



Our Foster Carer Support Offer



Everyday Support

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Remember...

- ✓ Don't be afraid to ask for support at any time, often it is better to seek support early
- ✓ For help accessing any of the support in this document, contact your Supervising Social Worker. Also ask them if there is support that you need that isn't listed here.
- ✓ If you experience any difficulties accessing support, contact your Team Manager.



The essentials

Supervising Social Worker

You will be allocated a supervising social worker and will be given their contact details. They will meet you every month for your supervision and you can contact them in between this by phone or email to discuss an issue or request support.

If you want to access any of the support outlined in this document, they are the first person to ask about this and can help to arrange it for you.

Induction Pack and Handbook

The induction pack and Foster carer handbook cover all aspects of fostering.

You will be given an induction pack when you are first approved, and you can access the Handbook at any time on the [Foster Carer website](#).

[Link to the Foster carer handbook can be found here:](#)

[Hertfordshire Foster Carers Handbook \(fosteringhandbook.com\)](http://fosteringhandbook.com)

Learning and Development Offer

As well as the mandatory training that all carers have to complete, we offer a range of specialist courses for specific issues, such as Attachment and trauma training, therapeutic parenting, mental health, autism and online safety.

Many courses are available as online eLearning, and some are also run as classroom-based learning in local venues across the county.

See the [Learning and Development Offer](#) for more details and how to book courses.

Support from other carers

You can request help from other carers at any time. Often speaking to other carers can be useful for talking through an issue you are experiencing with someone who will understand but isn't directly involved.

How to request help from other carers

Ask your supervising social worker if they can put you in touch with carers in your area or in similar situations.

Many carers have set up informal WhatsApp groups to keep in touch and support each other, which you may be able to join.

The buddy scheme

We don't want a foster carer to ever feel they're on their own. It's important they always feel supported. So, we buddy up new foster carers with experienced foster carers to help them feel supported throughout their fostering journey from assessment to placement and beyond.

In Hertfordshire we have recently developed our buddy support to ensure that all foster carers get the opportunity to be supported by other foster carers.

Our new buddy scheme introduces various buddy groups within the service depending on the needs of the child(ren) you care for and for you to be able to tap in whichever group you may find helpful. You can be linked up to more than one group and if your buddy need changes, you can join and leave groups at your own choice.

A buddy co Ordinator (foster carer) takes on the co-ordination of each buddy whatsapp group which involves being a contact person for all foster carers to be added to a Buddy whatsapp group. Once you have made contact/or SSW has made contact on your behalf, the buddy co Ordinator will add you to the Buddy whatsapp group and give you a ring to link up and check whether there is any specific support you think you would need from other carers. Some carers only want to be on the whatsapp group, however other carers may want to be linked up with other carers , which will then be facilitated by the Buddy co Ordinator.

The whatsapp group will link carers up, can be used to share information, resources, activities available, ask for advice etc.

Fostering Ambassadors

Fostering Ambassadors host and speak at events, showcase achievements and provide support to people who enquire to foster. The hope is that through their role as Ambassadors they will raise awareness of fostering and highlight the need to raise the number of foster carers for Hertfordshire County Council.

The Ambassadors offer support and advice to people on their fostering journey, to give applicants the opportunity to speak with an approved foster carer from the start. This can involve a phone call, meeting up, email/text and the option to have foster carer be present at the initial visit.

Speak to your supervising social worker if you'd like to apply to become a Fostering Ambassador.

Peer Support

Foster carer peer support refers to approved foster carers in a structured one-to-one relationship with other approved foster carers and is delivered by experienced foster carers outside of any line management relationship. Peer support can be provided when there is a specific need for an intervention, i.e. to support in a crisis and to prevent placement breakdown. A decision for peer support to be offered can be made by your fostering team as part of Fostering support.

Sleepovers

Regular 'sleepovers' for the children you are looking after can help you to have a break. This is where the child spends time with someone else who has been approved as being able to provide suitable care for them. It could be for a few nights or just for a day out and we will always try to make sure that the sleepover carer is someone the child knows. Sleepover care can be useful when you are looking after a child with complex support needs.

It's important to be aware that regular sleepovers may not be suitable for all children, particularly those under five or who find it difficult to settle with new people. Social workers will always have to consider the needs of the child as well as the needs of the foster carer when making decisions about sleepovers.

Mockingbird and other fostering hubs

Hertfordshire currently offers support to many fostering families via Mockingbird family model. Mockingbird is an extended family model that provides emotional and practical support to families, sleepovers, support groups and social activities for children and carers.

