

Lancashire County Council

Foster Carers' Charter

Roles and Commitment

The foster carers' charter represents a commitment on behalf of Lancashire County Council in its role as the corporate parent, Lancashire County Council fostering service and the foster carer to work in partnership in the best interests of the children for whom they care. It is a promise, owned by everybody involved, to strive for best practice at all times.

Lancashire County Council's Corporate Parent Role

The role of the corporate parent when placing and supporting children in a foster home is to:

- Act in their best interests, and promote their physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings and take them into account.
- Help them to gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by Lancashire and its relevant partners.
- Promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes for them.
- Ensure that they are safe, and that there is stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- Prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

Lancashire County Council's Fostering Service Role

The fostering service aims to provide stable and first rate foster care for children who are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. To achieve this aim the service recruits, trains and approves foster carers and delivers ongoing support to them, in order to give them the skills and confidence they need to develop meaningful relationships with the children and young people they care for. In this way the service provides stable and loving homes while the children are part of the foster family.

The Foster Carer's Role

Foster carers look after children by developing meaningful relationships in a safe and nurturing family environment. The stability, care and love provided by foster carers helps the child to achieve recovery and healing from past trauma and promotes resilience in order for the child to realise their full potential.

A foster carer's relationships with other members of the team around the child should be based on mutual trust and respect.

This charter explains what all parties can expect from one another.

What foster carers and fostering services can expect from Lancashire County Council as the corporate parent.

1. Working in partnership

We understand that we must provide foster carers with the best possible opportunity to give the children in our care a loving, stable home, and to enable those children to enjoy a positive, nurturing experience of family life – one that does not set them apart from their peers.

We must:

- Treat foster carers as experts on the child and include them where appropriate in all relevant meetings where planning and decision making affect them or the children they care for.
- Treat foster carers without discrimination.
- Value foster carers' skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals.
- Respect confidentiality.

2. Information

We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's need.

We must:

- Share all the relevant information needed in order to care safely for the child and to support the child in fulfilling their potential with the foster carer.
- Provide this information in writing prior to the placement, or as soon as possible in the case of emergency placements.
- Secure clear and timely plans for the child's care.

3. Clarity about decisions

We recognise that in order for children to live a full family life, foster carers must be able to make decisions regarding the children they look after.

We must:

- Ensure that foster carers are able to make everyday decisions as appropriate that mean that their fostered child is not treated differently from their peers and can feel part of their family.
- Provide clarity about any decision foster carers cannot take at the outset so that everyone is clear about their respective responsibilities.
- Deal swiftly with any requests for decision making on matters that are outside of the foster carer's authority.

4. Communication and Consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We must:

- Facilitate communication between foster carers and decision makers.
- Provide foster carers with the opportunity to influence relevant policies and procedures.

What foster carers can expect from Lancashire County Council fostering service:

1. Working in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and can make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.

We must:

- Value foster carers' skills and expertise.
- Recognise that foster carers are the people who live with children every day and usually know them best.
- Include foster carers where appropriate in all meetings that affect them and the children they care for.
- Ensure that our fostering service will comply with fostering regulations and guidance.

- Treat foster carers without discrimination and with respect.
- Respect confidentiality.

2. Information

We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's needs.

We must:

- Share all information we have about the child in order to care safely for them.
- Provide foster carers with access to relevant policies and procedures.

3. Support

We recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task, and that appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the children in their care.

We must:

- Ensure there is a robust post-approval induction process.
- Respond and consider requests for additional support, including respite and out of hours support.
- Provide foster carers with regular supervision, support and phone contact.
- Give foster carers honest and open feedback.
- Provide foster carers with access to out of hours support from people with fostering expertise, where possible.
- Pay foster carers' allowances in a timely manner.
- Ensure that there is a local group, recognised by the fostering service, where foster carers and their family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families.
- Support foster carers to facilitate positive relationships with birth families.
- Recognise and champion the contribution foster carers and their families make to fostering.

4. Learning and Development

We believe foster carers must have learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure they have the skills and

knowledge they need, and allow them to develop their practice in order that they can help transform the lives of the children they foster.

We must:

- Ensure all foster carers have an individual personal development plan.
- Provide foster carers and their family members, where appropriate, with appropriate, accessible and relevant training by trainers who understand fostering.
- Support foster carers to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care and the other members of the team around the child.
- Continue to provide all foster carers with other development opportunities which make the best use of their skills and expertise, such as mentoring or providing training or support.

5. Fair treatment

We recognise that foster carers have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances.

We must:

- Consult, where possible, with foster carers before changing terms and conditions.
- Ensure honesty and openness in all of our discussions and communications with foster carers.
- Provide a framework for dealing with allegations, including access to independent support, and adhere to agreed timescales.
- Ensure that foster carers are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support should they be subject to an allegation.

6. Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We must:

- Ensure that we consult with foster carers in a meaningful way on matters that affect them.
- Give foster carers feedback from consultations.

- Provide clear information on how foster carers can give us feedback and report concerns.

What Lancashire County Council fostering services can expect from foster carers

1. Working in partnership

We must demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct. We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship and we will aim to build a meaningful and collaborative relationship with our supervising social worker and the child's social worker.

We must:

- Demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability.
- Provide children with a positive experience of family life.
- Attend meetings and take part in any discussions about the children and young people we care for and follow through on any actions agreed.
- Work with the individuals and agencies involved with the child such as the child's social worker, fostering service, school, and health and religious bodies.
- Work with birth parents, wider family and any other significant people in a child's life.
- Meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow policies and procedures.
- Inform our supervising social worker about factors that impact on our fostering including changes in our household.
- Inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us.
- Inform the child's social worker about any concerns we have related to the child.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Maintain an open dialogue with the fostering service.
- Take ownership for accessing appropriate training to further enable them to meet the needs of the child.

2. Respect for the child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations and potential.

We must:

- Develop a meaningful relationship with the child - understand their needs, support their growth, become an advocate and champion for them, and endeavour to remain in touch with them when they move on.
- Care for the child in a manner that recognises and respects their identity - including their ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural heritage.
- Afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own child.
- Support the child to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.
- Support the child to inform the development of the services which affect their care, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.
- Careful consideration to stability and permanence including post 18.

3. Learning, development and support

We must access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career in accordance with the needs of the children we are caring for. This will ensure we have the skills and knowledge we need and allow us to develop our practice in order that we can help transform the lives of the children we foster.

We must:

- Be willing and able to develop our skills throughout our fostering career.
- Attend relevant training.
- Be willing to attend and contribute to support groups.