



ISP's Introduction to **FOSTERING GUIDE**



fostering
therapeutically
SINCE 1987

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Welcome to **THE WORLD OF FOSTERING**

When you first start to research fostering, we appreciate there can be a lot of information to absorb. From the different types of care through to how the application process works, it can feel overwhelming. But it doesn't have to be. This guide gives you an overview of how therapeutic fostering works, the benefits and rewards of fostering and a step-by-step guide to becoming a foster parent. Plus, there's a handy fostering cheat sheet for all the terminology you might encounter during your research. So, let's get started...

WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?

Foster care gives vulnerable children a stable, loving home when they're unable to stay with their birth family. Children can be in foster care for a few nights, several months or years, or even until they reach adulthood. The duration will always depend on their circumstances and care plan.

At ISP, we work with some of the most vulnerable children, who often have more complex needs and require specialist care and therapeutic support to help them move forward. However long a child is placed for, it's crucial that the foster home they go to is right for them.



Types of FOSTERING

Short-term fostering

This is the most common type of fostering and can last any number of days, weeks or months up to 2 years.

Long-term fostering

This is where you care for a child on a long-term basis, often until they reach 18 years old.

Respite foster care

This allows other foster families, and birth families who have children with complex needs, to take a break for a couple of nights or a couple of weeks.

Emergency foster care

This provides a safe place for a child to stay in an emergency situation, which can happen at any time day or night.

Disability fostering

This involves providing children with disabilities or complex medical conditions with a stable, loving home that can help them thrive.

Fostering siblings

This is where you foster a group of brothers and/or sisters to keep them together, which is so important for their stability.

Parent and child fostering

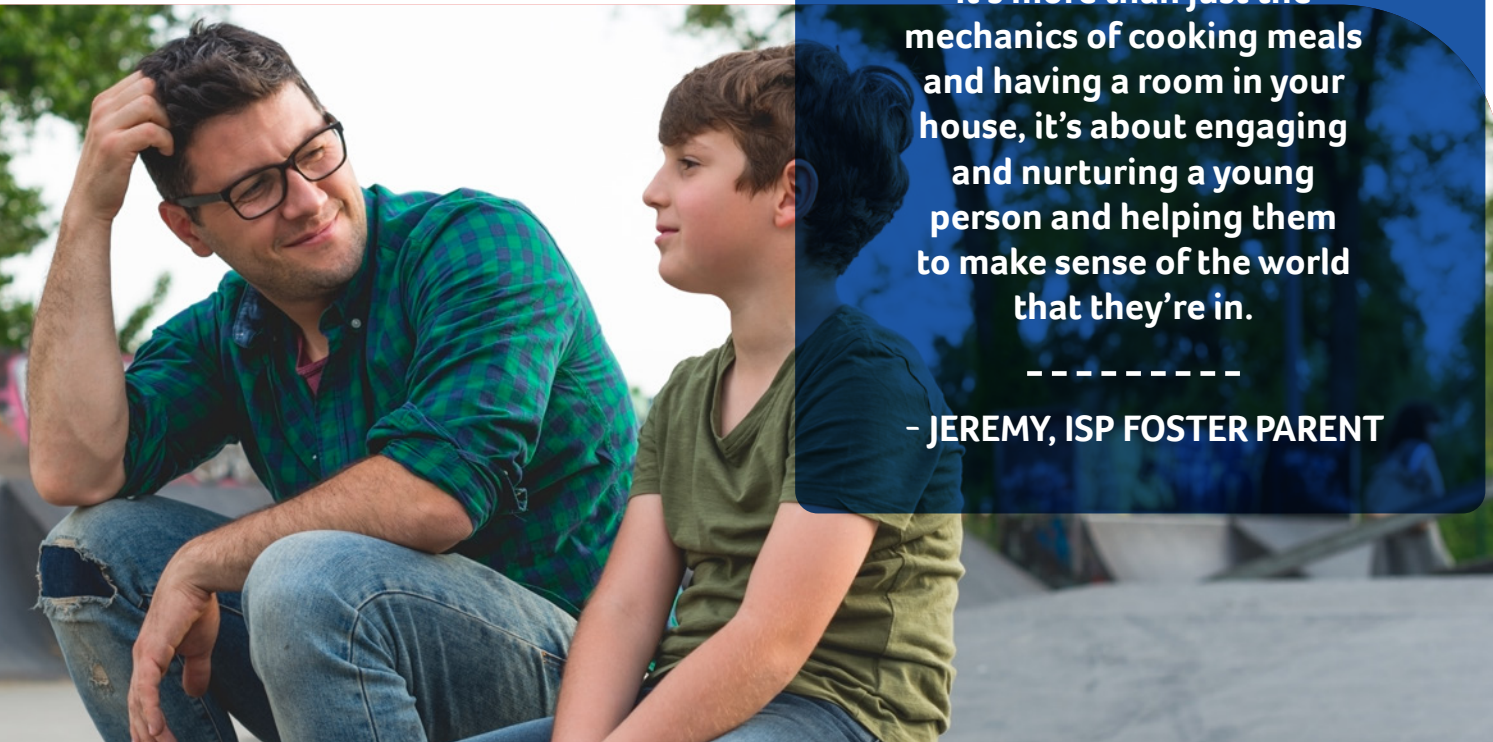
This is where you provide care and support for a vulnerable parent and their baby or young child, helping them with the practical skills they need to care for their child.

