

Family finding for long-term foster care: A toolkit

For children who come into care and are unable to return to live with their parents, there are a number of different permanence options. Where long-term fostering is the agreed permanency plan, the fostering service is responsible for **finding the right home and family** for those children. It is essential that every child in foster care is found the right placement as soon as possible.

All children should be placed with a foster carer who has the skills and experience to meet their needs, including cultural, language and religious background, and ideally within their community. **High quality matching and permanency planning** is essential to this process and is the first step in achieving safe, stable and permanent foster homes for children who need them.

Whether you are considering 'in house' families from within the agency or an external placement, an initial family finding meeting is a helpful way for key professionals to consider the child's needs and the **family finding strategy**. The child's social worker should provide a full background history of the child, sharing any assessments that have been completed, and regular reviews should be scheduled to take note of any changes to the child's needs or circumstances.

Your agency will have its own policies and procedures regarding family finding for long-term foster care. This toolkit is designed to support these and to offer a **set of helpful resources** that can be used individually or collectively throughout the family finding process.

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Family finding
for long-term
foster care

A Toolkit



NEARLY 70,000 CHILDREN LIVE WITH OVER 53,000 FOSTER FAMILIES ACROSS THE UK, WHERE ONE CHILD EVERY 15 MINUTES COULD NEED A FOSTER FAMILY.

CONTENTS

All About Me: A Direct Work Tool

This is a tool for social workers, family finders or current foster carers to record a snapshot of the child's life, including their interests, achievements and thoughts. The tool invites conversation with the child about their current circumstances and helps them to think about and plan for their future. It can provide an insight of the child for prospective carers and, in capturing their development, interests and life journey, is a form of life story work that – if done regularly – will support the child's growing sense of self and identity.

Profiling children: Good practice tips for social workers and family finders

Family finding is a complex task that involves portraying the child positively, realistically and sensitively. One of the ways you can do this is through a written profile, which is a valuable tool that can help bring the child to life and, ultimately, to achieve the best possible match for them. This guidance offer hints and tips that will help you to produce a strength-based and child-centered profile that will give prospective families the confidence to discover more. It also includes some example profiles.

Taking Photos and Videos of Children in Care: Good Practice Tips for Foster Carers

Photos and videos are an important way of marking key events and activities that allow children to reflect on and make sense of their childhoods and personal histories as they grow up. Therefore, children should have an accurate and meaningful record of their time in foster care that they can access now and in the future as part of their life story.

Photos and videos can also be used for the purpose of family finding and are an opportunity to represent the child to prospective carers. This guidance will help current carers to consider the contribution they can make to the child's profile through the provision of high quality photos and videos.

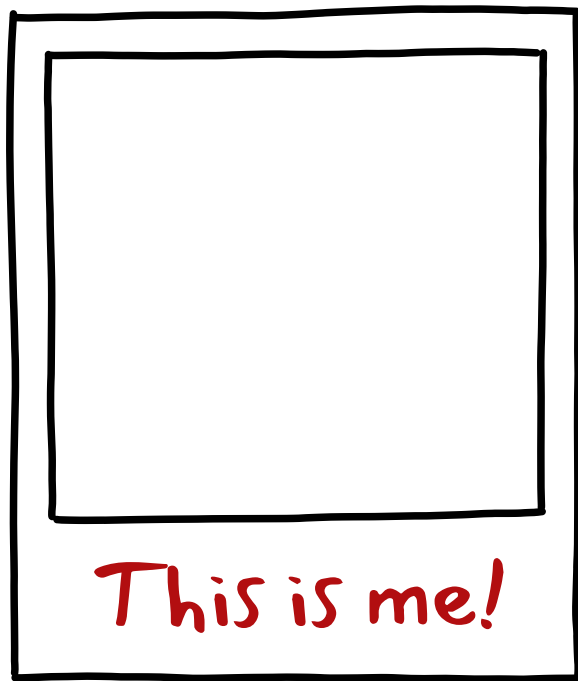
A Guide to Running an Exchange Day for Fostering: Good Practice Tips for Local Authorities

Exchange Days allow prospective foster carers to meet and hear directly from social workers, family finders and current carers about children who need a permanent foster home. Exchange Days are an established part of the family finding process in adoption but are a helpful tool in family finding for long-term fostering, too. This practical guidance will help local authorities to organise and facilitate an Exchange Day for fostering and offers advice on how to portray a true sense of the child at the event.

