

Foster carers

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Introduction

A foster carer is someone who is approved by the local authority to look after children and young people who can't live with their own family. This may be because of difficulties at home or while awaiting adoption.

Foster children are not part of the benefit unit for Universal Credit assessment purposes. Foster carers cannot receive an additional award for any foster child because they receive a Fostering Allowance, which is not taken into account when assessing the Universal Credit award.

Types of foster care

There are many types of foster care, some are short term and some are long term. This guidance applies to all types of foster care.

Emergency	When children need somewhere safe to stay for a few
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	nights.
Short-term	Carers look after children for a few weeks or months while plans are made for the child's future.
Short breaks	When children who are disabled, have special needs or have behavioral difficulties regularly stay for a while with a family. This means their parents or usual foster carers can have a break.
Remand	When young people are remanded by a court to be looked after by a specially trained foster carer.
Fostering before adoption	When babies or small children stay with foster carers who may go on to adopt them.
Long-term	Not all children who need to permanently live away from their birth family want to be adopted, so instead they go into long-term foster care until they're adults.
Specialist therapeutic	For children and young people with very complex needs

Spare room subsidy in the Social Rented Sector

See the Spare Room Subsidy guidance for exceptions for foster carers.

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Conditionality

A foster carer is treated as responsible for a child for conditionality purposes. Fostering couples with a joint claim are encouraged to nominate the lead carer in relation to the child(ren).

If the couple refuse to nominate the lead carer they effectively share what would otherwise have been their expected work related requirements/conditionality if one had been nominated.

Foster carer's circumstances	Conditionality regime
Child under one - lead carer (includes	No work-related requirements

foster carer)	
Single foster carer or nominated carer in a fostering couple with a foster child aged under 16 placed with them	Work Focused Interview
Both members of a fostering couple may fall into the Work-Focused Interview regime group where in exceptional circumstances there is evidence that a foster child has proven care needs that require full time care by two adults.	Work Focused Interview
Single foster carer or nominated carer in a fostering couple where there is no child placed with them can continue to remain in this regime for up to 8 weeks until they get another foster child	Work Focused Interview

Work-Focused Interview regime

Any action outside participation in Work-Focused Interviews is entirely voluntary for foster carers.

The claimant is made aware of the expectations to participate in interviews and it is included on their Claimant Commitment.

In addition, both members of a fostering couple may fall into the Work Focused Interview regime, where there is evidence that a foster child has proven care needs such that they require full-time care by two adults.

Claimants who are foster carers need to show evidence that confirms their circumstances. It is part of making their Universal Credit claim and is required to confirm entitlement, payment of correct award or setting the right conditionality regime. This could be information contained in the documents provided by the local authority or agency when setting up the foster placement.

Work-related requirements may be temporarily 'switched-off' when a child is in considerable distress and this is causing significant disruption to the family and the claimant's ability to undertake work-related activities. This also applies to foster children.

Change of circumstances

The foster carer's current circumstances are checked before a change of Labour Market regime. Such circumstances include:

- foster child reaches 16
- child joins the household (including birth, adoption or fostering)
- change of nominated lead carer
- a child leaves the household

These are examples, not a complete list

Bereavement

Following the death of a partner, child or cared-for person (including foster children), the claimant continues to receive Universal Credit at their normal rate for the assessment period in which the death occurred and the following two assessment periods. See death and bereavement.

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