Fostering teenagers

This is where foster families look after children over the age of 10, which can be easier and a lot more fun than people first think.

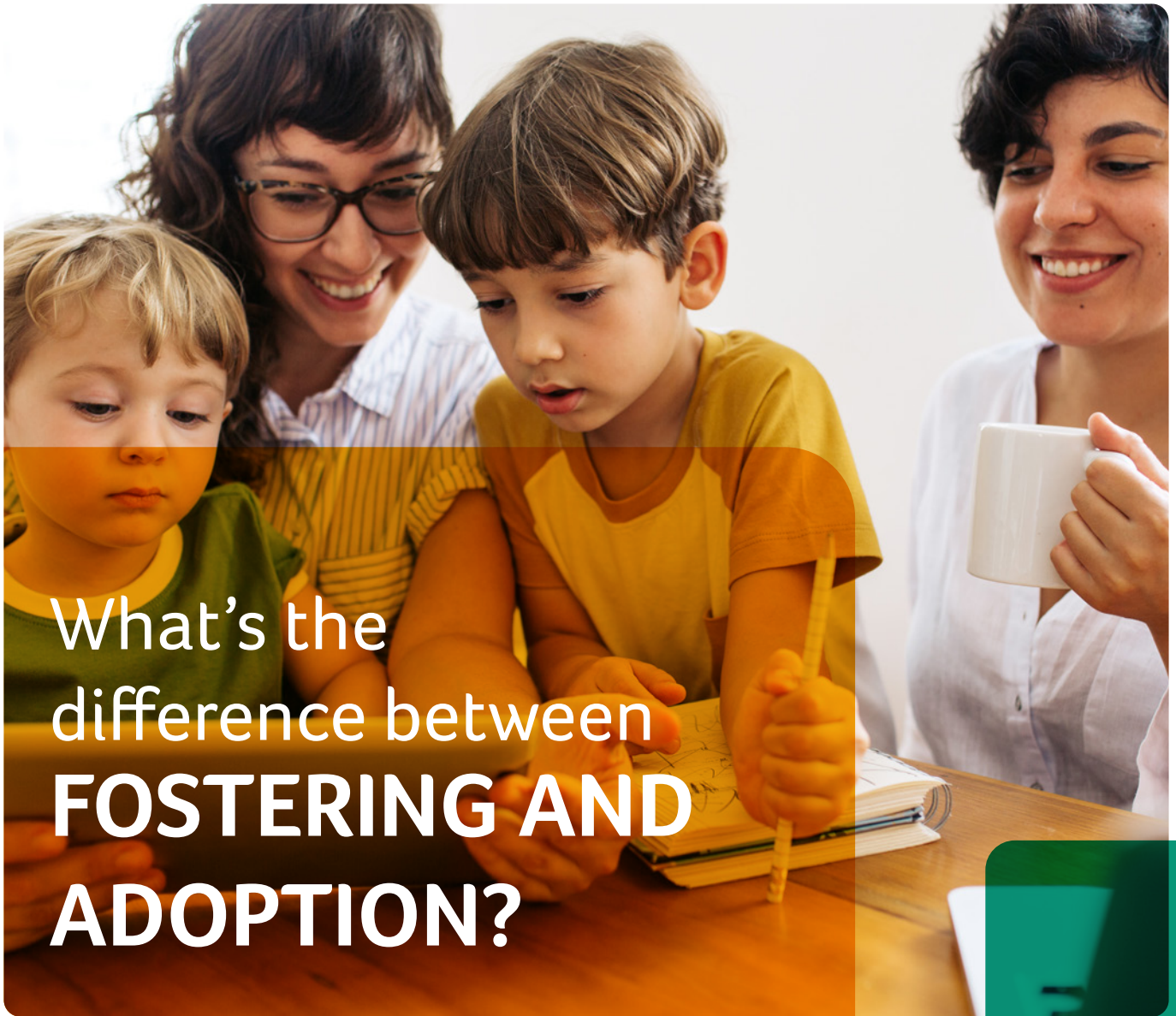
Unaccompanied children

This involves nurturing and supporting vulnerable teenagers during a crucial stage in their lives.



It's more than just the mechanics of cooking meals and having a room in your house, it's about engaging and nurturing a young person and helping them to make sense of the world that they're in.

- JEREMY, ISP FOSTER PARENT



What's the difference between **FOSTERING AND ADOPTION?**

YOUR ALLOWANCES

When you adopt, you will only be entitled to the same state benefits as birth children, such as child tax credit, if you meet the threshold. Foster parents, however, continue to receive generous allowances for as long as the child is in their care. They also get a professional fee for their hard work and dedication.

YOUR RIGHTS

As foster parents don't have legal responsibility over the child in their care, there may be an element of shared decision-making on behalf of the child. This can include things like haircuts, going on holiday or staying over at a friend's house. However, foster parents can sometimes be given delegated authority, which empowers them to make those day-to-day decisions. An adoptive parent obtains the same rights as a birth parent, so they don't need to seek permission and have full responsibility over the child.





“There are so many children that need security, safety and one to one time. It is so worthwhile and rewarding. People forget that this is not an easy process, but you have the training and full support. I think as a family there really is so much that you can get from it.”

- JENNY, ISP FOSTER PARENT

Why foster A CHILD?

Sadly, the main reason almost 30,000 children come into the UK care system each year is due to abuse and neglect, however there are many other reasons why a child may need fostering. One thing is guaranteed though - these young people desperately need safety and security, which is exactly what our foster parents provide.

