are helped to put learning into everyday life

Services should give carers regular opportunities to:

- think about how they care for children
- reflect on relationships within the household
- discuss any problems
- say what support they need

Where a child has needs the foster carer does not fully understand, services should provide access to specialist advice and support.

Services should also provide practical help when it is needed, including:

- financial support
- information and guidance
- help accessing services

Services should regularly ask children how supported they feel and ask carers how supported they feel. They should listen carefully to what they hear and use it to improve what they do.

The 7 Development Standards

Development Standard 1: Understanding the role of the foster carer

A role is the part a person plays in helping others or doing something.

What this means for children

Children should be able to enjoy everyday life and do ordinary things, and carers should be able to make decisions about everyday things.

Children tell us that feeling part of a family is important. When foster carers can make everyday decisions, it helps children to feel more settled and feel included, and they can feel like they are part of a family in the same way as their friends.

It also helps children understand what is expected of them and feel confident about the routines and rules in their home.

Foster carers need to understand:

- their role
- the decisions they can make themselves
- when they need to involve others in making decisions

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When a bigger decision does need other people to be involved, carers should know who to speak to so that decisions can be made as quickly as possible.

Carers need to learn that:

- Fostering works best when carers, fostering services and the local authority work together as partners.
- There are laws and rules that help protect children and guide how fostering works.
- Foster carers should be trusted to make everyday decisions for the children they care for.
- Any limits on what a carer can decide should be based on the needs of an individual child and not applied as a rule for everyone.
- They might sometimes need to make an urgent decision to keep a child safe or support their wellbeing, even if it has not been possible to get permission first.
- Information about children and their families should be treated respectfully and confidentially, unless it needs to be shared to keep someone safe.
- They can get extra help if they are disabled or neurodivergent.

Carers need to learn how to:

- Make decisions about how to care for children day to day.
- Know when they need to ask others about a decision and do this quickly so that children do not have to wait.
- Work with other adults to make longer term plans for the child.
- Work positively with the people supporting the child and other people in their life.
- Tell people if a child is not getting what they need, in a way that helps protect the child and the whole foster family.

Development Standard 2: Building safe, stable and loving relationships with children

A relationship is the connection between 2 or more people. It is built through spending time together, caring, trust, and support.

What this means for children

When children come into care, they have often experienced adults leaving, relationships ending, or people letting them down. Because of this, trusting adults can feel difficult.

What children often need most is at least one trusted adult who stays. Someone who:

- knows them well
- cares about them
- sticks with them through good times and difficult times

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- does not give up on them

Children tell us that strong relationships make the biggest difference. When children have a trusted adult in their life, they are more likely to:

- feel safe
- feel valued
- ask for help when they need it
- believe in themselves
- cope with challenges

Children may not always find it easy to build relationships. Some children may:

- push adults away
- find it hard to trust
- worry that people will leave
- test whether relationships will last

This is often linked to what these children have experienced in the past.

Children need carers who understand that trust takes time. They need carers who can:

- stay calm during difficult moments
- keep showing care and interest
- be predictable and reliable
- keep reaching out to children, even when it feels hard

Carers need to learn that:

- Having at least one trusted adult who knows a child well and stays in their life is one of the most important things that helps children in care feel safe and happy.
- Having experienced abuse, neglect or loss can make it harder for children to trust adults or build relationships. These responses are understandable and are not the child's fault.
- Trust is built over time through small, predictable actions. Children learn to trust adults when adults care for them, keep their promises, and reach out to them again and again.
- A child's behaviour often shows how they are feeling or what they need. When carers look past the behaviour, they can better understand what the child is trying to say.
- The whole fostering family matters to how a child in care feels at the home. Everyone in the home can help a child feel welcomed, included and valued.
- Arguments and difficult moments happen in all families. What matters most is what happens afterwards. Children need adults to come back, listen to them, and rebuild trust when things go wrong.

Carers need to learn how to:

- Help children build trust in adults. Carers should start where children feel comfortable and move at a speed that feels safe for them.
- Respond to behaviour that is upsetting or hard to understand in ways that keep everyone safe and protect the relationship.
- Notice changes in how a child is feeling, including when those feelings are shown through behaviour rather than words.
- Help the child build good relationships with everyone in the home, including the carer's own children.
- After a disagreement, listen to the child and help them feel important, understood and connected again.
- Be supportive through changes and difficulties in a child's life, including:
 - changes of school
 - moves between homes
 - time with family changing

Development Standard 3: Therapeutic parenting

Therapeutic parenting means caring for a child in a way that helps them feel safe, understood, and loved, especially after difficult experiences.

