

Become a foster carer



All children deserve to
live in a safe home with
a caring family.

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Table of contents

What is a foster carer?	2
Why do children need foster carers?	3
Who can be a foster carer?	4
Why become a foster carer?	4
Rewards and challenges of being a carer	5
What makes a good carer?	7
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers	9
What are the different types of foster care?	9
What is the role of Child Safety in foster care?	13
How are carers supported?	14
The journey to becoming a foster carer	18
Legislative requirements for providing care	23
More information	24

What is a foster carer?

Foster carers open their homes to children who are unable to live at home with their own families. This can be because they have been abused or neglected or are at risk of abuse or neglect.

When children can't live safely at home, the first choice is for them to be cared for by their extended family or community (this is known as kinship care). When that's not possible, the next best option is for them to be cared for by foster carers.

Foster carers:

- » are not biologically related to the children they care for
- » care for children of different ages and cultural and religious backgrounds.



Foster carers may provide care for a few nights, a few months or long-term. Carers may also provide emergency care for children or short breaks (respite care) for other carers.

Foster care is not 'one size fits all'. Children have different needs and require different types of care. You can choose the type of care to suit you, your family and lifestyle.

Wherever possible, children are reunified with their families. Their families are supported to safely care for their children at home. Carers are an important part of this journey and often help maintain ongoing relationships between children and their families.

Anyone who wants to become a foster carer goes through an application process. This process is designed to ensure we keep children safe.

Caring is both rewarding and challenging. If you're interested in becoming a foster carer, it's important to talk it through with the significant people in your household and your life before you take the first step.

Why do children need foster carers?

Most children coming into foster care have experienced, or are at risk of, harm and may:

- » be any age up to 18
- » be in sibling groups
- » come from anywhere in Queensland
- » come from any cultural or religious background
- » have special care needs.

Who can be a foster carer?

Carers come from all walks of life. It's important for carers to come from all parts of the community so we can match the needs of children requiring care.

We need carers who are:

- » male or female
- » single or a couple, married or in a de facto relationship
- » from any cultural background.

We welcome carers that:

- » work full-time
- » work part-time
- » do not work at all
- » have other children in their home and those that don't.

Carers must be over 18 years of age and eligible to obtain (or already have) a blue card.

Why become a foster carer?

People may have different reasons for becoming foster carers, but they all want to provide a safe and stable home for a child in need.

People may become carers because they:

- » miss having their own children at home
- » want to 'give back' to the community

- » have their own care experience, or know children or other carers
- » have space in their home or time to give to a child.

Rewards and challenges of being a carer

Becoming a carer is a big decision. Bringing other people's children into your family can be very rewarding but it may not always be easy. It will affect your life and the lives of those around you.

Experienced carers understand the personal rewards it brings to them and their families, but also the challenges of caring for the children placed with them.



The rewards

As a carer, you will:

- » help keep children safe
- » support children to reach their full potential
- » help parents develop new ways of relating to their children
- » use your skills and life experiences to help others
- » strengthen your own parenting skills and knowledge
- » be a highly valued and important member of a caring team
- » grow your social and personal connections.

The challenges

Carers experience challenges including:

- » responding to difficult behaviours
- » demands on their time and energy
- » finding space in their life for themselves
- » helping their own children with feelings about sharing their parent, their home and their lives
- » continuing when positive changes are small or slow
- » saying goodbye to a child when they leave
- » sharing the decision-making for the child.

Experienced carers say the rewards far outweigh the challenges and are most often found in the day-to-day moments as they share their lives with children.

Foster carer stories

To watch stories from carers about their experiences, go to **qld.gov.au/fostercare**

What makes a good carer?

A good carer:

- » accepts children for who they are and does not judge
- » is loving, kind and shows respect
- » is open and honest
- » stays calm and keeps going even during hard times
- » can spend time with the child while looking after other family members
- » is ready to learn how to take care of the child in the best way
- » listens to the child and helps them feel hopeful, supported and encouraged
- » works with others to help the child and their family reach their goals
- » sets boundaries and house rules so the child knows what is expected of them
- » helps children talk about and stay connected to their families and other important people in their lives
- » supports a child's reunification with their family when it is safe.

Children can feel very upset when they are separated from their parents. A good carer helps the child with these big feelings.

