



Foster Care for Families Guide

Supporting you to navigate foster care discussions with your own children.



Empowered by
Anglicare
Southern Queensland

You are all in this together

Welcoming children or young people into your home who are in need of a safe and stable environment is a life changing decision for you and your family. You will be living a life that's different from most families; with different challenges, stresses, and rewards. So it's good to talk to your partner, children and those closest to you, share your knowledge, and discuss and gain their support before committing to your foster care journey.

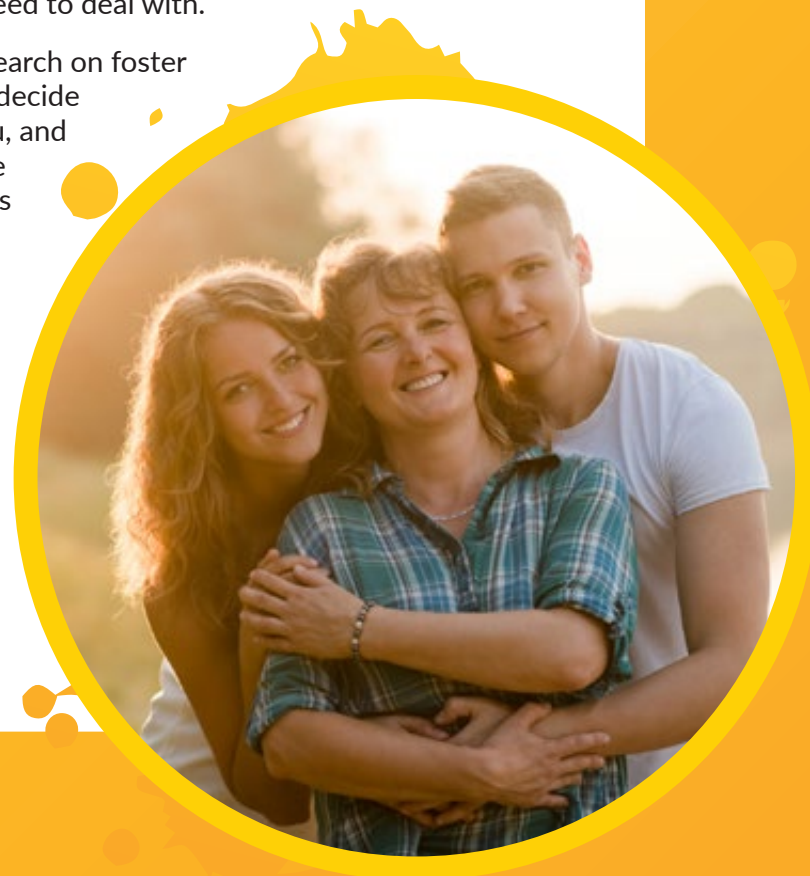
We understand that managing your own children's feelings about sharing you, their home and their lives with another child can be tricky, so we have prepared this guide in consultation with foster carers, potential carers (currently going through the approval process) and their own children.

It is hoped that the lived experiences of these carers and their children will help you navigate the discussions with your own children - managing their expectations, educating and involving them in the decision to become a foster carer. 'You are all in this together!'

Be prepared and do your research

When you first talk to your family, your own children may have many questions. There could be misconceptions, stigma around foster caring, and insecurities that your own children may need to deal with.

Doing your own research on foster caring will help you decide if this is right for you, and it will ensure you are prepared for all kinds of questions from your own children. Google it, take a look at our 'You Be You' website and online resources, and perhaps attend one of our information sessions.



13 commonly asked questions that your children may ask you

To help you prepare for your family discussion, the following questions and responses may also be a good starting point. You might like to ask your children what questions they have and go through the responses below with them.

The following responses are based on the experience and feedback from carers and their own children.

1

Why do you want to become a foster carer?

I would like to be a foster carer because I have a lot of love to give and so do we as a family. We can offer a child who may be experiencing loss and confusion a safe and stable home. The child can't be with their family at the moment, so they need to feel cared for, comfortable, and safe. We can provide all of these things.

It is also an opportunity to make a positive difference in the life of a child and give back to our community. We can learn so much from each other as a family and from others who are in need. Hopefully we will all be more compassionate and understanding from this.

It has been on my mind for a while and I was thinking that we could sit back on the sidelines as a family and let other people have a go, or we could get involved and make a difference and do something good.





Why can't the child stay with their own family?

2

- For many different reasons there are times that parents aren't able to care for their children and that's where we can help out and welcome them into our family for a period of time. This gives the parents some time and space to get the help they need.