What this means for children

Children come into care after difficult things happen to them. To cope, children often develop ways of protecting themselves.

These behaviours may have helped children stay safe in the past, but they can sometimes make it harder to manage strong feelings or trust people. They might make it difficult to accept rules or support from adults.

Healing from difficult things takes time. Different things can help children to heal, including:

- safe and supportive homes
- school, hobbies and fun activities
- adults who understand and stick with them

When carers understand how a child's past may affect their feelings and behaviour, they can adapt the way they parent. Children benefit from carers who:

- show kindness
- want to know why a child is feeling or behaving in a particular way
- stay calm and give children time to grow, learn and build trust
- do what they promise they will do, and behave in the same way over time

These qualities help children feel safe.

Carers need support to:

- help children recover from difficult experiences
- understand children's needs
- manage everyday parenting difficulties
- look after themselves

Carers need to learn that:

- Children often communicate through their behaviour, which may be linked to past experiences. Understanding what is causing the behaviour can be more helpful than just trying to stop it.
- Many children in care feel different from their friends because of their past experiences. Some try very hard to be perfect, while others feel alone or misunderstood. This can affect their confidence and how safe they feel.
- Children need to feel emotionally safe as well as physically safe. Feeling accepted, understood and cared for helps them trust others and manage difficult feelings.
- Children who have learned that adults cannot always be relied upon may find it difficult to ask for help. They may hide their worries or push people away at the times they most need support. This can be confusing, but it is often a sign that the child needs help.
- When children feel scared or unsafe, or like there are too many things happening at once, they may struggle to think, manage their emotions, learn or solve problems.
- Helping a child feel safe is often the first step to helping them grow and learn.
- Every child is different. Some children can cope with difficult situations more easily than others. Different children will find different situations difficult.
- Children build confidence and learn how to manage their emotions over time.
- It is normal for carers to sometimes feel tired, worried or unsure. This is not a sign of failure. It is a reason why carers need support.
- Carers who can respond with curiosity, compassion and patience are better able to support children through difficult feelings.

Carers need to learn how to:

- Be kind when a child shares or shows difficult feelings, without telling the child those feelings are bad or trying to make the feelings go away straight away.
- Think about why a child is behaving a particular way and what they might need.
- Know when a child is having so many feelings, worries or things happening at once that it becomes hard for them to cope, and how to help the child stay calm.
- Help children understand their emotions by putting feelings into words and help them make sense of what is happening to them.
- Set clear rules when behaviour is unsafe, while making it clear that it is the behaviour - not the child - that is the problem. After arguments, carers should talk and make up with the child as soon as possible.

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- Respond to unhappiness, arguments or strong emotions in ways that help everyone stay calm. This might mean giving the child time and space and helping the child feel safe.
- Set clear rules that fit a child's age and understanding and help a child follow them. Recognise when a rule is not working for a child.
- Show children how to manage their emotions, teaching by example.
- Work with the other adults in a child's life, such as teachers and school staff, so they understand what works best for the child and so that the child understands the rules they need to follow in different places.

Development Standard 4: Identity, culture and the child's sense of self

Your identity is what makes you, you. It includes things like your name, your family, the things you like, where you live, and what is important to you. Culture is the way people live, celebrate, and share what is important to them. Sense of self means knowing who you are and feeling good about yourself.

What this means for children

Every child should grow up knowing who they are. This includes understanding:

- their history
- their culture
- their faith or beliefs
- their family relationships
- their community
- the experiences that have shaped their life

Children in care can sometimes grow up with missing pieces of information about their lives. They may have questions about their past, hear different things about what happened from different people or have gaps in their memory. This can make it harder to understand who they are and where they come from.