Please see more information about Mockingbird here:

[The Mockingbird programme | The Fostering Network](#)

In addition to Mockingbird, we have other similar community hubs such as the Under 7s and the Hearts hub. See further information in these links

[Under 7's HUB \(hertfordshire.gov.uk\)](http://hertfordshire.gov.uk)

[The Hearts hub offers support to children with disabilities and additional needs and their carers.](#)

We are currently working to develop more Hubs across Hertfordshire so that we can extend this great support offer to a wider range of fostering families.

Our duty system means that you can always contact someone if your supervising social workers is on holiday or not around.

When you are approved you will be provided with the number for your Fostering team's duty and for the Fostering team manager.

You can contact the duty social worker during office hours if you need support and your supervising social worker is not available.

Fostering out of hours Service (FOOSH)

After office hours and at weekends, Foster carers can access support from the Fostering out of hours Service (from 5.30 to 11 pm) and Children's Services Emergency Safeguarding line.

See link to the website for more information:

[Out of hours support for foster carers | Hertfordshire County Council](#)

Support Groups

A range of support groups run in local areas (including face-to-face and virtually). There are locality support groups for each area as well as county wide specialist groups for specific areas, such as support groups for carers of young children, Supported lodgings carers, Support group for carers who care for children with additional needs and Men who foster. The groups vary in size, format, timings and location.

These groups provide really helpful support and can be:

- a chance to meet other local carers to share experiences & knowledge
- a safe environment to share your views and feelings
- an option to just listen if you don't want to speak
- opportunities to develop social networks, make new friends & plan events
- an informal, fun, friendly, welcoming & relaxing environment
- a way to keep you up to date with changes in the fostering service
- time to hear from speakers about a range of topics – e.g., Money Advice, Staying Put, CAMHS, Herts Rewards
- a chance for plenty of tea, coffee, biscuits & cake!

The support groups are usually up to 2 hours in duration, but they are designed to be flexible – we recognise foster carers are very busy people and have many commitments, so if you can only attend part of it, that is fine. You can attend groups in different areas and there is no need to book. Feedback from attending these groups is one way in which you can help shape our service from within – we really want to hear your ideas.

Each of the Fostering hubs as mentioned earlier in the document also offer support groups/coffee mornings. Additionally, if there are any barriers which might prevent you from attending, please do raise with your SSW and we will look to find a way to overcome this. The service will pay for travel expenses to and from the groups. In addition the groups, many carers are linked to Whatsapp groups for support

To find out more, contact your Supervising Social worker to find out about the ones most relevant for you. We recognize the value in having a number of diverse groups to meet carers' different needs so please do speak to your SSW about finding the right one for you.

All information on support group meetings (times, venues etc) will be sent out monthly via the foster carers email and can also be found in the Hertfordshire

support group offer which is sent out with the Foster carer induction pack and via the Foster carer Service emails.

Area Social Events

Carers in each area work together with the fostering teams to organize local events and activities, such as children's Christmas and summer parties and the annual foster carer appreciation dinners. If you are interested in getting involved, please let your supervising social worker know.

Foster Carers Conference and awards ceremony

The Conference is an enjoyable event and a celebration of your hard work. The conference usually has a keynote speaker, lunch, afternoon workshops, various stalls and a free raffle.

On the alternate year, an **awards ceremony** is held to celebrate carers who have fostered for 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and 35+ years, as well as awarding carers in recognition for outstanding contributions they have made to children's lives.

Support with Trauma, Education, Special Educational Needs and Mental Health

Trauma

The ***Trauma focused fostering support team aims*** to support foster carers caring for children looked after to understand their child's developmental trauma and how this may impact on their behaviour.

The Trauma focused Fostering Support Team will help professionals in the team around the child to make sense of the child's trauma history and link this to any challenging behaviour the child might show in the home, in order to develop strategies to support both foster carer and the child. Every referral is considered on a case by case basis and a consultation will be offered to explore this.

The Trauma focused fostering Support Team offer ARC Training, monthly ARC workshops which focus on different topics and direct work with Foster carers and children.

Education

Each area of Hertfordshire has an advisory teacher who is responsible for supporting the educational needs of Children Looked After, as part of the Virtual School. You can contact your local advisory teacher via your supervising social worker, and they will be able to provide bespoke educational support for a child in your care. Here is a link to the Virtual school website [Hertfordshire Virtual School](#)

Special Educational Needs

There is lots of support available for children with SEND in Hertfordshire, [the Local Officer website](#) is a great place to start.