As a foster family we would need to make sure that the child is looked after and they're safe and happy while they are with us.

3

Will you treat the child differently to me?

The child that comes into our home will be welcomed and treated with love and respect, like we treat all of our family members.

All of us need to follow basic house rules, and this includes visitors. For example, everyone needs to wash their hands before a meal. We might need to explain that washing your hands reduces the risk of getting sick.

Over time we may expect the child to help out with some of the house chores that you are involved in. We will need to give the child time to adjust to their new home and work out how they can be involved.

We also need to follow the government rules around caring for a child in care. There may be times when they require support for behavioural or emotional issues, and this may need a different approach to how we would work through these issues with you.

4

Will the child in care be with us forever?

We can choose to offer short-term or long-term care. While they are with us they will be a part of our family.

Our hope is that their own family can get the help they need, and the child can return home. This would be a good result for everyone.

5

What about me? Where do I fit in?

You know there's going to be times when we'll be busy with the child in our care. Just know that you will always have special times with just us, where we go and do something together. We'll make sure you keep having these special times.

When we're busy, you can get involved and help out. This is a good way of showing support for our family. We can all have a go, because we are working together as a team.





Are you going to love them like you love me?

6

You can love anyone in this world and you can share that with them. It doesn't have to be labels - mummy or daddy or brother or sister. Anyone who comes into our home will be loved and supported, and while they are with us, they are part of our family.

Just remember, you are first and foremost our children, we love you and we will always ensure we have your best interests at heart.

Will they love you like their mum and dad?

7

The children that come to us in care have their own mum and dad, maybe brother and sister or aunt and uncle, and that's who they remember. They may show us love and want to give me hugs, and they might want to give you hugs too. We just need to welcome the child into our home and treat them like they are part of the family while they are with us.

8

Do I need to be best friends with the child in care?

You don't have to treat the child like they are your best friend, but you might like to be a sister or brother or friend to them while they are staying with us. You may not have the opportunity to see them again after they stay with us, so while they are with us, we, as a family will do the best job we can to make them feel like they are part of our family.

9

Will I need to help more around the house?

Yes, you may need to help a bit more. We really won't know what this looks like until the child arrives. Whatever we ask you to do to help out, it is for the benefit of the whole family. So you are doing a good thing and maybe you're learning new skills too.

For the older kids, there may be times when we need to take the child to an appointment or visit their own family members, so you may have to do things like get the dinner table ready and peel the potatoes so we are ready to cook when we get home.

For the younger kids, you may be asked to have a go at making your own bed and help with choosing your kindy lunches for the day. Just little things, so we are all working as a team.





Will the child share a room with me or have their own room?

10

It is good for the child in care to feel a sense of their own space and privacy. By providing the child with their own space, it will help them relax and feel safe and comfortable in our home.

Ideally the child will have their own room, however in some circumstances it may be appropriate and okay for them to share. It really depends on what would work best for our family and the child.

If we go ahead and have a child come and stay, you may like to help choose a doona cover and some books and toys, so they have something of their own.

11

Are they going to attend the same school as me?

Sometimes school-aged children will stay in their current school, so they have something consistent and familiar in their life, such as school teachers and friends. There may be situations where the child in care will need to change schools.



12

How am I going to explain this to my friends?

It's important to use the child's name and not a label. So we can say, "This is Lucy, a family friend who is staying with us for a while". It is best to keep the explanation as general as possible. Labelling a child as a 'foster child' will make them feel different to everyone else, and we want to make sure they feel included as much as possible while they are with us.

13

Won't it be sad when they have to leave?

It will be sad when they leave, so we would need to focus on the positives. Maybe you have become really good friends, or taught them something new. Maybe the child has given us a better understanding of how lucky we are and how thankful we are as a family to share with others who need love and support.

If they are going home to their own family, then this is a good thing. It means the child can be with their own parents and siblings. This is the best outcome that we could hope for.



TOP TIPS

for discussing foster care with your children



1. **Be prepared** – read as much as you can on foster caring and speak with others.



2. **Choose the time and place** – you all need to feel relaxed and have the time to chat for the discussion to be meaningful.



3. **Listen** – accept what your children are saying without interrupting. Then once they have finished, provide them with more information.



4. **No distractions** – focus on your children when they want to chat more about foster caring and how it will affect them. This means the mobile phone is off and you are not unpacking the dishwasher while talking. If you are distracted, your child may think that it's not important for **YOU**, so why should it be important for **ME**.



5. **Understand and respect** – acknowledge and accept if your children are very negative to the idea of foster caring. It may not be the right time, and that's okay.