Children and young people tell us that knowing their story helps them:

- build confidence
- feel proud of who they are
- understand their experiences
- develop a stronger sense of belonging

Foster carers play an important role in helping children understand themselves. They can help children to:

- ask questions about their lives
- talk about their family and relationships

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- explore their culture, faith and community
- make sense of difficult experiences
- think about who they are becoming

Helping children understand themselves should be done with care, honesty and respect for the child's experiences and feelings.

Carers need to learn that:

- A child's identity is made up of many different parts.
- How children think about themselves develops over time and may change.
- As children get older, especially when they are teenagers, they may change how they think about themselves or their past. Carers should let them do this safely without judging them.
- Children in care are more likely to have missing information, unanswered questions or different versions of their history. These gaps can affect their wellbeing, confidence and mental health both now and later in life.
- Experiences of losing or being separated from important people can affect a child's sense of who they are.
- Even when a child is not seeing someone important to them, that person may still be very important to the child. Children often have mixed feelings about their family, and these feelings should be accepted and understood.
- Some children develop negative beliefs about themselves as a result of what they have experienced. They may think things such as "It was my fault", "People always leave", "I am different from everyone else". A carer always being there for a child can help stop these negative beliefs over time.
- For some children, neurodiversity or disability is an important part of who they are. Children should be supported to understand their strengths, needs and the ways in which they experience the world.
- Children who have come to the UK without their families may be making sense of who they are at the same time as dealing with being in a new country and culture. Carers should support them to understand their past and who they are, even though this can be difficult.
- What carers believe about themselves, and the world will influence how they care for children. They need think about their own beliefs and biases to stop racism and discrimination.

Carers need to learn how to:

- Notice what is important to a child about who they are, not just through what they say, but through their behaviour, interests and what they like to talk about.
- Celebrate the things that matter to the child, including birthdays, religious festivals, cultural celebrations, family milestones and other important events.
- Support the everyday parts of a child's identity, such as hair and skin care, food and clothing, language, faith and more.

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- Allow children to change their mind about how they want to show who they are over time.
- Support children to explore who they are, including where they have questions about whether they want to continue to do things, while showing respect and value towards what people in their family or culture do.
- Learn about the child's culture and faith drawing on people in the child's family or the community who understand this.
- Prepare children for time with family and other important people, paying attention to how the child feels before, during and afterwards.
- Talk with children about their family, history and life experiences in a way that works for that child's age, is honest and sensitive, and at a speed the child is comfortable with.
- Help create and maintain the child's life story by collecting and preserving things such as photographs, memories, achievements and mementoes.
- Notice if a child says or believes negative things about themselves. Help them build confidence through encouragement, positive relationships and chances to succeed and feel included.
- Notice when a child experiences discrimination and help them.
- Think about their own experiences, assumptions and biases, talk about these with those supporting them, and continue learning where further understanding is needed.

Development Standard 5: Safeguarding and the child's safety

What this means for children

Every child has the right to feel safe.

Children need to know that if something worries them, scares them or makes them feel uncomfortable, there is an adult who will:

- listen
- take them seriously
- help keep them safe

Some children in care have experienced harm in the past. Because of this, it can sometimes be difficult to tell adults when something is wrong.

Children often pay close attention to how adults respond when they do speak up. Children are more likely to ask for help again in the future if adults:

- notice
- listen
- believe them
- take action

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Keeping children safe is not only about responding when something goes wrong. It is also about helping children feel safe in their everyday lives. Children need carers who:

- notice when something does not seem right
- understand when a child may be worried or struggling
- act early when problems start to happen

Foster carers play a vital role in helping children stay safe. They need to be able to:

- recognise signs that a child may not be safe
- ensure children feel able to talk
- respond calmly and appropriately when children say what they are worried about
- work with other professionals to protect children

When children share worries or concerns, they may not always talk directly about what has happened to them. Sometimes they will communicate through:

- behaviour
- emotions
- changes in mood
- changes in relationships

When a child does tell someone about a worry or experience, they need to know that they will be heard and supported.