Mental health

The [CAMHS Targeted Service](#) provides specialist support for children and young people in care who have identified difficulties with emotional wellbeing. Speak to your supervising social worker, and the child's social worker, who can make a referral and arrange a consultation. The consultation aims to provide a reflective space for the professional network to think about the young person's experiences and needs, and which CAMHS service would be most appropriate. The consultation can be an intervention in itself. Following the consultation, a range of flexible interventions, with a focus on developmental trauma and attachment difficulties, are available depending on needs – these include interventions for the child as well as those for the network of adults supporting them.

The wider community CAMHS service also provide support if you are looking after a child or young person who might require psychiatric intervention or access to a high-risk pathway. Your supervising social worker or the CAMHS Targeted Team will be able to refer them for other support through CAMHS although there can sometimes be a waiting list for this.

There are also other specialist services such as Eating Disorders Team, Home Treatment Team (alternative to inpatient services), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy team (DBT), Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team (CCAT) at Watford and Lister Hospitals, Forensic Adolescent Practitioner service, and Adolescent inpatient unit (Forest House). All of these services are multi-disciplinary teams and may include a range of professionals including child psychiatrists, specialist nurses, clinical social workers, clinical and counselling psychologists, child and adolescent psychotherapists, systemic family therapists, and occupational therapists. Young people might also be referred or signposted to other services within Hertfordshire, such as Step 2 or Positive behaviour, Autism, Learning

disability, and Mental health Service, or local voluntary services.

The **Children Looked After Nurse** can provide general advice on medical issues or help you to access other health care. Your supervising social worker, or the child's social worker, will be able to put you in contact with this service.

You can also request **counselling for yourself as a carer** – speak to your supervising social worker, who can make a referral on your behalf. Additionally, you can get advice/support from Fostering Network.

There is also a **CAMHS attachment group** specifically for foster carers. This is run in small groups of 10 carers and is very popular and a safe place where foster carers can share how situations have made them feel.

We are also looking at reviewing support offer to carers who look after children with additional needs. This will include shared care. This will be added at a later date.

Placement Support Interventions

A range of bespoke support interventions are available to support carers and children experiencing difficulties during a placement. Speak to your Supervising Social Worker if you feel you may need this sort of support. The types of support available include:

- Once a child is placed in a fostering family, an Initial placement support plan will be drawn out to outline the support offered to children and carers. The Placement support plan will then be reviewed ongoing in placement support meetings.
- **Practical support** to help you to support a child in placement with you. This sort of support is always bespoke and agreed around your needs and the child's needs. It can include support for the child to access activities inside or outside the home, or support for you within your home.
- Peer support carers can support you with dealing with or preventing a crisis, in addition to the support provided by your supervising social worker. Ask whether a carer can be matched to you.

Fostering Network

All foster carers get free membership of the Fostering Network.

The Network website contains lots of helpful information and support, and they also run an advice line. Call 020 7620 6400 or go to www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk .

You can use your hertsfostering.org email address to register on the website, in order to access the full range of benefits and resources.

Engagement opportunities

The Fostering Forum

The Fostering Forum is a group of people who are committed to promoting the development and wellbeing of children in care, as well as those who look after them. The group consists of senior members of the Fostering Service and the Children's Services, as well as Safeguarding Team members and, importantly, Foster Carers who are at the daily front line looking after children.

Meetings are held, currently once every two months. The meetings are attended by Foster Carer representatives from each team, North, South, East and West. The representatives raise suggestions or concerns on behalf of other Foster Carers to the service team for discussion.

Please tell the representatives about anything that you feel might be helpful to the service. The representative can take your issue forward, anonymously if you feel happier, or point you in the right direction if that is appropriate. Sometimes, it can feel that something only happens to you and that you are alone, but sharing of information can highlight if there is a recurring issue which needs to be addressed.

We are always looking for new representatives to come to the Forum to present the Foster Carer views. Please consider whether you could join the forum, as you can directly help influence the service.

Please speak to your representative below to find out more:

Fostering Strategy Delivery Groups

Coproduction with foster carers is crucial in the ongoing work to develop our Fostering service and we have a number of working groups looking at different aspects of the service.

A number of working groups have been established as part of the fostering strategy. If any carers are interested in joining any of the delivery groups, we are keen to hear from you! Please speak with your supervising social worker who can put your name forward.

