

Foster for
Gloucestershire
County Council

Fostering information pack



We need all kinds of foster carers to
make a difference to all kinds of children



foster!

Thank you for your interest in fostering for Gloucestershire County Council.

We've put together this information pack to give you as much information about fostering as possible. For those new to fostering, we aim to answer some of the many questions you are bound to have. For those who have experience of fostering, we've included some information on the benefits of fostering for Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) and how you can transfer to us.

Every child who comes into care is different and so is every foster carer. Our foster carers come from many different backgrounds and personal circumstances and we value their diversity. The one thing they all have in common is a commitment to providing a stable and supportive home to Gloucestershire children.

If you still have questions after reading this document, you are welcome to get in touch with our friendly team to discuss any aspect of fostering.

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Tel **01242 532654**

Email **fostering@gloucestershire.gov.uk**

Website **www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/fostering**



Foster for Gloucestershire

Not for profit

Gloucestershire County Council is entirely not for profit and always has the best interests of the child at heart. Every penny that is allocated to our service is spent on achieving the best for children, unlike many independent fostering agencies that operate to make a profit for their shareholders.

Largest fostering agency in Gloucestershire

We are the largest fostering agency in Gloucestershire, with over 240 fostering families working with us. We have support groups in every district and can connect you to other carers in your area, giving you a local support network.

Helping children stay local

Join our team and you'll be helping local children stay in their communities. This means they can stay at their school, see their friends and have supervised time with their families, if it's safe to do so.

Helping children regularly

When Gloucestershire children come into care, we favour our own foster carers over agency foster carers when the match between the child and the foster carer is right. As a county council foster carer, you can choose the type of fostering you would like to do and you are unlikely to have long gaps between children.

All local support

All of your support and training is based in Gloucestershire. The child's social worker and your supervising social worker, along with other relevant professionals, work for the same organisation and to the same high standards.

Interested in transferring to Gloucestershire County Council?

If you are an existing foster carer and feel it's time for a change, we'd be delighted to talk to you, whether you're currently fostering for an agency or you're moving into Gloucestershire from another local authority area. Be reassured that, if you choose to transfer to us, you can continue caring for the children who are currently staying with you and with whom you have a special bond. We follow the transfer protocol established by The Fostering Network. In most cases, we are able to fast track applications from people who are already fostering.

"It's so important that a child is placed in a familiar environment where possible, so that they can stay in their school with their friends and local support networks, so that they can just be the same child and can forget for a small moment that everything has changed. Familiar teachers can continue supporting a child they know well and the child can carry on with play dates and still go to that birthday party. For teenagers who rely heavily on their tribe, it can be devastating to separate them from their friends."

Philippa, GCC foster carer



Why foster for GCC

How we support you

Support for you

You and your family will be allocated a supervising social worker who is there just to support you and will be in contact regularly. You will also be able to ask for extra help from a team of family support workers when you need it. You will have access to an out of hours service that provides help in an emergency.

Potential for growth

We provide a comprehensive programme of online and local training that begins as soon as you apply to foster with us. This will give you the skills you need to make a difference to the lives of vulnerable children.

You will also have access to ongoing training and personal development, including the opportunity to foster full-time with one of our specialist schemes when you've gained the skills and experience.

All costs covered

You will receive allowances to cover the costs of caring for a child while they stay with you. We pay additional allowances for birthdays, religious festivals and holidays.

You will also receive a fee that recognises your skill and experience as a foster carer, which increases after your first year of fostering. More complex types of fostering attract higher fees.

Our big fostering family

When you foster for Gloucestershire County Council, you'll join a friendly and supportive fostering community that meets regularly to share information and learn from each other. You'll be connected to other carers in your local area through a monthly support group. Your birth children will be invited to Kids 4 Kids to socialise and share their experiences with other children who foster. You'll be invited to social events, like the annual family fun day and the foster carers' appreciation evening.

Other professionals

You'll have access to other professionals to support you and the children you are caring for. This includes specialist support from child psychologists to help you understand the child and health and education support for the child.