Carers need to learn that:

- Abuse and neglect can take many forms
- Harm can be caused by strangers, friends or trusted adults within a child's family or the place they live
- Children do not always recognise that they have experienced abuse. They may talk about it after some time, share small pieces of information, or show something has happened through behaviour rather than words.
- The way adults respond when a child shares a concern is extremely important. Feeling listened to, believed and supported can help a child feel safe. Feeling ignored can make it harder for them to speak up again.
- Keeping children safe is a everyone's job. Foster carers are part of a wider network of practitioners and each plays a different role in protecting children.
- Everyone's safety in the foster home matters
- Harm to children in care does not always happen within the home. Children may be at risk in their community, or online. These harms often develop gradually. Changes in behaviour, friendships, routines or going to school can be important signs that something is wrong.
- Not every worry raised about a foster carer is the same. There is an important difference between a serious allegation more general concern about how children are being cared for, and responses should be fair.

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- If a concern/worry is raised, then fostering services need to make sure that foster carers are listened to and supported too:
 - be kept informed
 - have access to support
 - be able to share their views
 - be able to challenge decisions where appropriate
- Children may raise concerns or make allegations for many different reasons. These can include:
 - they need something they are not getting
 - they are confused or worried
 - they are unsure about who to be loyal to
 - they are responding to something from the past
 - they are feeling unsafe
 - they want to be heard
- Whatever the reason, concerns should always be taken seriously and explored carefully.

Carers need to learn how to:

- Create a home where children feel safe talking about difficult things, through everyday conversations, spending time together and being available to listen.
- Know when a child wants to share and not make them share before they are ready.
- Respond calmly when a child shares a worry, concern or experience of harm, helping to keep the child safe while making sure that social workers and the police can do their job.
- Recognise signs that a child may be at risk of harm and tell the right people quickly. This might include noticing changes in behaviour, friendships, routines, going to school or going missing.
- Support children to stay safe online by having clear rules about the internet and devices and at the same time having open, honest conversations with children about their online lives and interests.
- Help children stay safe without preventing them from taking part in normal activities and hobbies.
- Consider the safety and wellbeing of everyone in the house, including their own children.
- Work well with all practitioners around a child.
- Respond calmly when any concerns are raised about them, staying focused on what the child needs.

Development Standard 6: Health, education and everyday wellbeing

Health includes physical and mental health. Education means the nursery, school or college a child goes to but also more broadly how they learn. Well-being means feeling safe, healthy, happy, and cared for.

What this means for children

Children in care want the same things that all children want. They want to:

- be healthy
- do well at school or college
- have fun and enjoy life
- spend time with friends
- have hopes and plans for the future
- grow into independent adults

People should never expect less from a child just because they are in care. Children depend on the adults around them to:

- notice when something is wrong
- help when support is needed
- encourage them to keep trying
- celebrate their successes

Children tell us that it matters when adults believe in them and have high expectations for what they can achieve.

Children need adults who take their health and wellbeing seriously. This includes physical health and mental health. When children receive the right support, they are more likely to feel confident, achieve their goals and enjoy everyday life.

Growing up involves learning new skills and becoming more independent over time. Children need support to:

- make decisions
- solve problems
- manage responsibilities
- build confidence

Foster carers play a vital role in helping children:

- stay healthy
- attend and succeed in education
- take part in activities and opportunities
- develop life skills

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- believe in themselves and their future

A carer who takes a child's health, education and ambitions seriously can make a lasting difference to their life.

Carers need to learn that:

- Children in care have a right to health care and regular health checks. Some children may have health needs that are not always easy to see.
- Mental health is just as important as physical health. Children do not always tell adults when they are worried, upset or struggling. Sometimes their feelings are shown through their behaviour.
- Children in care can face extra difficulties at school. Having adults who believe in them and encourage them can make a big difference.
- Every child in care has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) and a teacher at school whose job is to support them. Foster carers should be involved and speak up if they are worried about a child's learning.
- Learning how to be independent happens over time. Children and young people need the opportunity to practise life skills as they grow up.
- Young people do not stop needing support when they leave care. Relationships and trusted adults still matter.
- Disabled children, and children with special educational needs may need extra help to access health care, education, activities and opportunities to become more independent.
- Technology is an important part of children's lives. It can help children learn, keep in touch with friends and have fun. It can also bring risks, so children need support to use it safely.