Activity Days for Fostering

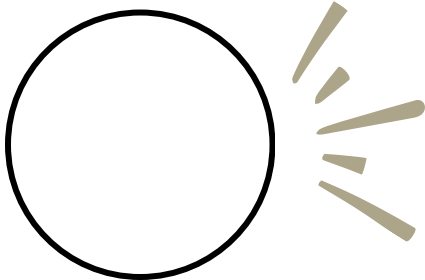
Activity Days for Fostering focus on finding loving, stable homes for children who need to remain permanently looked after under foster care arrangements. Activity Days for Fostering are designed to speed up and improve the process of matching children with a wider range of prospective foster carers. They allow for prospective foster carers to directly meet children waiting for permanence in a prepared, supported, safe and fun environment. Find out more about these events and how to commission one for your local authority.

ALL ABOUT ME



This is me!

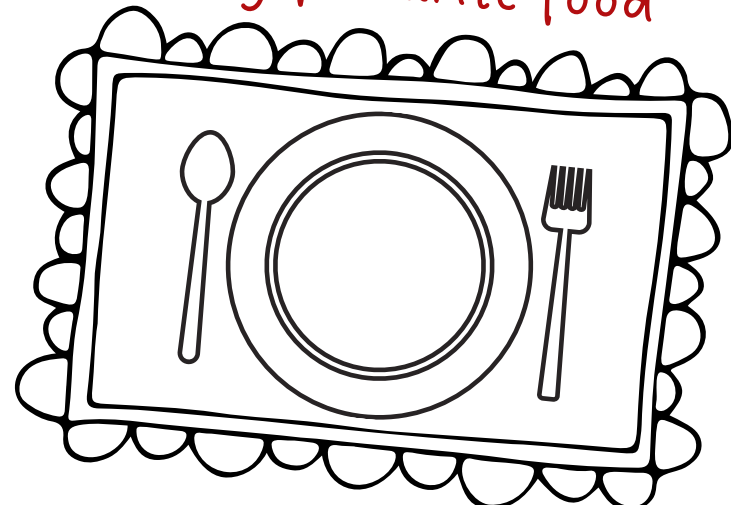
I AM



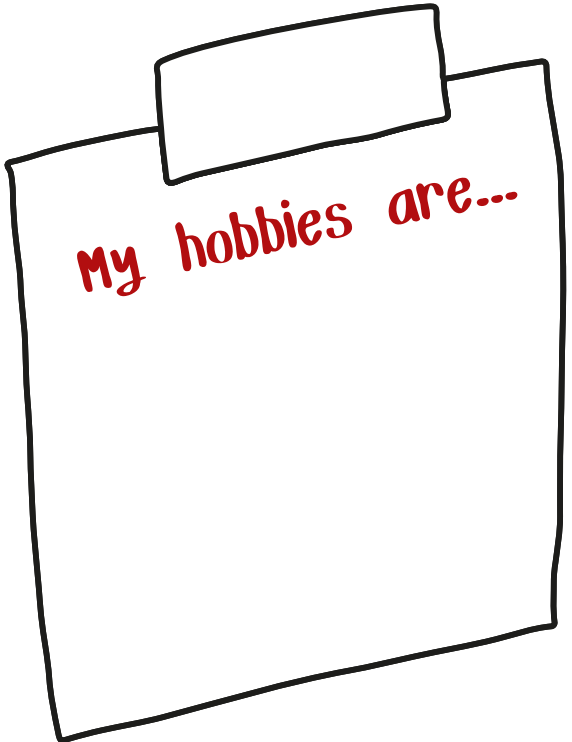
YEARS OLD



My favourite food



MY FAVOURITE ARTIST

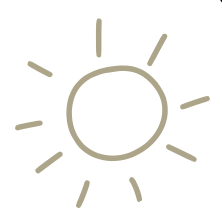
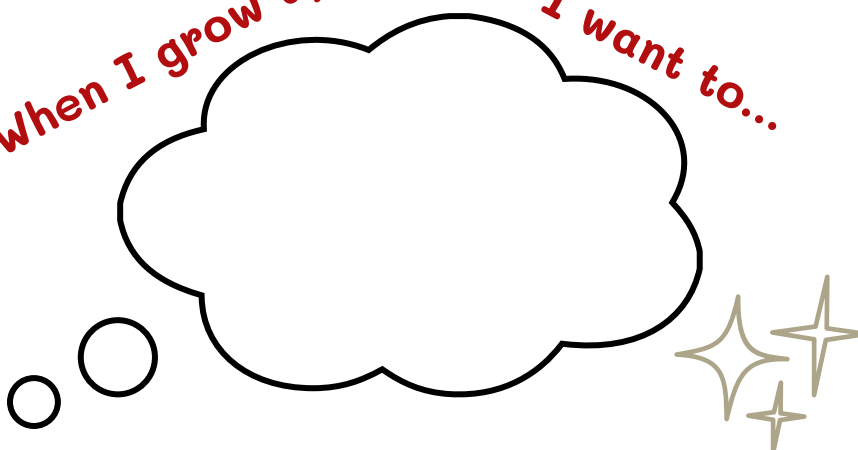


My hobbies are...



My favourite movie

When I grow up I want to...



I live with...



Things that make me happy...



Things that make me sad...



My questions...



Profiling Children

Good Practice Tips for Social Workers and Family Finders

Family finding is a complex task that involves portraying children positively, realistically and sensitively. One of the ways you can do this is through a written profile, which is a valuable tool that can help bring a child to life and, ultimately, to achieve the best possible match for them.

The purpose of the profile is to introduce the child to prospective families and give them a feel of the child in the here and now. It is also to encourage the family to rule themselves in to consider the child. The profile should be a concise snapshot of the child, bringing together information from the child and those who know them best.

Remember that the profile is the first impression prospective families have of the child. Don't be tempted to copy and paste from a court report or permanence report. Talk to the child about their interests and ask the people who care for the child to describe the child, their personality, and likes and dislikes.

Preparing a profile that is succinct, honest, balanced, and conveys a genuine sense of the real child today, is not an easy task. This guidance will offer hints and tips and will help you to produce a strength-based and child-centered profile that will give prospective families the confidence to discover more.



Hints and tips for writing a profile

The child should be actively involved in creating their profile if possible and appropriate. Even a small child can tell you their favourite things to do.