Before applying to become a foster carer, you need to talk to your family and support networks about:

- » what's happening in your family at this time
- » how your family would adjust to having children in your home
- » if you're comfortable allowing Child Safety and other service providers into your home
- » the changes to your lifestyle and loss of privacy that comes with sharing your home with a child
- » if your relationship is strong enough for you and your partner to work as a team and support one another
- » if you live alone, will your family and friends support you
- » if you have room in your house for a child (or another child)
- » how you would cope with a child returning to their parents.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers

In Queensland, when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not able to live safely at home, the first choice is for them to be cared for by family or community. This is known as kinship care.

However, when that's not possible, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander foster carers play a vital role in keeping children and young people safe and connected to culture.

What are the different types of foster care?

There are different types of family-based care which may suit you, your family and your lifestyle.

The care might:

- » be for a few nights, months, or longer
- » be emergency care for children in urgent situations
- » provide short breaks to other foster carers (also known as respite care).

You can choose the level of commitment you're able to make based on your own family situation.

Short breaks care

Short breaks care is for people who would prefer not to provide ongoing care for a child. These carers choose when they can provide care, for example on weekends or school holidays.

Short breaks care extends a child's support network and helps them feel more connected to their community.

Importantly, it also helps foster carers by giving them a break so they can recharge and continue to care long-term.

New carers may start out as short break carers and become full-time foster carers after gaining some experience and confidence.

John and Laura both work full-time and have 2 children in high school. They became short breaks carers and now provide regular care on weekends and school holidays for Jack (5 years old).

Emergency care

Emergency care is short-term care at short notice for children who urgently need a place to stay.

Emergency carers:

- » may be needed when a child first comes into care
- » may be needed if a child needs a home while they wait to move into longer-term care
- » often have skills to help children who have experienced abuse and trauma.

Some carers may consider becoming emergency carers once they have some experience of foster care.

Tyrone (8 years old) and Sarah (6 years old) needed a safe place to stay at very short notice. They were placed with emergency carers Matt and Lisa for 3 days while Child Safety arranged a longer-term placement.

Short-term care

Short-term carers are full-time foster carers who provide ongoing, day-to-day care for children for up to 2 years.

During this time, Child Safety works towards reunifying the child with their family, if possible. Short-term carers help the child stay connected to their family.

Jessica (4 years old) was placed with foster carer Margaret because she was neglected and could not safely be left at home. Margaret cared for Jessica full-time for 18 months while Jessica's parents were getting support to strengthen their parenting skills. Margaret worked as part of a team with Jessica, her family, Child Safety and other services so that Jessica could be returned to her parents after they had demonstrated they could keep her safe and well.

Long-term care

Long-term carers give children a safe and stable home because they cannot live with their family. Long-term carers commit to the ongoing full-time care of a child.

Paul and Alison are in their early 40s and have been unable to have children. They were interested in caring for a sibling group on a long-term basis. Child Safety placed Luke (5 years old) and Alicia (6 years old) with them when they were 6 months and 18 months of age respectively, due to their mother's long-term mental illness. Paul and Alison continue to care for Luke and Alicia and support contact with their mother, when it can occur, a few times each year.

Provisionally approved carers

A person who has applied to become a foster carer may be provisionally approved as a carer. This means they can care for a child while their application to be a foster carer is decided.

This type of approval is usually given to people already well-known to a child to enable an immediate placement to be made.

Provisional approval is valid for 60 days. It may be extended but cannot exceed 90 days.

What is the role of Child Safety in foster care?

Child Safety (part of the Queensland Government) is the lead child protection agency in Queensland.

Child Safety is required by law (*Child Protection Act 1999*) to ensure children are safe from abuse, neglect and harm in their homes. This can mean finding safe and caring places for these children to live.

Child Safety funds a range of non-government support services across Queensland to recruit, assess, train and provide ongoing support to foster carers.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children need to live away from home, Child Safety aims to ensure they stay connected to their culture, family and community. Child Safety is guided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Find out more: qld.gov.au/atsi-child-placement-principle

How are carers supported?

Personal support

A foster care recruitment service will support applicants through the application and assessment process. These recruitment services focus on recruiting carers and processing applications.

Once you are approved as a foster carer, your recruitment service will connect you to a local foster care support service that will provide ongoing support and training. This support service works with Child Safety to help carers meet the needs of children in foster care.

Carers can also ask for assistance from Queensland Foster and Kinship Care — an organisation that represents and supports carers.

Many foster carers also build networks and find support from other carers in their local area and their wider community.

Financial support

Allowances and benefits

Carers receive a fortnightly caring allowance to help with the costs of caring for children in their home, such as:

- » basic household expenses
- » food
- » clothing
- » gifts, pocket money and entertainment for children in care.