Carers need to learn how to:

- Help children stay healthy by supporting:
 - healthy eating
 - exercise and being active
 - good sleep routines
 - regular check-ups with doctors, dentists and other health professionals
- Help children have a healthy balance between time online and other activities, making sure they also have opportunities to spend time with friends, play and take part in hobbies and activities.
- Notice when a child may be struggling with their feelings or mental health, respond calmly, and get the right help when it is needed.
- Support children at school by:
 - talking to teachers
 - attending school meetings
 - helping with learning at home
 - encouraging children to do their best

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- Notice when a child is finding school difficult or is not attending, and work with the school and other professionals to help them get back into learning.
- Help children build independence at a speed that is right for them by supporting them to learn everyday life skills, such as:
 - managing money
 - cooking simple meals
 - travelling safely
 - making decisions
 - looking after their health
- Help young people prepare for adult life and understand the support available to them as they get older, while still being there for them.
- Support children's wellbeing by helping them to enjoy:
 - friendships
 - hobbies
 - sports and activities
 - rest and relaxation
 - the everyday experiences of childhood

Development Standard 7: Working with others around the child

Adults who care about a child work together to make sure the child is safe, happy and healthy.

What this means for children

Children in care often have lots of different adults involved in their lives. These might include:

- social workers
- teachers
- doctors and health professionals
- independent reviewing officers
- advocates
- family members
- foster carers

When the adults around a child work well together:

- children get clear and consistent information;
- support happens when it is needed;
- promises are more likely to be kept, and;
- children understand why decisions are being made

This helps children feel safe, listened to and supported.

When adults do not work well together, children can:

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- hear different answers from different people
- become confused about what is happening
- wait for support that never arrives
- feel left out of decisions about their lives

This can make it harder for children to trust the people around them.

Foster carers are often the person who knows the child best day to day. They play an important role in helping everyone work together by:

- sharing important information
- speaking up for the child when needed
- helping adults understand the child's needs
- keeping the child informed in a way that they can understand

Children should always be at the centre of decisions about their lives. The adults around them should work together to make sure:

- plans make sense
- support is joined up
- children know what is happening
- children know who to turn to for help

Carers need to learn that:

- Lots of different adults may be involved in a child's life. The carer's job is to help everyone work together to do what is best for the child.
- Children should be helped to understand:
 - who the adults in their life are;
 - what each person does, and;
 - how they can help
- Different people have different jobs. Knowing who does what helps carers get the right help when it is needed.
- Spending time with family is important for many children. When it is safe, carers should support children to keep in touch with the people who matter to them.
- Family and friends carers (kinship carers) may already know many of the people in a child's life. This can be a strength, but it can also bring extra challenges.
- Some children have come to the UK without their family. These children may need support from services that help with immigration or asylum. Carers should know who can help and where to get advice.

Carers need to learn how to:

- Talk clearly with the adults who support the child, both in meetings and in writing.
- Help children spend time with their family when this is part of their plan. This includes:

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- helping the child get ready;
- supporting family time where needed, and;
- helping the child make sense of their feelings afterwards
- Write records in a way that the child could read in the future. This means:
 - using clear language
 - avoiding jargon
 - avoiding judgement
 - remembering that care-experienced adults have a right to see their records
- Involve children in recording their story when it is helpful and appropriate, so records are written with them, not just about them.
- Speak up for a child when they believe something is not in the child's best interests, raising concerns in a respectful and constructive way.
- Use supervision to:
 - share worries
 - ask for help
 - think through challenges
 - develop their skills and confidence
- Raise concerns about their own treatment, or about things they are worried about, and know how to ask for support or take concerns further if needed.
- Work positively with people who were already important in the child's life before they came into care, including family members, friends and, for kinship carers, their own wider family.

Part 4: Guidance for fostering services

Part 4 of the document explains what organisations should do to provide good fostering services for children in care.

Regulations set out the legal requirements that services must follow. This part of the document explains what this looks like in everyday situations. It sets out the detail leaders and practitioners need in order to do their jobs well.

The points below explain what matters most in how people act in everyday situations. They should guide how fostering services, carers and other professionals work together to support children.

- Everything a fostering service does should be guided by one question: What is best for the child?
- Children do best when they have stable, trusted relationships with adults who know them well and stay in their lives
- Foster carers are very important to children. They should be treated as important members of the team around the child and included in decisions that affect the child
- Good care should be informed by research and evidence, the views of children and young people and the experiences of foster carers
- Children and foster families are different. Services should respond to the needs of each child and family, rather than applying the same approach to everyone



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