Remember that the profile could be read by the child or someone who knows them. It should not include confidential or sensitive background information.

Describe the effect of the trauma on the child and not the trauma itself. Detailing abuse can be overwhelming for prospective families at this stage.

Include a good quality photo that represents the child. Sibling photos should demonstrate their togetherness and the text should discuss them as individuals, as well as siblings.

There may be a need for detail on medical matters but avoid complicated terminology. Succinctly explain what it means for the child and how it is managed.

Don't fall into the trap of using social work jargon. Speak plainly and avoid generic phrases and acronyms. Physical descriptions are often unnecessary.

Portray the child as an individual. Capture their uniqueness by using the child's and their carers' own words.

Keep the profile up to date to reflect the child as they grow and develop.

Don't be prescriptive about the family needed and demonstrate a flexible and individual approach to contact that invites the start of a conversation.

Proofread the profile: check your spelling and grammar, and avoid repetition. Include your contact details at the bottom of the profile.

If appropriate, the finished profile should be shared with the child. It's an opportunity to discuss their wishes and feelings.

Profiling Children

Good Practice Tips for Social Workers and Family Finders



Thinking about Language

“All of his immunisations are up to date”

Why does this need to be included in the profile?

“She is meeting her developmental milestones”

What does that mean for this particular child?

“He presents as happy”

Does this mean that he is actually not happy?

“She never does what her carers say”

What impression does this give?

“Considering all he has gone through”

Is this strength-based or does it focus on deficits?

“She has not been diagnosed with Autism”

Why is this relevant? Does she have autistic traits?

Children with Disabilities

For children with disabilities, the quality of the profile is a key factor in the matching process. Be mindful that attitudes towards, and understanding of, disability in general can limit matches if information is presented negatively. The profile should focus on the ‘whole’ child and present them ‘in the round’, rather than as a list of impairments. A shorter but still realistic profile that delicately balances the child’s personality with their needs can prevent overburdening prospective families with information at such an early stage.

