

Time to make a difference

Committing to fostering

**LIFE
WITHOUT
BARRIERS**

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If full-time foster care is not for you, respite caring is most definitely a viable option! On average, I connect with the family one weekend every six weeks. The contribution you can make, however frequent or less so, will go a long way to assist the child, the full-time carers and also the Life Without Barriers team.

Racheal

We know that many people have fostering in their heart, but one of the biggest factors is whether they have enough time to make a difference in a child's life. Knowing if you have enough time to foster children requires evaluating your current commitments, lifestyle, and the time demands of fostering. Depending on their age and needs, children in care will require varying amounts of attention, support, and time, so it's important to be realistic about how fostering will fit into your life. Here's some pointers you can use to figure out whether you have enough time available to become a carer:

Evaluate your current schedule

Whilst fostering will involve some change and scaling back of your current commitments, it's important to look at what you currently have on your plate and realistically what can go from your schedule and what must stay.

- **Work commitments:** Look at your work schedule and determine how flexible it is. Do you work full-time, part-time, or have flexible hours? Carers need time for school drop-offs, family visits, appointments, meetings with their care team, and day-to-day caregiving. Whilst working from home can seem like a more flexible option available to many in recent times, it's important to be realistic about how much of your attention you really can give up during your workday.
- **Family and social obligations:** If you already have children, a spouse, or other family obligations, consider how fostering would impact your ability to meet those needs. Factor in how much time you spend on social activities, hobbies, and personal time. If your current socialising involves other families, consider the impact of not being able to attend should a child in your care not be able to at any given time.

- **Existing commitments:** Have a think about any other regular commitments such as volunteering, education, or caregiving for other family members, and how they might be impacted. Determine whether these can be adjusted or reduced if necessary to create time for fostering. If you have a multigenerational household, it's important to consider how having other children join the household would work for everyone involved.

Understand the time commitment for fostering

Often people, especially those who already have children of their own, compare the time commitments of parenting to that of fostering. Whilst they are similar, children in care will need even more of your time to help them grow, heal and learn to trust again.

- **Becoming a carer:** The process of becoming a carer itself is an involved one, that includes background checks

and administrative steps, initial carer training and an extensive carer assessment with a series of personal interviews. Those applying to become a carer need to commit the time required to attend training sessions and assessment interviews, which may include time during work days. The process can take anywhere from 3 to 12 months depending on your availability and circumstances that need to be explored.

- **Day-to-day care:** Children in care, especially younger ones, will need daily care such as help with meals, homework, bedtime routines, and emotional support. Whilst this may seem similar to parenting your own children, often children need help to catch up to developmental milestones we take for granted. You'll also need to make sure you have time for the fun stuff, including regular interaction and relationship-building.
- **School runs and appointments:** Carers are responsible for ensuring children get to school (which may or may not be in your local area), attending parent-teacher meetings, and supporting extracurricular activities. Additionally, children in care often have medical, counselling, or other therapeutic appointments that you must attend.

- **Training and meetings:** Fostering requires regular training, reviews, and meetings with your support team both in the office and in your home. Making sure your schedule allows time for these is an important consideration, especially as some may occur during work hours.
- **Supporting the child's needs:** Children in care may require extra time for emotional support, therapy sessions, or behavioural support, particularly if they have experienced trauma or live with disability. This requires both emotional and physical availability from carers.
- **Facilitating family visits:** All children in care have families that love them, even if they can't care for them. As a Carer you must be willing and able to help facilitate connection with a child's family, which may involve transport and supervision. Visits can mean lots of big emotions which means giving a child your time, patience and understanding to unpack.

Consider your family's readiness

Fostering is not a lone activity, therefore it's critical that your entire household is on board with taking the next step to welcoming a child into your home.

- **Partner and family support:** If you have a partner or other family members living in the home, discuss how fostering will affect their time as well. Is your partner willing to share responsibilities, such as helping with school runs or attending meetings? Will your family support the increased demands on your time?
- **Impact on existing children:** If you already have children, consider how fostering might impact their routines and needs. Can you balance the time required for both your foster child and your own children? Ensure that your current children are emotionally ready to share your attention with another child.

Assess your flexibility

One of the key attributes of great carers is that of flexibility; in approach, in time and just all round generally going with whatever life throws at them in the moment. It's important to look at how flexible your commitments and attitudes are when considering if now is the right time for fostering.

Work-life flexibility: Many foster carers find that having a flexible work schedule (e.g., part-time, freelance, or remote work) makes fostering more manageable. If your current job does not offer flexibility, consider whether you could adapt your work hours or negotiate a more flexible arrangement.

Emergency availability: Foster carers need to be available for emergencies, such as if the child becomes ill, needs to be picked up from school, or has a sudden meeting they need to attend. Ensure you have the flexibility to respond to unexpected situations.

Use of support systems: Can you rely on others, such as family or friends, for occasional support with caregiving responsibilities? This could include helping with school pick-ups, childcare, or attending appointments when necessary. It's important to consider what background checks this might require and if that is something your support network is willing to take part in.

Plan for time demands of different age groups

Foster carers often provide care for a variety of children of different age and developmental stages. It's important to consider how different stages of childhood and adolescence come with different commitments on your time and energy.

Infants and toddlers: Caring for very young children involves constant attention, from feeding and changing to ensuring their safety and comfort. This age group requires a significant time investment, often around the clock. For infants coming into care, they need to learn to trust and connect with others which means ensuring a consistent caregiver is available to help them reach important milestones in their physical and social development and overcome any roadblocks that may have presented in this regard. Many very young children will have very regular family visits with the hope of returning home, which is another commitment carers must be willing to help facilitate.

School-aged children: While school-aged children are in school during the day, foster carers need to have time for school runs, after-school activities, and help with homework. For some children in care school can be something they are working towards attending full time, with carers needing to help facilitate that transition. Children in this age group may also have therapies or other appointments they need to attend for their health and development. Additionally, school aged children need time to develop peer relationships which might mean play dates and after school playground runs.

Teenagers: While teenagers may be more independent, they still require guidance, supervision, and emotional support. Teens in foster care may have additional needs related to social or behavioural challenges, so time must be set aside for open communication and relationship building. Adolescence is a time of significant self-discovery and identity formation, where carers need to be available to help young people answer their important questions and work out who they are.

Be realistic about your personal time

Making time for yourself in a busy lifestyle is often the first thing to go, but to be a great carer it's important you have the capacity to make time for yourself so you can keep making a difference without burning out.

Self-care and time for yourself:

Caring for a child can be emotionally demanding, so it's important to ensure you still have time for self-care and relaxation. Overcommitting yourself without time for rest can lead to burnout. Have a think about the ways you currently take time to recharge your batteries and how that might fit with fostering.

Hobbies and social life: Fostering may require scaling back certain activities or social engagements. Be honest with yourself about what you're willing to adjust or give up making time for fostering.

Reflect on your motivation and readiness

If you're keen to foster but starting to wonder if you really have the time needed to commit to such a big change, it can be helpful to think back on your reasons why?

Why do you want to foster? - Reflect on your motivation for fostering and whether you're ready to commit the time it requires. Understanding why you want to foster and being prepared to adjust your life to meet the needs of a foster child is key to knowing if you're ready. Sometimes it might be worthwhile waiting a little longer until the time is just right.

By thoroughly evaluating your schedule, commitments, and flexibility, and by planning for the various time demands of fostering, you can better determine if you have the time available to foster children.

If you've got the time to provide a safe and nurturing environment to children, whether that be part time or full time, we'll be there to provide you with support, training and connection to our caring community. Give us a call today to find out more

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