As a foster parent, you are often the light in the dark. Not only do you provide care for a vulnerable child who has experienced trauma, but you give them the chance they deserve to grow and develop in a healthy environment. This is fundamental in helping to shape their future, no matter how temporary they might be placed in your care.

Reasons why children need a foster family

- Abuse – physical, emotional or sexual
- Neglect – physical, emotional, educational or medical
- Family breakdown, such as domestic violence or a sibling conflict
- Family crisis, such as financial issues or eviction
- Illness of a primary caregiver
- Death of a primary caregiver



What is **THERAPEUTIC FOSTERING?**

We founded therapeutic foster care in 1987. It's a specialist type of fostering designed to give an enhanced level of support to children who have suffered trauma or have complex needs.

Therapeutic fostering is about talking, thinking and reflecting on experiences

THE ISP INTEGRATED THERAPEUTIC MODEL

We believe that therapeutic foster care should enable children and young people to get to know who they are, so they can grow to reach their emotional, social and educational potential, and live in harmony with themselves and others.

We achieve this by:

- Placing the child or young person at the centre of our foster care model and tailoring care and treatment plans to their specific needs.
- Surrounding them with an integrated team of adults, including foster parents, therapists, social workers and educational experts.
- Working together to ensure the child is getting the right treatment to support their psychological, emotional and behavioural development.
- This enhanced level of therapeutic support for children in care gives every young person the opportunity to lead healthy, happy lives.



