

Frequently Asked Questions about foster care

Who can foster?

At BCYF, we welcome all Foster Carers from diverse backgrounds, cultures, religious beliefs, experiences, age, sexual orientation, relationship status and gender identity. Foster Carers may be married, single, same-sex couples, with or without children, divorced or de facto. Foster Carers can be working, not working, studying or retired and they can own their own home or be renting a property.

If you are aged 21 years or older and can offer a child or young person a safe, stable and nurturing home environment, we will welcome your application. Foster Carers must be an Australian resident (if you do not have permanent residency then you are unable to provide long-term or permanent care, however you can provide emergency, respite or short-term care).

What types of foster care can I provide?

We are seeking carers who can provide a range of different types of care, including emergency care, respite care, short-term care and long-term care.

Overnight or emergency care: for children and young people who require an immediate placement. Often requested at short-notice until a longer-term plan is developed.

Respite care: these placements are often over the weekend or during the school holidays, these placements may be one or two weekends per month. Respite care provides support to a child or young person's parents, guardians, or their primary Foster Carer by providing them with a regular break.

Short-term care: for children or young people who may require a placement for a couple of weeks up to approximately six months while a plan is developed and implemented for their reunification with their family.

Long-term care: for children and young people who cannot return to their family for an extended period of time, this can range from any period longer than six months and in some cases, years.



What checks are carried out on me and my family?

There are a number of screening checks as part of the assessment process. These checks include medical and health checks, home and environment, referee checks, police check and a Working with Children Check. People aged 18 years or older living in your household will need to have a police check and a Working with Children Check, as well as anyone who regularly stays overnight or for two or more consecutive nights.

Can I foster if I have my biological children in the home?

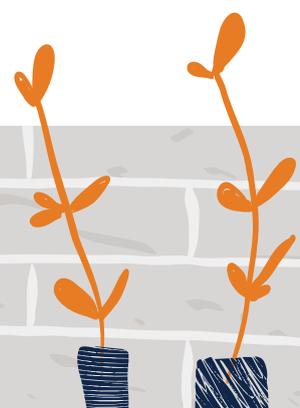
Yes. Many of our foster families at BCYF have their own biological children and it can be a positive experience for everyone involved. Children and young people who need care often have complex needs and require a significant amount of time, support and attention. Fostering a child or young person can be a big change for a family, so it is important to talk to your children and ask them how they feel about it.

I have never had children of my own. Can I apply to be a Foster Carer?

Yes. We are seeking Foster Carers with a range of diverse experiences who can care for and relate to children and young people, this is not limited to people who have had their own children. Many Foster Carers bring their own experiences of caring for their extended family members, their friends children or others in the community to their role as Foster Carers. BCYF also provides many social and educational opportunities, as part of its 24-hour support, to ensure you feel confident with being able to support the child or young person in your care.

I don't own my own home. Can I apply to be a Foster Carer?

Yes. Those who are renting their home are able to apply to become carers, as well as those living in units and apartments. We will work with you to ensure your home meets the home and environment standards for foster care.



Do I need a spare room to be a Foster Carer?

Children and young people in care need a home where they feel safe, secure and cared for. They need a home where they feel like they belong, they are accepted and they need to have their own privacy and space to store their belongings. As part of this, children and young people in care need to have their own bedroom. Sibling groups may share a bedroom if appropriate, however we ask that children who are not related have their own room.

I work full time.

Can I apply to be a Foster Carer?

Yes. BCYF will work with you to ensure a placement with a child or young person is suitable given your employment conditions and other commitments.

Foster Carers might work full-time, part-time, casually or on a voluntary basis. They might be retired or studying full time or part-time. If you are concerned your work commitments could be too demanding, respite care may be a suitable option for your household, respite carers are usually people who work full-time however are able to provide weekend placements with a child or young person.

I am single.

Can I apply to be a Foster Carer?

Yes. Foster Carers can be single, married, in a same-sex relationship or a de facto relationship. We have many amazing carers who are single. Your extended family may become part of the child or young person's support system. BCYF also provides many social and educational opportunities as well as general support, to ensure you do not feel alone.

I am a member of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Can I apply to be a Foster Carer?