Memberships

We automatically register you as a member of The Fostering Network, which offers you additional training, a 24 hour legal advice line and independent advice on many aspects of fostering.

Gloucestershire County Council is a member of New Family Social, an organisation that supports LGBTQ foster carers and adopters by providing guidance and advice. All foster carers and adopters receive free membership on approval.





Meet Becky



Becky is the birth daughter of Jacqueline and John and has been fostering alongside her parents since 2018. They have done all sorts of short-term fostering, including offering short breaks to a child with disabilities, looking after a young asylum seeker and taking care of a baby.

Becky said:

My name is Becky and I am 17 years old. I have grown up in a fostering household for the last four years. It's been really fascinating to be honest, full of ups and downs, but never a dull moment.

I can now talk and make relationships easily with other kids of all ages

I've met so many different kids from different backgrounds with a whole range of individual needs, which is what makes it so interesting for me as I've learnt so much as a person. I feel that it has made me a better person overall, as I can now talk and make relationships easily with other kids of all ages. I've also learnt empathy and to look outside of my world and see how others live and have lived, and how they have grown up with all sorts of challenges that I can only imagine.

I am constantly amazed by how resilient our foster kids have been and how well they get on with their lives. I am constantly blown away by how they do that, and it makes me wonder sometimes how I would cope if my life had turned out differently. We as a family try our best to support them with everything in their lives and more importantly to give them some fun, especially at times like birthdays, Halloween, Easter and, of course, Christmas!

One of the most memorable and touching things that I can remember was the reaction of a teenage boy when my family and I entered his room one evening with a big birthday cake with lit candles and loads of pressies, all singing happy birthday at the top of our voices! To see his face and reaction was priceless. He was 15 years old and had never had that happen before and had to be shown how to blow out his candles. He seemed to be a bit embarrassed afterwards but we then found out later that he talked about it nonstop to his social worker for days after.

The little things that you do can make such a difference

I guess what I am trying to say is that fostering brings a whole wealth of experiences that you, as a birth child, can look back on and indeed learn from. The little things that you do can make such a difference to someone else's life that you may never even know about or appreciate, and to be honest that is the thing that warms my heart!

"I am constantly amazed by how resilient our foster kids have been and how well they get on with their lives."

Becky

Many people rule themselves out of fostering because they think they won't be accepted

The only basic requirements are that:

-  You are over 21 years old
-  You have a spare room in your home
-  Your own children are at least a year old by the time you start fostering
-  You have no criminal convictions relating to children or sexual offences
-  You have experience of caring for children

Other factors you might like to consider are:

-  Do you have the time and energy to care for a child, including taking them to meetings and appointments?
-  If you have a partner and/or birth children, do they support your decision to foster?
-  Is your home child friendly?
-  Are you financially stable?



Common Myths

"I can't foster because..."

I'm too old

There is no upper age limit to foster and we have foster carers who have continued fostering into their eighties. You just need to be in good health and have the energy to care for a child.

I'm in a same-sex relationship

Your sexuality has no bearing on your ability to foster and we have many same-sex couples who foster very successfully. You just need to be able to offer stability and a loving home to a child.



I'm a single male

Both men and women make great foster carers, so being a single male definitely won't exclude you from fostering.

I haven't had my own children

Having your own children can give you valuable experience but it isn't essential. If you can demonstrate that you have experience of looking after other people's children, we will provide you with the training you need.

I work full-time

It is possible to work alongside fostering. You'll just need to be available to take children to school and to be there when they return home and in the school holidays. If you foster as a couple, sometimes one person will work, while the other is the primary foster carer. Working carers can also choose to do short break fostering.

"Don't be under the illusion that it would be more difficult for same sex couples to successfully become foster carers. This was the illusion we were under when we initially applied, but we went ahead and were delighted to realise that this would have no bearing on our application."

