



MyFosterChild



MUSLIM ADOPTING AND FOSTERING

A GUIDE

Welcome to your introduction guide from My Foster Child. Fostering and adoption has long been a topic of both interest and confusion amongst Muslims. In this pack you will find core information, details of our current social realities, personal insights and straightforward guidance on how you may begin your own journey as a Muslim carer insha'Allah.



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Welcome!

There are some gifts which are truly priceless. There are some scars which leave no physical trace. In a world which can be daunting and uncertain, fostering and adoption transforms the lives of some of the most vulnerable children in society.

For a number of often complex reasons, there are many children who are unable to grow up with their birth families and are placed in care. The consequence of disruption early in a child's life can often have devastating consequences on their emotional and social wellbeing far into the future.

At My Foster Child, we believe children who are unable to live with their own birth family still have the right to be nurtured, valued and cared for. These children need committed parents who can provide them the comfort and guidance through their unique life journey. It is easy to take a secure home for granted, but many children have never experienced- and therefore crave- this simple pleasure.

The elephant in the room
The unfortunate reality is Muslim children wait the longest to be placed with a family. The lack of Muslim families willing to adopt or foster mean that Muslim children are the forgotten segment of our Ummah who remain vulnerable and often helpless.

While we are often moved by and act for the plight of children in foreign countries, the desperation of Muslim children within the UK care system grows only with time. Within our very own communities, there are Muslim children termed 'at risk' for reasons such as having parents who have died or from suffering abuse or neglect.

Our vision is for every Muslim child in public care to have the opportunity to practice Islam in a stable, loving environment. For these children to become strong individuals who make positive contributions to their communities and society.

Muslim children need parents who will be their rock through the good times and the bad, helping them make sense of the world and their place in it. These are our children. These vulnerable children cannot afford to be the elephant in the room any longer.

Every drop raises the ocean
Every one of us has a story to tell. Our lives are shaped by the unique experiences, people, circumstances and ambitions in our lives. We are the threads which intertwine to create the fabric of society. We believe strong societies are made from strong families. Strong families are made

of individuals who can selflessly give love and security to children who need it most. The power to transform a child's future through fostering and adoption is therefore unparalleled. .

Many children are still waiting for their own story to unravel...

Side by side: A communal obligation

Adoption and fostering has often been an area of confusion amongst Muslims with many different- often contradictory- opinions floating around on the matter. Increasingly however, Islamic scholars and imams are working hard to engage with society's current problems, highlighting how the Shari'ah (Islamic law) can provide us with real and lasting solutions.

As a result, many are not only neutral to the idea of adopting but consider it a much needed and extremely worthwhile act. In response to the increasingly desperate domestic affairs of Muslims in the UK, Imam Abu Eesa Niamatullah called for Muslims to consider adoption and fostering as "not just permissible but one of the communal obligations of our age".

Communal obligations are those which apply to a need which the community as a whole is responsible for fulfilling- the idea being that if the required number of Muslims take on a particular responsibility; the rest of the community are not held accountable for it. For the case of adoption and fostering therefore, once enough Muslim families have come forward to take Muslim children into care, then the whole community is seen as having fulfilled their duty.

Last year 63,000 children came into Local Authority care. Looked after children come from homes where they have been abused and neglected. Their childhoods are often fraught with difficulties affecting their emotional and behavioural development, educational performance, self esteem and adult opportunities. However, life as a looked after child for Muslim children is far worse. Non Muslim foster carers are doing a wonderful job, taking on our responsibility in caring for our Muslim children and safeguarding them from harm. The question remains however, who is safeguarding their faith and future in this life and the next?



“Children who are black Caribbean or black African, Asian (particularly Asian Muslim), and of mixed ethnicity wait much longer for an adoptive family in comparison to white children.” BAAF

The Realities: Muslim children in the care system

In Numbers

The UK government currently collate statistics on all the children in the care system. It is very difficult to accurately estimate the number of Muslim children in care as statistics are based on Ethnicity and not Religion. The following table gives an indication of the growing number of children of Asian origin in care since 2006.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Indian	300	290	300	300	320	300	280
Pakistani	610	640	670	670	740	770	760
Bangladeshi	280	280	310	350	410	430	440
Other Asian	910	1100	1300	1600	1700	1630	1350

As the number of Muslim children in care grows, so too does the need for Muslim families willing to provide a welcoming home to an adopted/fostered child. As the number of Muslim children in care outnumbers Muslim families ready to adopt or foster, inevitably they will be placed with non Muslim carers.

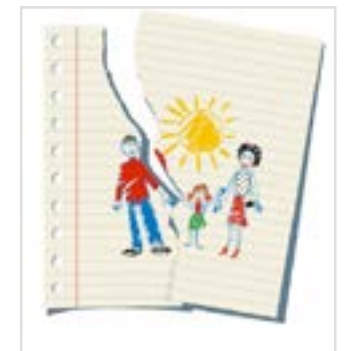
Why are Muslim children coming into care?