This allowance continues until the young person in their care is 21 or leaves the carer's household.

The allowance is not considered a 'payment' for caring and is not a source of income. It's a reimbursement toward the real costs of providing care. Short break carers receive the allowance in proportion to the amount of time they provide care for a child.

The caring allowance is not subject to tax and should not be cited as income for any purpose, such as yearly tax returns, applications for Commonwealth benefits, or when applying for loans from financial institutions.

For more information about the types of carer allowances and carer payment amounts, go to

qld.gov.au/fosterkinshipcarerallowances

Other financial support

In addition to the fortnightly caring allowance, financial support is available at the start of a child's care arrangement with you, when costs are likely to be higher. This includes:

- » a one-off establishment payment when a child first comes into their care — the payment is to help set up the care needs for a child once their care arrangement is confirmed to be more than 7 days
- » a one-off start-up allowance to support the set-up costs for a new care arrangement longer than 5 days
- » an extra allowance may be provided to carers who have children with high, complex or extreme support needs.



Carers may also be reimbursed for substantial additional costs as part of the child's case plan. Your local Child Safety service centre manager will need to approve these costs before you purchase goods or services.

Approved carers can also get a Carer Business Discount Card. This card helps with everyday caring duties by providing access to discounts at businesses across Queensland.

For more information about the Carer Business Discount Card, go to **qld.gov.au/carers-business-discount-card**

Commonwealth Government benefits

As a carer, you may be eligible for Commonwealth Government benefits. These can include:

- » Family Tax Benefit Part A — helps families with the cost of raising children. This is income-tested and paid per child.
- » Family Tax Benefit B — provides extra financial assistance for single parents, non-parent carers such as grandparents and great grandparents, and couples with one main income.
- » Some carers are also eligible for the Child Care Subsidy, Parental Leave Pay or Parenting Payment.

For more information, call Centrelink on 13 61 50 or visit **www.servicesaustralia.gov.au**

The journey to becoming a foster carer

There are 4 stages of the application process before you can begin caring for a child. Please allow 3 months from the time you apply .

The approval process is to make sure you are:

- » suitable to be a foster carer and that all members of your household are suitable to live with children
- » able to meet the standards of care outlined in the Statement of Standards in the *Child Protection Act 1999*
- » able to work towards achieving goals for the safety, care and protection of children and young people.

While it might feel long, the process is in place to help keep children safe.

The stages and steps are shown in the following diagram.

During the explore, apply and approval stages, you'll be connected with a foster care recruitment service in your local area. They can answer your questions and support you through the application and assessment process. They'll also provide mandatory Getting Ready to Start Training.

Approved foster carers are then connected with a local foster care support service of their choice (if possible).

Explore



- Fill in an Expression of Interest form or call the Foster Carer Recruitment Line on **1300 550 877**.
- You will be connected with a foster care recruitment service
- Join an information session

Apply



- Complete forms and checks with support from your foster care recruitment service
- Attend an interview
- Undergo an assessment
- Complete Getting Ready to Start Training

Approval



Approved carers will:

- Sign a Foster Carer Agreement
- Receive a letter of confirmation
- Receive a Certificate of Approval

Get ready



- You will be connected with a local foster care support service
- Complete ongoing training

Begin caring



- Welcome a child into your home
- Stay connected with your foster care support service. They will provide ongoing support and training.

Checklist to becoming a foster carer

Use this checklist when you're ready to start the journey of becoming a foster carer.

☐ Find out about foster care

- » Go to **qld.gov.au/become-a-foster-carer**
- » Talk with your partner, children and any significant people in your life. Make sure you all understand the potential challenges and rewards before you decide to take the next step.

☐ Expression of interest

- » Complete an online expression of interest form at **qld.gov.au/foster-carer-eoi-form** or phone 1300 550 877.
- » A foster care recruitment service in your area will connect with you.
- » Join an online information session to learn more about foster care.

☐ Application

- » Complete an Application for Approval form, with help from your foster care recruitment service.

☐ Checks

- » Child Safety will do personal history checks of you and any adults living in your home.
- » You and any other adult members of your household will complete a blue card application or provide your current blue card details. Find out more: **qld.gov.au/foster-carer-blue-card**
- » Your foster care recruitment service will conduct a Household Safety Study.

- » Your foster care recruitment service will assist in other discretionary checks, if necessary, such as a medical check, referee checks, or employer referee checks if you are in child-related employment.