Involving the Child

The essence of a good profile comes from interactions with the child. Use the All About Me direct work tool to talk to the child about themselves and to capture information about their personality and interests, as well as their thoughts and feelings. Questions you might ask the child as part of this work, include:

Tell me two things you like about yourself.

Tell me a story about yourself.

Tell me about something you did that was really fun.

Tell me about a time when you were really proud of yourself.

Do you like school? What is your favourite subject?

What is your favourite food/TV programme/song/book?

What are your hobbies and interests?

What do you want to be when you grow up?

What would you like people to know about you?

What kind of permanent foster family would you be happy in?

If you could have your own special wish, what would it be?

“JAMAL IS AN AFFECTIONATE LITTLE BOY, WHO IS FULL OF ENERGY. JAMAL LIVES WITH HIS YOUNGER BROTHER IN FOSTER CARE BUT NEEDS HIS OWN SPECIAL FAMILY TO GROW UP IN. JAMAL HAS A DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY CALLED AUTISM, WHICH MEANS THAT HE EXPERIENCES THE WORLD IN A WAY THAT IS UNIQUE TO HIM.”

“CHARLOTTE LOVES PHYSICAL PLAY, ESPECIALLY ROUGH AND TUMBLE GAMES. SHE ALSO LIKES DANCING TO MUSIC AND PLAYING OUTSIDE. CHARLOTTE’S CONFIDENCE AND CURIOSITY IS GROWING EACH DAY.”

“JOEY WAS BORN WITH A CONDITION CALLED PIERRE ROBINS SYNDROME. FOR JOEY, THIS MEANS THAT HE FINDS IT HARD TO BREATHE UNAIDED AND TO TAKE MILK FROM A BOTTLE. AT THE MOMENT, JOEY FEEDS USING A TUBE, WHICH HELPS THE MILK GO STRAIGHT TO HIS TUMMY. JOEY’S FOSTER CARER FINDS THIS SIMPLE TO MANAGE.”

Profiling Children

Example Profiles

Hi! My name is Ezequiel

"I am 12 years old and I love playing football!"

Let me tell you more about myself...

"I support Arsenal Football Club."

And here's what others say...

Ezequiel is sporty and sociable, and has a great sense of humour; he is a kind and thoughtful young person who is considerate of others. Ezequiel likes doing a range of activities from playing football to watching TV, trampolining, going to the skate park and riding his bike. His key worker at the residential home says, "Ezequiel enjoys spending time with other young people but he also likes to have his own space and enjoys watching Netflix in his room or in the activity room. Ezequiel has a mobile phone, which is important to him and helps him to stay in touch with his family and friends. Ezequiel loves playing on his Nintendo Switch and his favourite game is Tony Hawk's Pro Skater".

Ezequiel can be cautious of new experiences and people but with lots of support and encouragement, he will often try new activities and communicate positively with new people. His social worker says, "Initially, Ezequiel can be somewhat shy but once he is comfortable, he will open up and talk about the things he is interested in. Sometimes Ezequiel finds it hard to express himself and to understand his feelings. He needs carers who will offer him a safe space to share his emotions, to help him to make sense of them, and to find positive ways to express them. Ezequiel is making wonderful progress in residential care and is ready to live with a family who will give him a true sense of belonging as part of a family unit."

Ezequiel is settled at school, where he is achieving academically and has positive relationships with his teachers, who are trusted adults in his life. He is beginning to think about his future by choosing his GCSE optional subjects and is particularly interested in Computer Science and Physical Education. Ezequiel has a large friendship group and it will be important for him to remain at his school in Lewisham for continuity of his academic progress and support networks.

What kind of foster family does Ezequiel want?

Ezequiel would like a foster family who share his Black Caribbean background and ideally, he would like a foster brother or sister. Ezequiel wants to live in Lewisham to stay connected to his family and friends, and he would like his carers to show an interest in the things he enjoys.

To find out more about Ezequiel, please contact:



Hi! Our names are Tommy and Gracie

Tommy: "I can play the piano."

Gracie: "I love singing, dancing and gymnastics."

Let us tell you more about ourselves...

"We have a very strong bond and are both super creative!"

