



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 experienced, or are likely to experience harm. Harm can be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and/or neglect. Many children can return home after a period of temporary care, but some will need permanent out of home care.

The children and young people are under legal orders, and ages can range from 0-17 years. Foster carers help children keep in contact with people and places that are important to them. 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 their schooling and recreational activities
- help the child keep in contact with people and places important to them
- support the child's cultural and religious needs
- support the child's reunification with their family, when that is the plan
- work with all members of the child's care team.

Foster care in the Department

The Department is made up of metropolitan and country districts and 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 their 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 stability and connection. The Department's best hopes are that children who come into care are able to return to live at home.

Temporary care

When children first come into care they may require temporary care, anything from a few days to up to two years depending on their age and circumstances.

Emergency care

This type of care is frequently provided to children who first enter care until a longer term placement is identified, so carers will need to be flexible and available from overnight to a month. Children may also require an emergency placement if their primary care arrangement breaks down

Short break care

Foster carers who provide short breaks support a child's primary placement often for example, one weekend a fortnight or month in their own home.

Permanent care

Children in out of home care, who are unable to be reunified with a parent or caregiver, may need permanent out of home care. The best hope is that a care arrangement will be found with foster carers who can provide a care arrangement for the child until they turn 18 years old.

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 approximately 4 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 is Foster Care enquiry form?

The Foster Care enquiry form provides us with important and relevant information about you and enables one of our workers to have further contact with you.

What is preparation training?

Preparation training consists of 19 hours of training covering a wide range of topics to prepare 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.

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 am on a fertility program/ I have a baby / I have a toddler. Can I foster?

Communities will explore how you will care for your own child and a foster child during the assessment process.

Does it matter how old I am?

Foster carers need to be 18 years of age, however, your age may affect the decision about which child is placed with you.

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 their needs are being met and protects them from harm.

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.

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

You will normally 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 might work full-time, part time or not at all. If you work full-time this may affect the type of care arrangement you can provide such as short break care.

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.





Step 1	Check out the Information booklet
Step 2	Submit a Foster Care Enquiry form
Step 3	Receive a home visit or phone call
Step 4	Complete an application and screening
Step 5	Complete assessment/ preparation training
Step 6	Approval

The information booklet contains basic information about becoming a foster carer. You can refer to Communities website for fostering information or attend an information session if available.

Foster Care Enquiry form

Submit a Foster Care Enquiry by completing an online form from Communities website or by phoning us. We will then give you a follow up phone call to provide further information and answer any questions you may have.

Home visit/phone call from worker

After your queries are answered and you have decided to proceed, 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 an opportunity for us to learn more about you. It is also an opportunity for you to hear more about fostering and ask any questions you may have. An application pack will be provided to you following the home visit / phone interview.

Application and screening

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 and 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.

Assessment and preparation training

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 your ability to:

- meeting the foster child's emotional, educational, psychological and physical needs
- provide a safe environment
- work as part of a team
- take responsibility to learn and develop as a carer
- 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.

Approval

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 Fostering and Family Care.

Phone: 1800 182 178

Email: fostering@communities.wa.gov.au

[facebook.com/fostercarewa](https://www.facebook.com/fostercarewa)

Web: www.communities.wa.gov.au

Other information

Will I be paid to care for the child?

Foster carers are paid a subsidy, which is a contribution to the cost of caring. 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 may 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, their 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 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.

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.

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 their 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 their 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.

Carers who do not have contact with parents, a communication book can be used to share important information. 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 they wish 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.





Community services organisations

You are also able to foster through a community service organisation (CSO). To find out more, their details can be found on our website.

Information on CSOs and their contact details are on our website:

www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/resources-prospective-foster-carers

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 they find 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 they have experienced?

It is important to be willing to learn about caring for traumatised children; who may be developmentally younger than their chronological age, have an intellectual or physical disability or struggle to manage their emotions. Carers will be integral in helping them to work through their experience with the benefit of safe, stable and nurturing care.

All carers have a learning and development plan and are encouraged to continue their learning, particularly 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.

Can I access cultural support if the child in my care is Aboriginal?

As more than half the children in care are Aboriginal, it is very likely that you will be asked to care for an Aboriginal child. All carers have access to support from specialised staff, programs, and ongoing learning opportunities.



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

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Become a foster carer.
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Department of Communities

Postal address: Locked Bag 5000, Fremantle WA 6959

Fostering enquiries: 1800 182 178

Email: fostering@communities.wa.gov.au

Website: www.communities.wa.gov.au

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) – Telephone: 13 14 50

If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, contact us through the National Relay Service. For more information visit: www.communications.gov.au/accesshub/nrs

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