THERAPEUTIC FOSTER CARE LOOKS BEYOND BEHAVIOUR

Therapeutic fostering encourages foster parents to look beyond behaviour and look at the reasons behind it instead. For example, if a child becomes angry, we try to understand why they're reacting that way:

- What caused this situation?
- Have they been triggered by their past?
- What does the anger really mean?
- Is it confusion, frustration or anxiety?
- What's the behaviour really telling us about the child?
- What are they really trying to communicate?
- By putting ourselves in their shoes, we're in a better place to help.

And of course, we provide all the training and support to help you understand and manage the behaviour. The goal is to help the child find more appropriate ways of communicating their emotions.





What it takes to be an **AMAZING** **FOSTER PARENT**

Fostering children and young people is one of the most rewarding careers out there, but it does come with challenges. As most of the children we care for at ISP have had particularly difficult starts in life, it's safe to say they might carry a lot of emotional pain from past trauma, or have a wide range of complex needs that require specialist support.

Trauma has a very profound impact on a child's brain, affecting their behavioural, emotional, social and physiological development. This might then manifest in anger, frustration, emotional withdrawal, hyperactivity or issues with attachment. They need foster parents who are patient and willing to help them work through their issues.

To be a foster parent, you must:

- **Be aged 21 or over**
- **Have a spare bedroom**
- **Be a British citizen or have the legal right to remain**

While all our foster parents receive specialist training to equip them with expert knowledge and skills, there are some key personal qualities you need to be a great foster parent.



Empathy

Empathy requires you to put yourself in the shoes of another person and understand where they're coming from. This is a vital skill, especially when fostering therapeutically.

Resilience

Being thick-skinned and resilient are crucial skills. Fostering children with disabilities, complex trauma and/or learning difficulties can mean managing difficult behaviour. They need a foster parent who is able to stay calm and act with a clear mind in times of distress.

Positive outlook

This trait is an important one when caring for children who may have low moods, pent up frustration or lack of trust in adults. It's been proven that positive energy rubs off on people, creating a domino effect, so if you're able to start each day on a positive note, this can help set the tone for the child's day too.

Observant

Children in care are generally more susceptible to self-harm, mental illness and other dangerous behaviours that can put themselves and others at risk. This is why you need to have a level of astuteness so you're able to spot changes and respond accordingly.

Practical

Sadly, many children in care experience neglect, which can lead to them having a very limited understanding of personal care and hygiene. Having practical skills would enable you to teach children the basics in personal care, such as how to brush their teeth, clean themselves and wash their hair. All of this will help them develop independence, which is vital for their growth.

Communication

This is a fundamental skill for all foster parents, especially those that foster therapeutically. Some children with complex needs may be hyperactive while others may be withdrawn, so we're always looking for foster parents who are able to communicate, listen and look beyond behaviour to understand the reasons behind it.

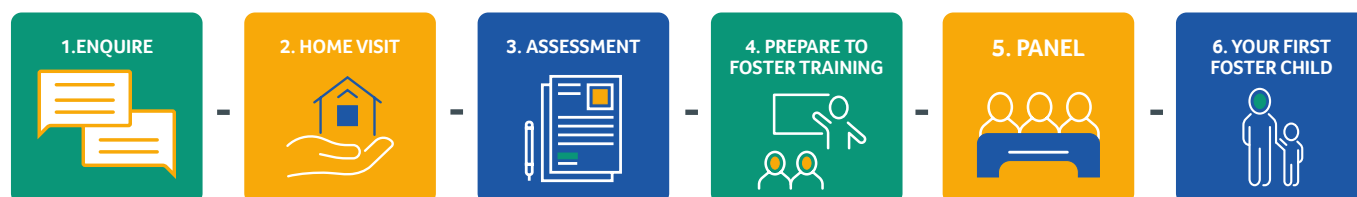
Your gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and marital status aren't factors in whether you can be a foster parent. What matters is your commitment to transforming the lives of vulnerable children.

The fostering process FROM START TO FINISH

We've put together a step-by-step guide to help you understand how the fostering process works, from your initial enquiry to having a child placed in your care.



THE FOSTERING PROCESS AT A GLANCE



STEP 1 - SPEAK TO OUR TEAM

The first thing to do is get in touch for an informal chat. You don't need to have decided to become a foster parent at this point, as our friendly advisors can answer any questions you have and fill you in on what we do and the children we work with. Just send us an enquiry and we'll give you a call.