Nick and Nick, GCC foster carers

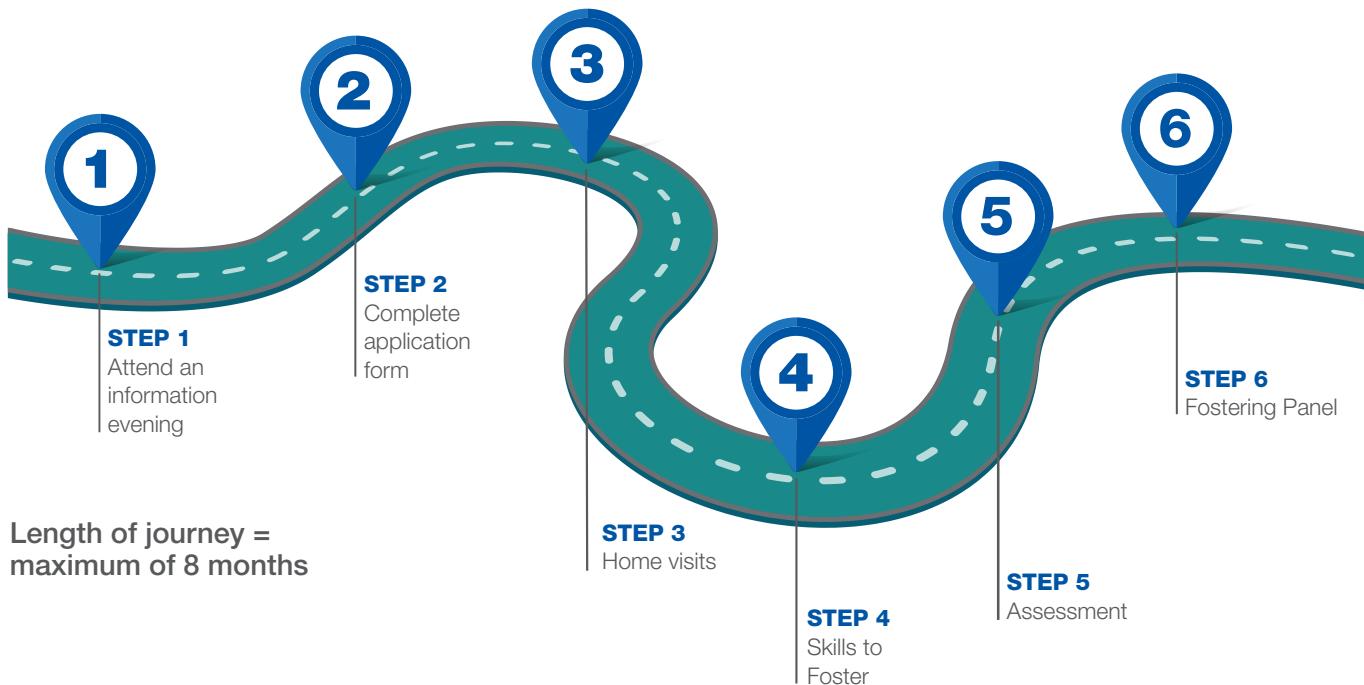
Frequently Asked Questions

Deciding to foster can be a life-changing decision and we understand that you'll have a lot of questions. Here are a few that we commonly get asked.

Q	Why should I choose to foster for my local authority?	Q	Can I have a say about the children that I foster?
A	Your local authority is responsible for all children who come into care. When the matching is right, we always try and place children with our own foster carers first, meaning regular placements and greater choice to suit your own circumstances. We are also focussed on the needs of the child rather than on a business model. All of our support and training is local and easily accessible.	A	You are always given a choice about whether to foster a child or not. You will be approved to foster children from 0 to 18 (or 5 to 18 if you smoke) but you can express a preference for the age group you would like to foster. We will always discuss any possible placement with you to ensure it is right for you and the child.
Q	Will children spend time with their birth families?	Q	Will fostering affect my own children?
A	It is important that children remain in contact with their families unless the court decides this is not in the best interests of the child. Foster carers need to be prepared to support time with birth families, which will usually be supervised by someone from the GCC Family Focus Team and will usually take place outside of your home in an agreed location.	A	Fostering has an impact on the whole family, although many families find their birth children benefit greatly from the experience. We have a dedicated session on our Skills to Foster training course for birth children, to help them prepare for the changes that fostering will inevitably bring. We also have a support group for birth children, so that they can share their experiences. We will always take your own children into consideration when matching you to a child.
<p>Q Can I foster if I smoke?</p> <p>A Foster carers who smoke or use e-cigarettes are able to foster children over the age of five. It's important that foster carers are a positive role model for the children they care for, so we would ask that you smoke outside and discourage the children you care for from smoking.</p>			<p>"My birth daughter has flourished being in a larger family unit. She is kind and caring and better for being a sibling. The boys call her their sister."</p> <p>Elaine, GCC foster carer</p>