☐ **Interviews, assessment and training**

- » Participate in an interview and assessment with your foster care recruitment service, along with any adult household members or significant other adults, and your children (depending on their age).
- » Complete Getting Ready to Start Training
- » Your foster care recruitment service will complete your application for approval by Child Safety.

☐ **Approval and agreement**

- » If your application is approved, you'll receive a letter confirming that you have been approved as a foster carer.
- » You'll also receive a Certificate of Approval. This is valid for 12 months and will need to be renewed every 3 years after that, upon application and approval.
- » You will complete a Foster Carer Agreement. This details the support available to help you fulfil your role, ongoing training requirements and the types of care arrangements you are willing to consider.
- » Upon approval, you can register for the Carer Connect app.

☐ **Support and training**

- » Your foster care recruitment service will connect you with a foster care support service in your local area.
- » You'll be supported with ongoing mandatory training and any other training you may wish to do.

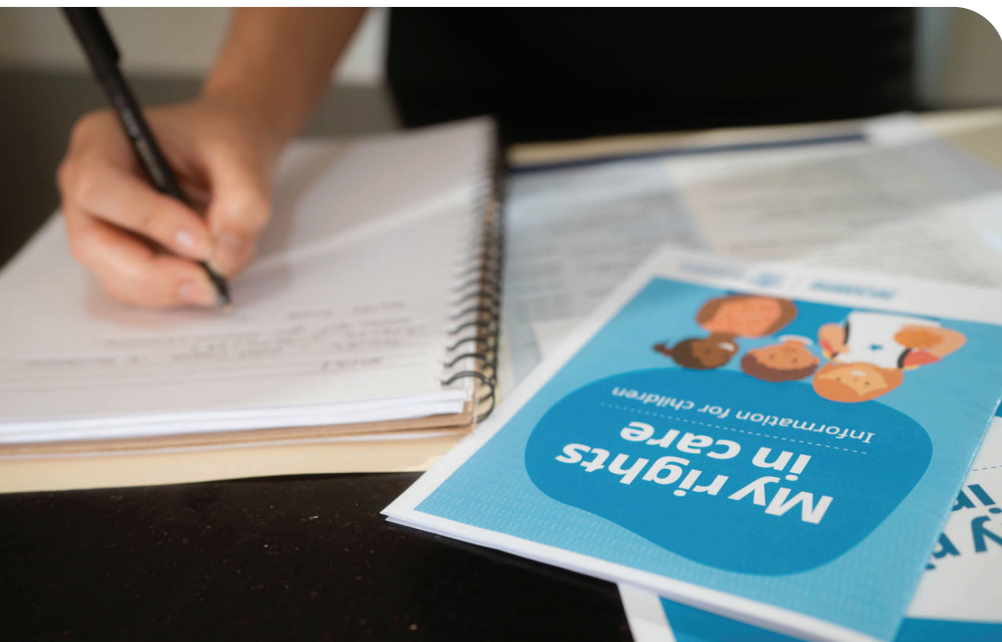
□ **Caring and ongoing support**

- » When you're ready, you'll begin caring for a child in your home as a foster carer.
- » Your support service will provide ongoing training and support as you continue your foster care journey.
- » Your Certificate of Approval is valid for 12 months and will need to be renewed every 3 years after that, upon application and approval.

If you decide at any time that foster caring is not for you, you can pause or stop the process by informing your recruitment or support service.

Unsuccessful applicants

If your application is not approved by Child Safety, you'll receive a letter stating the reasons for the decision and your right of review.



Legislative requirements for providing care

The Statement of Standards

Child Safety and your foster care services are responsible for ensuring that children are cared for in a safe and accountable way.

The *Child Protection Act 1999* and the *Child Protection Regulation 2011* are the key laws that regulate how the government responds to children and young people in need of care and protection. Foster carers are required to provide a level of care consistent with the Statement of Standards outlined in Section 122 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*.

Your foster care recruitment service will explain this to you, along with the Charter of Rights for a child in care, and the *Human Rights Act 2019*.

For more information, go to:

- » Statement of Standards:
qld.gov.au/fostercarer-standards-of-care
- » Charter of Rights for a child in care and human rights for children in care: **qld.gov.au/charterofrights-child-in-care**
- » The *Human Rights Act 2019*: **www.qhrc.qld.gov.au**

More information

For more information about becoming a foster carer, you can:

- » call the Foster Carer Recruitment Line on **1300 550 877**
- » go to **qld.gov.au/fostercare**