[Get in touch](#)



STEP 2 – HOME VISIT

If you're ready to move to the next step, we'll arrange for someone from your local ISP fostering team to visit you at home. Online home visits via video call can also be arranged if you'd prefer.

During your home visit, we'll speak about:

- The role of a foster parent.
- Our therapeutic approach to foster care.
- The application process and fostering assessment.
- Our Therapeutic Pathway training for foster parents.
- Wrap-around support for foster families.
- Fostering pay and additional allowances.

It's also a fantastic opportunity for us to get to know you better, so we'll ask some questions about you and your family, and why you'd like to foster a child, as well as answer any questions you may have. By the end of the visit, you should have a pretty good idea about whether fostering is right for you.

If you're suitable to foster and are ready to progress, the next step is to apply to foster using our online application form. We can also arrange for a paper version to be sent to you if you'd prefer.



STEP 3 – FOSTERING ASSESSMENT

Once your application has been accepted, you'll be assigned an assessing social worker who will carry out your fostering assessment – also known as a 'Form F assessment'. This involves a series of visits – usually around 8-10 – to explore various aspects of your life, including your home, childhood, birth children, current and previous relationships, physical and mental health, and more.

We'll also undertake various background checks, such as a full DBS (Disclosing and Barring) and gather a number of personal and professional references. The Form F report will help to build a clear picture of you and your family, and your suitability to foster.

It may sound daunting, but it's important to help you understand whether fostering is right for you and your family.





STEP 4 – PREPARE TO FOSTER TRAINING

As part of your preparation to become a foster parent, you'll be invited along to our Prepare To Foster Training course. The course covers a variety of topics that are essential in providing safe and secure family environments for looked after children, including attachment, the hierarchy of need, and loss and separation. You'll also learn about our key therapeutic foster care principles.



STEP 5 – PANEL

Once you've completed the assessment process and initial training, you'll be invited to attend a fostering panel either online or at your local ISP centre.

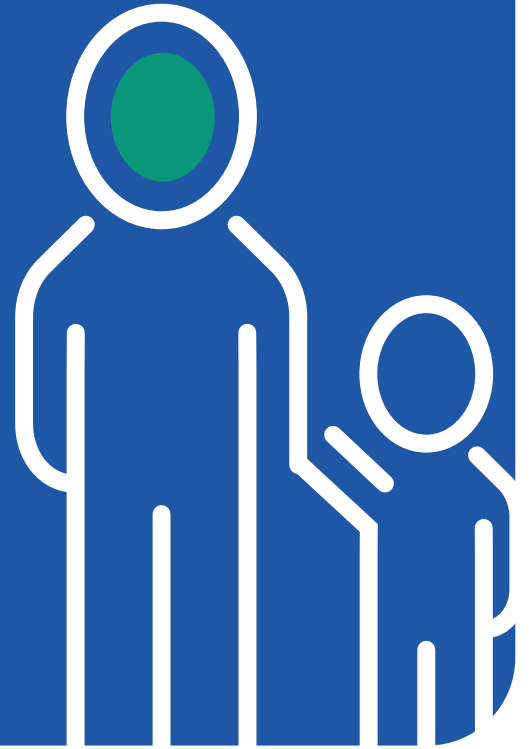
This is where your Form F report will be reviewed by an independent group of people from related professions, including education, health and social care, as well as care leavers too. They may ask you some questions about yourself and the report, and will then make a recommendation on your suitability to foster.

Their recommendation and the assessment report will then be reviewed by our agency decision maker, who will make the final decision about your approval.

STEP 6 – YOUR FIRST FOSTER CHILD

Once you're approved as a foster parent, we'll be in touch to start the matching process. We build strong relationships with our foster parents, so we can expertly match the needs of children and young people with our families and ensure stability for each child.

We'll send you all the information that we have on the child so you can decide whether you'd like to be put forward as their possible foster parents. The local authority makes the final decision.



Even though it was a long process, we've learnt a lot of good stuff through the process and understanding ourselves as well. It's a very thoughtful procedure.

- KELLY AND MIKE,
ISP FOSTER PARENTS



Fostering glossary

CHEAT SHEET

There might be some terms you come across during your research that you don't recognise. Here's a quick cheat sheet to help.