Choosing the right time to discuss

You're not alone. Foster caring is a family commitment, and to make the experience a success, your own children will need to be open to accepting a new child or young person into your home.

If your children are not on board with the idea, then there is an increased risk they may not cope with the change. This could result in the child in care having to go through another upheaval and move to another foster care family. So it is best to get it right from the outset, for the sake of your family and the child in care.

Before you discuss foster caring with your children, make sure you have done your research and checked out the commonly asked questions that your children may ask you.

- ✓ Consider times when the family are not tired, stressed or preoccupied. For example, Sunday around the table after lunch may be a better setting than mid-week at the dinner table.
- ✓ During your discussion, you might like to ask your children who they would like to welcome in, whether it's a boy or girl and their ages. They will definitely want a say in this, and how you approach these initial discussions will affect their expectations later on.





Informal discussions with younger children

Some families may take an informal approach to engaging with their children on foster caring, especially if the children are younger. Marie is currently going through the foster care approval process. For Marie and her husband David, discussions with their three children (all under the age of 10 years) have been ongoing in an informal way for a couple of years.

"I think about what this would look like for them (our children), and just talk openly as a family about it. We are very honest and open with each other as a family because that's really important to us, and we want to share our home with others to make their lives easier. So we talk regularly about what that would look like. For example, we talk with the children about helping to set up the bedroom, how we are going to introduce the child to our animals and show them where we keep the breakfast cereal."

Christina's story

“ My daughter loves children and was on board with foster caring from the start. I wanted to discuss this with my son, when it was just us. So we had a day out together at a wildlife park, and I was waiting for the chance to share my thoughts on becoming a foster carer. I was a little nervous because my son doesn't live with us, and I was worried that he would think we were replacing him.

Anyway, I said I have been thinking about this for a while. Instantly he said to me that he has a friend at school who lives in a foster home. He was very interested in why I wanted to do this. He wasn't against the idea.

My son said he would be happy if I did this, but he would prefer if my daughter and I had a younger girl come and stay at our home. He felt that because we live in a unit and boys can be quite active and enjoy open spaces, a girl would be more suitable. I really appreciated his honesty and I know he has my best interests at heart. So that's what we agreed, and we are now waiting for two young sisters to come and be part of our family for a while. ”





The family is on board. So what's the next step?

If everyone is on board with foster caring, you may like to register your interest by filling out our online Expression of Interest form at youbeyou.org.au. We will then give you a call and provide you with the essential information about applying to become a foster carer*.

Remember, foster caring can be both challenging and rewarding for you and your family. For your own children, they may develop a better understanding of the world that few of their peers understand, as well as learn to put others before themselves. Developing compassion, empathy and love for those who have a different experience to them, can also be very rewarding.

You and your family will be making a positive difference in a child's life by becoming a foster carer. We wish you and your family all the best with your journey. 💙

** To be eligible to apply, you will need to be at least 18 years of age. You also need to commit to home safety and personal background checks, as well as foster care training, so you have the skills you need to be a great carer.*

Your Journey

Becoming an approved foster carer is a deeply personalised journey that we take with you. The application process is relatively straight-forward and thorough, and can take around six months to complete. Although it involves interviews, safety checks and skills training, we're here to support you at every step along the way.

A foster carer can help provide a sanctuary and stability to those that are caught in a situation beyond their control. Here are steps you can take through Anglicare Southern Queensland to become a foster carer and help make a positive change in a child's life.

Step 1: Contacting us

Register your interest in fostering by filling out our online enquiry form at youbeyou.org.au and we will provide you with essential information about being a foster carer.

Step 2: Meeting us

Come and meet our team at an **information session** and discuss any questions you have about being a foster carer. When you're ready, we're here to take you on the journey.

Step 3: Knowing you

We really want to get to know you and ensure your home environment is a secure and **safe place for a child**. This will include home safety and background checks.

Step 4: Training you

Foster care training will help you to understand the role of the foster carer and **provide you with the skills you need** to be a great carer.



“If you're interested in finding out more, the first thing to do is speak to one of our experienced team who can talk you through how it all works.”

Step 6: Ready you

Once the assessment has been completed successfully, you will receive approval to become a foster carer and **your journey begins**.

Step 5: Reviewing you

We will commence a **full assessment** to determine your suitability for foster care.



To learn more and sign up for an information session visit youbeyou.org.au



1300 000 828



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Empowered by
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You Be You empowered by Anglicare Southern Queensland acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our services now stand. We pay our respect to Elders – past, present and emerging – and acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in caring for their own communities.