Q	Will the children show distressed behaviour?	Q	Can I foster if I live in rented accommodation?
A	Before a child arrives at your home, we will give you as much information as we have about any difficulties they are experiencing. All children who come into care do so because of a crisis at home or because of trauma and neglect and their behaviour will reflect this. We will give you training so that you feel prepared for any difficulties. You will also have the support of your social worker, a family support worker and any relevant professionals.	A	You can foster while living in rented accommodation – you will just need to get permission from your landlord or letting agent.
		Q	How long does the process take?
		A	We fast track anyone who has fostered before or anyone who has particularly relevant experience. For new foster carers, it takes between six and eight months. This gives you time to prepare to foster and to attend initial training.

What happens next...



Still got questions?

Take a look at the Frequently Asked Questions on our website or give us a call on

01242 532654



How to become a foster carer

www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/fostering

Types of fostering

Children need fostering for all sorts of reasons and for different lengths of time.

Short break



Our short break foster carers build a relationship with a child who regularly stays with them for short periods, like a weekend, to give their parents or foster carers a break. We ask our short break foster carers to commit to at least two weekends a month and to care for children of all ages.

Long term



Our long term foster carers welcome children into their homes as part of their family until they are ready to be independent. When it is clear that children are unable to return home, we prioritise finding them a home with long-term foster carers so that they can feel settled as soon as possible.

Emergency



Our emergency foster carers give children a safe home to go to immediately, no matter what hour of the day or night. This is usually for a short period, while decisions are made about what would be best for the child.

Short term



Short term fostering can mean looking after a child for anything from a few days to a couple of years while decisions are made about whether they can safely return home or move on to a more permanent arrangement like long-term fostering or adoption.

"Taking on an emergency placement is very hard work as every element of your life is on high alert but also enjoyable and very worthwhile, meeting and supporting very vulnerable children in crisis through the toughest point in their lives."

Lindsey, GCC foster carer





Meet Nikki and Gary

Nikki and Gary from Gloucester have been fostering for Gloucestershire County Council since 2009 and feel passionately about keeping brothers and sisters together.

Nikki said:

We have fostered for some years now and have become passionate about making room in our home to keep brothers and sisters together.

Most of us can only imagine what it is like for a child to be unable to live with their parents and to be taken from everything that is familiar to them. Imagine also being told that there is nowhere that can take you and your brothers and sisters and that you are going to be split up.

"If you have the space, we would strongly encourage you to foster brothers and sisters."

The joy of seeing them thrive together

Caring for siblings can be a challenge, especially when there's a range of ages, interests, tastes and ideals. They fight just the same as any other brothers and sisters! They also love each other just the same.

It can be a challenge when our relatively quiet house is filled with children who are finding it hard to adjust. Even so, the joy of seeing them thrive together and the opportunity for them to grow up together and share the most important memories far outweighs any of the difficulties. Christmas, birthdays, sports events, school, the everyday humour that exists between them – they should never be denied sharing these things.

Keeping the bond

Once separated, it is always difficult for brothers and sisters to keep in touch, often due to geography, repeated moves and different lifestyles. If we have only one child from a family group, we make as much effort as possible to keep communications open. We arrange visits, send pictures or letters and make phone calls to the rest of the family.

We feel it would be tragic for them to miss all the memories that are a given for most children. It may even seem like too much of an effort to the children at the time but we know, because they come back and tell us, that they value how much effort we make to keep them in touch with each other.