- **ADM** – agency decision maker
- **BAAF** – British Association for Adoption and Fostering
- **CAMHS** – child and mental health services
- **CP** – care proceedings, which determine the future care plans for the child
- **CSE** – child sexual exploitation
- **EWMHS** – emotional wellbeing and mental health services
- **ICO** – Interim Care Order, made under the children act of 1989
- **IFA** – independent fostering agency
- **IRO** – independent reviewing officer
- **LA** – local authority, the council that have legal guardianship of the children in care in their region
- **LAC** – looked-after child
- **OFSTED** – the organisation that inspects fostering services, both LAs and IFAs
- **PEP** – personal education plan
- **PR** – parental responsibility
- **SEND** – special education needs and disability
- **PTF** – Prepare To Foster, a compulsory training course
- **TSDS** – Training, Support and Development Standards
- **SW** – social worker
- **SSW** – supervising social worker
- **YP** – young person



The benefits of **FOSTERING**

Along with caring for a child in need and helping them grow into happy, healthy young people, fostering as a career has so many great benefits.

Transform a child's life

This is fundamentally what it's all about. You get to impart your wisdom to help a vulnerable child recover from hardship and show them what it means to be in a loving family.

Build long-lasting relationships

It doesn't matter how long a child is in your care; often, they'll remain in your heart forever. And many foster parents stay in touch with the children they've cared for, even once they've grown up and moved on from foster care.

Teach birth children important life lessons

The rewards of fostering will also positively impact your birth children as they learn to care and share with others. Plus, by understanding the struggles that children less fortunate face, we often find birth children develop a great sense of empathy and compassion.

Learn specialist skills

As a therapeutic fostering agency, our foster parents are extensively trained in safeguarding, child protection, therapeutic care, attachment, child development, paediatric first aid and more. Plus, there are ongoing training and specialist courses to help expand your skills and knowledge.

Financial rewards

At ISP, we value our foster parents as part of our professional team and pay a generous allowance to reflect their specialist skills, knowledge and experience. Please see our [allowances page](#) for all the latest fees.

You're self employed

All foster parents are self-employed, which entitles you to significant tax relief.



What to expect when you **FOSTER WITH ISP**

Wrap-around support package

The wrap-around support model we've built means that you and the child in your care are surrounded by a large team of experts, there to help you whenever you need it. This includes social workers, fostering advisors, teachers and therapists.

24/7 professional help

Fostering isn't a 9-5 job, so there might be times you need help outside of normal office hours. You're never more than a phone call away from someone to help with advice or to get things moving immediately.

Exclusive City & Guilds Assured training and career development

Fostering is a professional career, and we want you to excel at what you do. That's why we provide first-class training courses and even the chance to study for formal qualifications so you can expand your skills and continue to provide excellent care for children.

Events and activities for all the family

We work hard to bring everyone together for regular events at our local centres, and we hold family activities all year round.

Become an expert in therapeutic foster care

We are the pioneers of therapeutic foster care, a specialist type of care designed to help children who have suffered trauma or have complex needs. This means we've got all the knowledge to help you become an expert in therapeutic fostering.



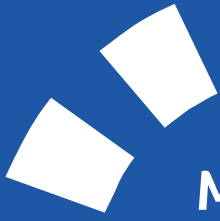
Allowances

AND REWARDS

Our generous allowances and benefits are designed to cover the cost of looking after a child, as well as to recognise the professional nature of the work and the difference you make.

- Receive an excellent allowance, that takes into account the child's age and your location.
- Additional allowances to help cover the cost of holidays, summer activities and school uniform.
- Access to hundreds of discounts from some of your favourite brands through our exclusive reward platform.
- Free events and activities for all the family throughout the year.
- 22 nights respite a year so you can unwind and have a well-earned break.





My advice to anyone thinking of fostering is just do it! Don't doubt yourself, just jump in the deep end and do it. You will get so much support from ISP to guide you through the process so you're never on your own. Just do it, you'll never regret it.

**--- NATALIE AND AARON,
ISP FOSTER PARENTS**

START YOUR JOURNEY WITH ISP

We're here every step of the way, so please get in touch to see if fostering could be the best decision for you.

Get in touch



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