So why exactly is there such a growing problem with Muslim families not able to look after their own birth children? The rise in the number of Muslim children in care can be attributed to a number of things. Initially, the number of Muslims in general is on the increase (2.7 million according to latest census figures) and within this larger group, many aspects of societal breakdown means more children are going into care across the board.

Specific factors include:

- Illness or death of a parent
- Abuse (sexual/physical/emotional)
- Chronic neglect
- Mental health of a parent
- Refugees (separation from parents whilst fleeing persecution)
- Trafficked children
- Disability of a child
- Substance misuse (alcohol and drug addiction)
- Abandoned children

As a community, the needs are great and we must take a multipronged approach in reversing this trend. From raising awareness and increasing our engagement with Muslim parents who suffer from personal, social or physical disorders to being able to place children into stable homes when- as a last resort- nothing further can be done to keep children with their birth families.





YOUNG AHMED'S STORY: Left lost in memories

Many children like Ahmed still struggle with the most difficult questions of identity and belonging, well after being placed in care

From a country devastated by over 30 years of war, Ahmed left his native Afghanistan with his uncle after both his parents were killed by shelling. Together, both uncle and nephew made the long and unforgiving journey through Europe and arrived in the UK. Upon arriving, the border agency separated Ahmed from his uncle and Ahmed once again found himself vulnerable and alone.

With Ahmed now in social care, local authorities began by looking for a family for Ahmed amongst his own religious and ethnic group. When no match could be found with either and no more families volunteering to take in young Ahmed, he was eventually placed in the care of new foster parents Patricia and Craig in Croydon. It has been a year since Ahmed has been living with his new foster parents and they are very good to him. Ahmed is well treated and slowly adjusting to a different kind of lifestyle and routine with his new foster parents.

Despite this however, Ahmed still cannot help but still crave his family- particularly his cousins. He longs for the familiar and beloved routine of going to Jumua every week and the buzz and hype of Eid day. He regularly recalls the special days of Ramadan where days of reflection and prayer would be

followed with evenings of gatherings and family. Ahmed has a sharp memory and a strong attachment to what he now calls 'a past life'. Ahmed tells Patricia and Craig all about it and they listen attentively to his excited tales, but they really cannot do much for him.

“There are days when the questions in my mind only invite more and more questions...”

Ahmed is- at heart- left confused. He questions why no Muslim families took him in when he was put in care? Why he sees so many Muslims in the market when out shopping, but has nobody to greet with 'salam'.

He wonders if he will ever be able to taste a meal like the food his mum used to cook for him. Ahmed is one of hundreds in this situation and his questions still remain unanswered.

BROTHER HAQ'S STORY:

Becoming a foster father

(1) Why did you want to become a carer?
A family friend who fosters encouraged my wife to pursue this.

(2) Describe your journey to becoming a carer...
The journey to becoming a foster carer was quite easy. The agency supported us all the way. At the time our English wasn't great but the agency provided lots of support and helped us with this. Our supporting social worker was excellent. We learnt a lot during training, which was quite straightforward but English as a language was our weakness.

When we came to England we had no opportunity to go college due to work commitments and we picked the language up from our environment. We were always made to feel that we had the potential to become successful foster parents though which was very encouraging.

(3) Who do you look after?
We have fostered approximately 9 children. The youngest was 5 days old and came directly from hospital and stayed in our care up to the age of two years. The oldest child we cared for was 18 years old from Afghanistan and stayed with us for 6 months.

“Serving others is our purest joy”

(4) Were there any difficulties?
When we were caring for an 18 year old boy, he would complain that my daughters and wife did not sit in same room as him and didn't get along with him freely. Of course this was due to the Islamic etiquette between adult males and females that are unrelated.

However we made the best effort we could to keep him in our family, providing him with his own room, and his own space, using a timetable to ensure that nobody got in each other's way and could use our home as their own. The most difficult thing is to keep the balance between foster children and birth children as all children require time, so it is important to keep a good balance, as if we neglect duties to our own biological children they may find comfort somewhere else.

(6) Benefits of fostering
It is a hugely rewarding act to provide a safe loving environment for a child. I strongly urge Muslim families to come forward and take children into their homes. There are thousands of Muslim children in the care system in the UK and most of them will be placed with non Muslim carers.





BROTHER IMRAN'S STORY:

a blessed journey to our adopted daughter

Based in Manchester, Brother Imran and his wife decided embark on the journey of becoming adoptive parents together. This is their story...

"To begin with we expressed an interest in adopting a child by contacting our local council. Shortly after, we received a telephone call from a member of the adoption team at the local council who arranged for an initial home visit. A lovely lady came to our home to meet us and discuss with us our interest to become adoptive parents. We were told it was necessary to attend a training course before anything went further so we were booked onto a 4 day 'preparation group' course which is usually carried out in one's local authority but we attended a course in a nearby authority due to a sooner date being offered. These four days ran between 9.30am and 3pm. Around 18 prospective adopters attended this preparation group.