Specialist fostering

Once you have gained the experience, you will have the opportunity to train to become a specialist foster carer.

Parent and child

Our parent and child foster carers provide a safe and secure home for a parent and their child, often a newborn baby. The foster carer is in the unique position of helping the parent develop alongside the child.

Parent and child placements are time-limited and the foster carer contributes to an assessment of whether the parent and child move on to living independently.



"There was a mum and her little girl and they stayed for the 12 weeks. She achieved all the things she needed to and managed to get a flat of her own. It felt really good, knowing I'd done everything I could do."

Caroline, GCC foster carer

Family Link Plus

Family Link Plus carers provide regular short breaks to children with physical and developmental disabilities. We are particularly interested in people who live in a bungalow or already have a home adapted to suit children with disabilities.

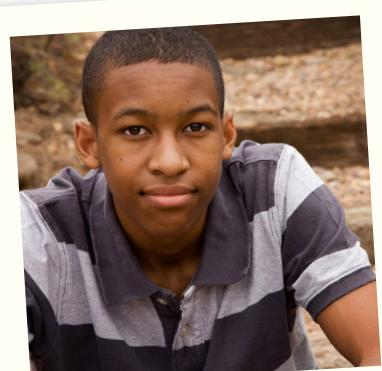
Children with complex needs

Our experienced foster carers look after some of the most complex children in Gloucestershire. These foster carers support high risk, vulnerable children to achieve stability so that they can return home or settle in foster care.

These are children who have experienced significant trauma in their young lives and need extraordinary foster carers with commitment, empathy and resilience. You'll need previous experience of fostering or particularly relevant work experience.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

We need foster carers who can provide a supportive and culturally-sensitive home to young asylum seekers. Most of the young people will be male, from 14 to 17 years of age and from countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea and Sudan.





Meet Becky and Stuart

Becky and Stuart, both in their forties, live in Gloucester and have been fostering for Gloucestershire County Council since 2016. Here, Becky describes the highs and lows of having a house full of teens.

Becky said:

When I said I wanted to foster teenagers most people, including my husband, thought I was crazy. We already had two of our own so what difference was an extra one, I thought? That one turned into three and we now have five teenagers living with us.

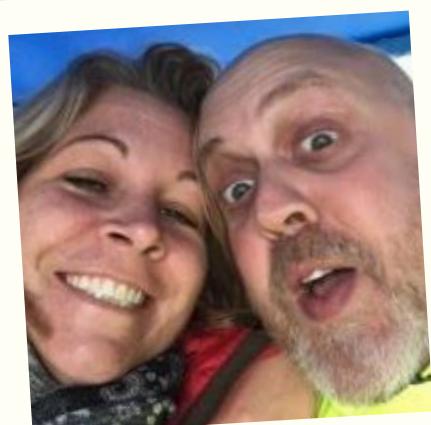
I was then convinced, since I was at home more, that a dog would be a good idea. The cute photos and puppy dog eyes from the children wore me down and we ended up with three St Bernard dogs! Proof that you can foster with dogs, who are like therapy for all of us.

"When I said I wanted to foster teenagers most people, including my husband, thought I was crazy."

What we gain far outweighs the struggles

I have cried, been driven to despair and survived on very little sleep. They will argue, make silly mistakes, frequently choose the wrong option and challenge and push until they nearly break you. But they are teenagers - that is what they do whether they are in foster care or not. The advantage with fostering is that you are not alone. We have an amazing supervising social worker, local support groups and loads of training. There is also usually a friendly foster carer who has been through or is going through the same challenges and can stand by you and work with you.

Fortunately, what we gain from these young people far outweighs the struggles. One silly mistake is shadowed by the three amazing choices they have made in the same day. I have learnt so much and there are far more times that I smile rather than cry. The pride I feel for even the smallest achievement is what keeps me going. There is nothing more rewarding than to share their success as young adults. My family is bigger, I'm more resilient and if my house were bigger, I would have more!