And here's what others say...

Tommy and Gracie are full siblings who are ten and 8 years old, respectively; they are from a White British background and are Christians. Tommy and Gracie practice their faith by attending a Catholic school and taking part in school masses and religious celebrations and festivals. Tommy is looking forward to his Sacrament of Confirmation later on this year.

Tommy is a very engaging and energetic boy; he likes adult attention and enjoys performing and telling jokes. Tommy has a wonderful sense of humour. Tommy is a talented swimmer and would like to be a footballer when he grows up just like his idol, Cristiano Ronaldo. Tommy is very affectionate and finds comfort in being physically close to his foster carer, who he cuddles up with for his and Gracie's favourite time of the week: movie night!

Gracie is a very playful girl, who loves chatting and socialising. She enjoys being helpful and will often ask her carer for simple jobs, such as putting away clean laundry and laying the table. Gracie is very independent and is learning to let the safe adults in her life take care of her and Tommy. Gracie is gifted with a wonderful imagination and is happiest playing with her dollhouse. She also enjoys baking and making jewellery.

Due to their experiences, it took longer for Tommy and Gracie to reach some developmental milestones and their social and emotional development, as well as their academic progress, is behind what might be expected of other children their respective ages. Tommy and Gracie are making excellent progress with the support of their Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), which offer them a more tailored education.

What kind of foster family do Tommy and Gracie want?

Tommy and Gracie would like for their foster carers to take them on fun days out as they both love adventures and they particularly enjoy capturing memories through photographs and making scrap books. It is important to Tommy and Gracie to stay in touch with their big brother and be supported to have direct contact with him. Tommy and Gracie currently share a bedroom but would like to have their own bedrooms as they get older.

To find out more about Tommy and Gracie, please contact:



Taking Photos and Videos of Children in Care

Good Practice Tips for Foster Carers

Taking photos and videos of children in care is an essential part of your recording commitments as a foster carer. Photos and videos are an important way of marking key events and activities that allow children to reflect on and make sense of their childhoods and personal histories as they grow up. Therefore, children should have an accurate and meaningful record of their time in foster care that they can access now and in the future as part of their 'life story'.

Your agency should have a written policy that sets out its approach to foster carers taking and storing images of children in care. It should outline why it's important for children and young people to have photos and videos of special moments and people in their lives, as well as the actions you can take to keep children safe. Talk to your supervising social worker for more information about your agency's policies and procedures.

You may be asked to take or provide photos and videos of children in care for the purpose of profiling them for a long-term foster care placement. If this makes you feel uncomfortable, think about the photos and videos as an opportunity to represent rather than promote the child to prospective carers.

Family finding is a complex task that involves portraying children positively, realistically and sensitively. Photos and videos are a potentially valuable tool that can help bring a child to life and, ultimately, to achieve the best possible match for them.

In adoption, for example, research has shown that video clips increase the number of enquiries by an average of 30% (Grant, 2011); therefore, it is important to consider the contribution you can make to the child's profile through the provision of high quality photos and videos.

WE LIVE IN A DIGITAL AGE WHERE MEMORIES STORED ON DEVICES CAN BE LOST WHEN CHILDREN MOVE ON. TALK TO THE CHILD'S SOCIAL WORKER ABOUT USING A VIRTUAL MEMORY BOX, WHICH IS A SECURE ONLINE TOOL TO SUPPORT CHILDREN IN CARE TO HAVE A SAFE SPACE TO KEEP MEMORIES, MEMENTOS, AND EXPERIENCES.

Hints and tips



Don't worry about the technical aspects of taking photos and videos; most smartphones have good quality cameras that will be suitable for the job.

Ensure that video footage is captured in landscape by holding the phone sideways; this will enable the film to be viewed in full-screen.

Consider the child's appearance; they should be well presented but in comfortable, everyday clothing.

Show aspects of the child and their personality that may not be fully portrayed on paper; what might be important for prospective carers to know about the child?

If the child has a medical condition, dedicate part of the video to showing what day to day life is like and how to use any equipment.

Avoid capturing the child in a state of undress or in school uniform; observe and respect cultural and/or religious clothing that might be important to the child.

Take a relaxed and informal approach; reassure the child by having fun with it and time the taking of photos and videos to fit in with the child's routine.

