

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. Fostering does not automatically end when the child is 16 and in some circumstances it can continue.

Foster children are not part of the benefit unit for Universal Credit assessment purposes.

Foster carers cannot receive the additional amount for a child or the Disabled Child Addition for any foster child because they receive a Fostering Allowance which is not taken into account when assessing the Universal Credit award.

However, they can receive the additional amount for a carer provided that the foster child is severely disabled and care is provided for at least 35 hours per week. See Carers.

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 nights.
Short-term	Carers look after children for a few weeks or months while plans are made for the child's future.
Respite	Short-term placement in which the child is placed with a foster family to provide respite to either the parents or current carers

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

Conditionality

For conditionality purposes, a foster carer is treated as being responsible for a child or in some circumstances, a qualifying young person.

Fostering couples with a joint claim are encouraged to nominate a lead carer. If the couple refuse to nominate the lead carer, they effectively share what would otherwise have been their expected work-related requirements and conditionality if one had been nominated.

How foster carer circumstances link with conditionality

Refer to the Characteristics section of the Work Focused Interview regime guidance for more detail of how foster care circumstances link to conditionality.

Work Focused Interview only regime

Refer to the guidance: Work Focused Interview only regime.

A claimant who is a foster carer must provide evidence that confirms their circumstances. It is a part of making their Universal Credit claim and is required to confirm entitlement, payment of the correct award and setting the right conditionality regime. This could include information included 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
- child leaves the household

These are examples and 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.

Housing costs

For information on housing costs, see Size criteria for renters.