Final words

Fostering teenagers is so important. They think they know everything but they don't; they don't speak your language but they still need you to listen; they might be bigger than you but they still need a hug.

So yes, I may be crazy, busy, and tired but I wouldn't change it.

Training

As a Gloucestershire County Council foster carer, you will have access to a programme of free, local training that will give you the skills you need to make a difference to children. In fact, your training starts as soon as you apply to foster with us!

The training pathway for new carers consists of:

Skills to Foster – this introductory course will get you thinking about aspects of child development, safeguarding, equality and diversity and how children come into care. It includes six sessions, usually held over weekends and evenings. Session seven is aimed specifically at birth children to help them understand the fostered child and how fostering will affect them.

Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards – once you are approved, these standards form part of your induction to the role of foster carer. They provide a national standard that sets out what you should know, understand and be able to do within the first 12 months of being approved. They also allow you to demonstrate your skills as a professional and valued carer of children.

Mandatory training – in your first year of fostering, you'll be asked to complete mandatory training courses that will help you keep children safe and healthy.



Further development – Your professional development as a foster carer will continue to be nurtured by your supervising social worker through monthly supervision, an annual review and your personal development plan. You'll be able to access a wide programme of training and can work towards gaining the skills to take on more complex forms of fostering, if this is something you are interested in.

"I enjoyed fostering so much that I did a degree in health and social care through the Open University when I was 50. It helped me a lot with understanding behaviours."

Pam, GCC foster carer



Meet Philippa and Stuart

Philippa and her husband Stuart live near Cirencester and have fostered for Gloucestershire County Council since 2014. They specialise in short-term foster care for younger children.

Philippa said:

I think one thing the pandemic has taught us is that not knowing when you'll see someone again is painful. When I said goodbye to my son as he headed off to study abroad, I knew he wouldn't be back for Christmas. We had no idea that the next time we would see him would be a year later!

Saying goodbye

When you say goodbye as a foster carer you know that at most you'll see the child or young person a few times a year. In some cases you might say goodbye and never see them again. That's hard. As short-term carers, saying goodbye becomes part and parcel of our fostering journey and it's the part that most people ask us about. How can you do it? How do you say goodbye?

Emotionally it's one of the hardest aspects of fostering. Just the process of preparing for a child to move is difficult and then you start to deal with the fact that a child you have loved like your own is leaving. The emotional cost is high. We all spend time recovering and emotionally preparing ourselves so that we are ready to welcome another child.

"Maybe there are easier things to do with my time but I imagine there are very few that are this rewarding."



We do it because it's worth it

The question I often ask myself is different to the question other people ask me. I often ask myself why we keep doing it. Why do we keep welcoming children, loving them and letting them go? The answer we keep coming back to is that it's worth it!

I believe that we change lives. Maybe there are easier things to do with my time but I imagine there are very few that are this rewarding. To see a small frightened child arrive in your home, nervous of adults and in poor health is heartbreaking. To say goodbye to that child, confident and healthy is a different kind of heartbreak. It's the cost of pouring love into that child and the natural outcome is that you miss them. That is absolutely as it should be.

Every time we say goodbye we grieve, but we also celebrate. Children are only children for a short time, but that time is crucial in forming the rest of their lives. We foster because we want to be a part of that for a vulnerable child. If that comes at the cost of saying goodbye, then we are prepared to pay it!

Support package

Many of our foster carers tell us they don't do it for the money but we'd like to reassure you that fostering won't leave you out of pocket.

Every day that you are caring for a child in your home, you receive an allowance that covers the expenses of looking after the child. The amount you receive is based on the age of the child.

You will also receive a generous fee in recognition of your time and skill as a foster carer. This isn't a salary but it does recognise the professional nature of fostering. More complex fostering attracts a higher fee and gives you the opportunity to progress in your fostering career as you gain the necessary skills and experience.

We also make sure that you can help children celebrate their birthdays and religious festivals and enjoy family holidays by paying additional allowances.