Don't ask or pressure the child to pose; photos and videos should be natural and capture the essence of the child.

Check out the lighting and make sure the photos and video will be bright and clear; consider going outside if possible.

Avoid background noise and distractions; make sure there is nothing confidential showing on camera, such as photographs of other children in the foster home.

Photograph and video siblings together to capture and reflect their relationships with one another.

Think about what activities to film in advance and ask the child what they'd like to do; there is a useful checklist below.

Taking Photos and Videos of Children in Care

Good Practice Tips for Foster Carers



If the local authority has asked you to be involved in preparing photos and video clips of the child for the purpose of family finding, it is good practice for the child's social worker to discuss the following with you in advance:

- ensuring that plans to photograph and video the child are part of the overall arc of family finding and will not be the first time the subject of long-term foster care is raised with the child
- explaining the purpose and process of the photos and video clips to the child, supporting them to ask questions and gaining their consent, where capable
- listening to the child's own ideas about how they want to be represented in the photos and video clips and what they want to emphasise about themselves
- your consent to photos and video clips being taken in the foster home environment and to being included in the photos and video clips, where and however relevant
- plans to reassure the child beyond the photos and video clips being taken, including answering any questions they have and addressing any of their comments or concerns.

A CHECKLIST FOR FOSTER CARERS

- I know my agency's policies and procedures around taking, sending and storing images of children in my care.
- Together with the child's social worker, I have talked to the child about taking photos and videos of them for the purpose of family finding.
- Together with the child's social worker, I have gained the child's consent and I also consent to being involved.
- I have thought about what I want to show about the child and how I will achieve this in still and moving images.
- I have involved the child in plans to make the photos and videos and have listened to their ideas about how they want to be represented.
- In making plans, I have considered the child's routine and other factors, such as the filming environment.
- I have the equipment I need to photograph/film the child; the device is fully charged and has sufficient memory space.

REMEMBER

Children should always give consent to photos or videos of them being taken, used or shared. If children don't want to have their photo or video taken, used or shared, you should respect their wishes. Be sensitive to the needs and experiences of children for whom photography may have been used abusively in the past. Avoid using personal equipment to store photos and videos of children and ensure that images and videos are sent and saved securely. Sharing photographs of children on social media or other online platforms carries potential risks. As a general rule, you should never share images of children in care on social media.

A Guide to Running an Exchange Day for Fostering

Good Practice Tips for Local Authorities

Exchange Days allow prospective foster carers to meet and hear directly from social workers, family finders and current carers about children who need a permanent foster home. Exchange Days are an established part of the family finding process in adoption but are a helpful tool in family finding for long-term fostering, too.

During the Exchange Day, prospective carers and social workers have the opportunity to have direct conversations about children, giving the carers a much fuller sense of the child. Through talking to the social worker and possibly viewing a video of the child as well, carers gain so much more than just simply looking at profiles. Social workers also value the opportunity to meet prospective carers at an early stage.

Exchange Days give prospective carers more direct involvement in the linking process, but they also provide them with a realistic picture of the range of children requiring long-term foster care. This can help carers reflect more widely on the children they might be able to consider. There are many examples of successful matches emerging from links made at Exchange Days, where carers felt a connection to a child they may not have considered based on a written profile alone.

You can feature as many children as you wish at an Exchange Day and representatives from other fostering agencies can attend, as well as prospective carers. Networking between agencies at Exchange Days can be highly productive in building links that support matching both now and in the future.

Hints and tips



- It is essential that the whole team around the child is on board and has an understanding of what an Exchange Day is. Why not hold an online information session for staff ahead of the event?
- It is important to talk to the child about the different family finding methods you are using so they understand the efforts that are being made to try and find the right family for them, and so they are aware of how their profile and/or photographs and video clips are being used.
- Have a core team or steering group who meet regularly to plan the event, including deciding which children to feature and which prospective carers and agencies to invite, as well as practical arrangements.
- Book a suitable venue that has space for confidential conversations to take place away from the general public, enough room for tables to display the children's profiles, a refreshments area, a registrations desk and bathroom facilities. A venue that is easily accessible with good transport links is essential.
- Everyone who attends the event must be pre-registered in order to ensure confidentiality. It is important to ask everyone to sign a confidentiality statement before or once they arrive.
- Once a date is set for the event, create a 'save the date' flyer to send to internal staff and start promoting the event to other fostering agencies.
- Ensure the recruitment and assessment team consider families who are in assessment, as well as those already approved. Attending an Exchange Day can be a valuable experience for new carers.
- Create a simple booking form for prospective carers and circulate this internally and to other fostering agencies.
- Ensure you have a record of the children being profiled and of the prospective carers and agency representatives who attend.
- At least two weeks before the event, send an Exchange Day invitation to all guests with details of the venue and timings.