Yes. We welcome prospective carers from all backgrounds. In fact, Foster Carers from a range of backgrounds and life experience are exactly what we are looking for to meet the needs of equally diverse children and young people requiring care.



Can I choose how long I want children and young people to stay with me?

You are able to choose whether or not you take a placement and when you want to end a placement, however, each child and young person's situation is different and their need to be in care will differ from case to case.

Can I choose which age group or gender I would prefer to foster?

You are able to indicate preferences for the age range and gender of the children and young people you wish to foster. Please be aware there might not always be any children or young people within your preferences needing a placement.

We ask all prospective carers to have an open mind about foster care placements. As children and young people from 0 to 17 years and from all backgrounds need care and a loving home, and Foster Carers can make a big difference to these children and young people at every age and stage of their lives.

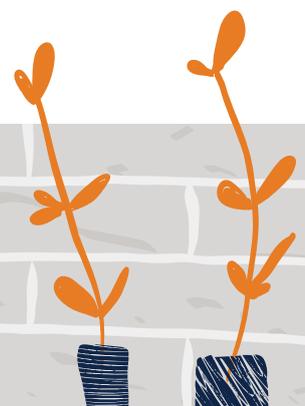
You are able to advise BCYF staff if you are unable to accept a child or young person into your home, for any reason.

How much will I know about the child or young person before they are placed with me?

Each potential placement will be discussed with you. It will ultimately be your choice whether you accept the placement with a child or young person. We'll give you as much information about them as we can to help you make an informed decision. Sometimes we have very little information, especially in an emergency, however we always try to find out as much information as we can, as quickly as we can.

Before accepting a placement you are able to obtain information about a child or young person which will help you prepare for the placement, including:

- If they have medical needs, and how to take care of them;
- Their current routine: whether they attend child care, kindergarten, school or work;
- Their behavioural needs and support they may require.



Do all children and young people in foster care return to their biological families?

Generally, the aim of foster care is to help children and young people return to their biological family, provided this is in the best interests of the child or young person. This is not always possible. If children are not able to return home to their biological family, they will be placed in a long-term placement or enter permanent care.

How do children and young people in foster care attend school?

Generally, the goal is for the child or young person to continue attending the school they are currently enrolled in, and BCYF makes every attempt to place the child or young person in a foster home that is in close proximity to their school.

What support is available for carers?

BCYF is committed to working closely with you and your household to ensure you receive the support you need.

BCYF provides:

- comprehensive and ongoing training at no cost,
- an allocated Case Worker to support the Foster Carer and foster child or young person through phone calls, home visits and after hours support,
- access to a team of specialist professionals as needed,
- access to a 24-hour support service,
- access to planned respite care if you need a break,
- linkages to broader state-wide networks with other Foster Carers such as peer support opportunities and access to foster care advocacy services,
- regular social events providing an opportunity for Foster Carers and foster care families to come together,
- financial assistance to cover the expenses of caring for the child or young person in the form of a fortnightly tax-free care allowance for each child or young person in care.



Do I receive an allowance?

Foster Carers receive a fortnightly allowance towards the ordinary day-to-day costs of caring for a child or young person until they reach 18 years old, complete the school year they commenced prior to their 18th birthday, or gain full-time employment. Young people and their Foster Carers will have the option of the young person remaining with their carer up to the age of 21 years, supported by an allowance through the Home Stretch Program.

The level of allowance depends on the age of the child or young person in care. Higher levels apply for those who provide care for children or young people with additional or complex needs. The care allowance covers items such as food, clothing, household provisions, gifts, pocket money and entertainment. The allowance does not pay for the Foster Carer's time and skills, but simply contributes towards the cost of caring for a child or young person.

There are other forms of financial support and Commonwealth Government benefits you may be entitled to. Get in contact with BCYF for more information.

Will I be taxed on the fostering allowances I receive?

Foster care allowances don't count as income for any purpose including Centrelink, yearly tax returns, applications for Commonwealth benefits, or when applying for loans from financial institutions.

How long is the recruitment process?

To ensure you feel fully equipped to be the best Foster Carer you can be, the process involves a number of steps which can take several months. You will go through a process of assessment, including screening checks and pre-service training before you can be approved as a Foster Carer.

How do I apply?

Contact us on 03 5222 6911 or fostercare@bcyf.org.au.

We look forward to hearing from you!