It's important to remember that you are only paid when a child is with you, unless you are doing specific kinds of fostering that attract a retainer. This means you shouldn't rely on fostering as your primary source of income and during your assessment we'll ask to see evidence that you are financially secure.

Employment status and tax

Foster carers are self-employed. This means you will be responsible for registering as self-employed with HMRC and for completing an annual tax return.

In addition to the tax-free allowance that applies to everyone, foster carers can claim additional tax relief known as qualifying care relief. More information on how this would work for you is available on the **[HMRC website](#)**.



The Band One foster carer is caring for a 13 year old girl and receives the following weekly payments:

Maintenance for 11 to 15 year old	£216.93
Fee	£125.30
Total for week	£342.23
Total for year	£17,795.96

Based on a full year of fostering, the foster carer would earn £17,795.96. The qualifying care relief amount is £10,000 + £250 x 52 = £23,000, therefore the full amount would be tax free.

The Band Two foster carer is caring for a sibling group of three, aged 2, 5 and 9, and receives the following weekly payments:

Maintenance for 0 to 4 year old	£180.88
Maintenance for 5 to 10 year old	£195.93 x 2
Fee	£184.66 x 3
Total for week	£1,126.72
Total for year	£58,589.55

Based on a full year of fostering, the foster carer would earn £58,589.44. The qualifying care relief amount is £10,000 + £200 x 52 x 3 = £41,200 therefore £17,389.44 would be taxable.

The Band Three foster carer is caring for a 16 year old boy and receives the following weekly payments:

Maintenance allowance for 16 to 17 year old	£246.89
Fee	£339.22
Total for week	£586.11
Total for year	£30,477.72

Based on a full year of fostering, the foster carer would earn £30,477.72. The qualifying care relief amount is £10,000 + £250 x 52 = £23,000 therefore £7,477.72 would be taxable.

Fostering can be challenging, so we are continually looking for ways that we can support you with additional benefits like these.

- We have negotiated a range of discounts with Gloucestershire businesses and attractions especially for our foster carers.
- You automatically receive free **Fostering Network** membership when you become a GCC foster carer, which includes discounts on items like house insurance, legal protection and specialist mortgage advice.
- We have annual memberships to popular family attractions that our foster carers can use.
- We offer a Refer a Friend scheme, which means that if you refer anyone to us who goes on to be approved as a GCC foster carer, you receive £500 in Love to Shop vouchers.

Visit our website for the most up to date information on our support package.



Find out more

Applying to foster can be a big decision. If you feel you'd like more information, here are some suggestions.

Books



Nurturing Attachments

by Kim Golding

Cathy Glass' novels,

which provide insight into being a foster carer

Being a foster family: what it means and how it feels

by Hedi Argent, Coram BAAF

Thinking About Fostering?

by Henrietta Bond, Coram BAAF

Contacts



The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity and brings together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children.

www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

Coram BAAF is a national membership organisation that offers advice and guidance on fostering and adoption.

www.corambaaf.org.uk

Fosterline is funded by the Department for Education and provides confidential and impartial advice and information for those interested in fostering.

www.fosterline.info

Foster Talk is an independent, non-profit organisation providing professional support services to foster carers across the UK.

www.fostertalk.org

New Family Social is a charity that offers support and guidance to LGBTQ people considering fostering and adoption.

www.newfamilysocial.org.uk





LOCAL
FOSTER
CARERS
FOR LOCAL
CHILDREN

The next step

We'd be delighted to speak to you about your interest in fostering. You can give us a ring for an informal, no-obligation chat, speak to a foster carer in person at one of our regular events or come along to our monthly, online information sessions run by a social worker and a foster carer. Visit our website for all the details.

Tel 01242 532654

Email fostering@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Visit www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/fostering

Let's get social on

Twitter: @FosteringGlos

Facebook: Gloucestershire Fostering

"Someone was quickly available to talk and they answered all questions helpfully and fully."

Enquirer

"The social worker I spoke to was very helpful and supportive. She listened and gave good advice."

Enquirer

"The response was very prompt. I also felt I was able to ask any questions. Very helpful."

Enquirer