A Guide to Running an Exchange Day for Fostering

How to Portray a True Sense of the Child



It is essential to prepare a good quality profile for the Exchange Day as this acts as an important introduction to the child for prospective carers.

Consider using the 'All About Me' direct work tool ahead of the Exchange Day to provide an insight of the child for prospective carers on the day.

Display children and young people's achievements, artwork, drawings and items that represent or are special to them.

Share a range of good quality photographs of the child and use videos: they bring children to life so much more than just photographs and written information.

It is very helpful if the child's current carer can attend the Exchange Day. Feedback from prospective carers shows that they find conversations with current carers particularly beneficial.

THE CHILD'S SOCIAL WORKER OR A WORKER WHO KNOWS THE CHILD WELL SHOULD ATTEND TO ANSWER QUESTIONS, DISCUSS THE CHILD'S PARTICULAR PLACEMENT NEEDS IN MORE DETAIL AND TAKE INFORMATION FROM ANY CARERS OR AGENCIES WHO EXPRESS AN INTEREST IN EXPLORING A POSSIBLE LINK WITH THE CHILD.

EXCHANGE DAY CHECKLIST

- The venue is booked and refreshments have been arranged.
- For each child/sibling group, there is least one member of staff (e.g. their social worker or family finder) who knows them well who is able to attend the event so that meaningful conversations can take place.
- Everyone attending is pre-registered and name badges have been prepared. Colour coding can help to identify different roles (e.g. social workers, current carers and prospective carers).
- Invitations have been issued with event details, including timings. We suggest that you factor in set-up and professional networking time before inviting prospective carers and fostering agencies to arrive. Don't forget to specify a finish time.
- Prospective carers and agencies are able to move around the stands, viewing the profiles, displays and videos. There is space for discussions to take place and a breakout area.

AFTER THE EXCHANGE DAY

- Gather feedback from all participants to evaluate the impact and success of the event.
- Ensure all potential links are followed up in a timely way.
- Meet with colleagues to review and evaluate the event and to track the progress of potential links.

Activity Days for Fostering

Activity Days for Fostering focus on finding loving, stable homes for children who need to remain permanently looked after under foster care arrangements. Activity Days for Fostering are designed to speed up and improve the process of matching children with a wider range of prospective foster carers. They allow for prospective foster carers to directly meet children waiting for permanence in a prepared, supported, safe and fun environment.

Activity Days for Fostering are entirely child-centred and the most important factor is that the children have fun. Children have the opportunity to meet other children who live with foster carers or in residential care and to meet families who can offer permanence. Activity Days for Fostering are also an opportunity for children to be actively involved in their family finding. If preparation work is undertaken honestly and sensitively, the event can help children shape their own pathway to permanence.

Children are usually referred to an Activity Day for Fostering because they have priority characteristics and finding a permanent foster family for them is likely to be challenging. The child may already have waited a considerable amount of time, perhaps because they had a plan of adoption or because other more traditional methods of family finding have been unsuccessful.

Activity Days for Fostering give children and prospective carers the chance to explore whether they have a connection, or 'chemistry', which is sometimes missed in standard matching practice and may result in carers considering children they would otherwise have overlooked.

Coram deliver Activity Days for Fostering for individual local authorities, or small groups of local authorities working collaboratively, on a commissioned basis. For more information, please contact fostering.activityday@coram.org.uk.



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Coram Campus
41 Brunswick Square
London WC1N 1AZ

Tel: 020 7520 0300

Registered Charity no: 312278

**MY NAME IS WHY
IT'S ALL I'VE GOT
THIS IS MY LIFE
IN ONE SHOT**

LEMN SISSAY