Ice-breaker

The first day was an 'ice-breaker' allowing everyone to familiarise themselves with each other before an introduction about the adoption process was discussed. The preparation group training days were very conducive discussing how long the adoption process can take, what backgrounds children may come from, how children can contact birth parents later in life and so forth. I got the impression that most people on the course found the course very useful but also very emotional at times too

including myself and my wife. On the last segment of the course an adoptive family along with their adoptive daughter came and we had an opportunity to see how happy they were and asked them questions relating to their process.

The next stage of the process involved the completion of a formal application form which was sent back to the local authority. We then had CRB and health checks carried out. We were then assigned a social worker for our assessment process. On first meeting with this lady, both myself and wife were somewhat nervous as we had never met this lady before and were discussing issues which were of a personal nature. For example how long had we been planning children for, had we been through fertility treatment courses. We had visits from our social worker over a period of around 6 months visiting us on 2-3 week slots. Questions were asked equally both to my wife and myself and then an individual session was provided, where we were we both questioned individually.

This process allowed our social worker to build up an accurate picture of our personalities and our relationship. Our social worker produced a 'prospective adopters

report' and we had to chance to read this report and make amendments where needed. This report was then taken to an adoption panel and the agency decision maker approved us as adopters. So now we are officially 'adopters' and extremely happy. The past 6 months had been intense on occasions but straightforward at the same time as we were simply answering questions truthfully about ourselves and our relationship.

Post Approval Stage

At the 'post-approval stage' of the process we were ready to be matched with a child. We had requested that we would like to adopt a child less than 12 months of age. One evening only a few weeks after being approved as adopters we received a telephone call from our social worker informing us that another authority from a different part of the country had contacted our authority saying they thought we seemed a good match for a baby under their care. The baby was 11 months old and from an Asian background. We went to our local authority office and collected a profile and picture of this baby. We spent a day or so reading through the profile between ourselves and showed our family members. We decided to pursue and informed our social worker we were happy to look to adopt this baby. It was arranged for the baby's social worker to visit us which happened within a few weeks from us viewing the profile. The meeting was spent discussing the baby's current situation in a foster home. We were asked around three questions, which were mainly aimed at myself, and the questions were related to raising the child in our religion and how we would feel should the child wish to contact their birth parents later in life. We were told another couple were interested in adopting this child and that we would be told within the next week which couple would be successful in adopting this child. This was certainly a tense moment for ourselves as we had to wait with patience.

Matching process

Once again we were waiting to be matched with another child. Our social worker contacted us approximately 1 month after we had pulled out of the proceedings with the first prospective child, with news that they had been contacted by an agency nearer to home this time who had a little baby girl of 11 months old. Again we received a picture and profile of this child and something felt more right this time.

Her birth mother had made it clear from day 1 that her only request is that her daughter is adopted by a Muslim family, and wanted no further contact with her. We told our social worker immediately that we wanted to pursue with this child and we were visited by her social worker. Following that we heard from the agency within a few days and were approved to go forward and adopt this little baby girl. A few weeks later the foster parents and social worker came to our home.

The baby's routine was discussed and a plan was put into place for spending time with the baby over the period of 7 days which the adoption agency term as 'meetings'. We personally felt the 'meetings' were arranged very well. The first few days we spent a few hours at the fosters carers home getting to know the little baby. The next few days involved staying a little longer and observing the waking, bath and bedtime routine and also taking the baby out for a few hours alongside the foster carer.

The final days involved the foster carer bringing the baby to our home to spend the day with us, and then ourselves collecting the baby from the foster carers to spend the day at our home before returning her in the evening to her foster carers where we would put her to sleep. This week of meetings was so exciting and helped us begin to bond with our new daughter, but was also extremely tiring. Both myself and my wife remember feeling absolutely exhausted towards the end of this 7 day period which we feel were caused by a number of factors including the travelling and emotions related to the visits.

So now it was the end of the 'meetings' and it was time for our baby daughter to finally come and live with us. We arrived at the foster carers early that morning and our daughter was awake, bathed and dressed. Her clothes were packed and the foster carers gave us some toys of hers to keep as a present for our baby. The child's social worker from their agency arrived at the house and final documentation were completed. Most of the 'goodbyes' by the foster family to the child are performed prior to this day to avoid upset and the foster carer gave our daughter a final kiss. We put her comfortably into the car and drove home. The feeling was incredible with immense joy for both of us due to the fact that we were now responsible for caring for this lovely little baby girl. The adoption agency recommended that family members do not visit the new child until they fully settle, allowing for time to bond. This in reality was very difficult as the family was overcome with joy so they paid their visits but came in smaller numbers on separate occasions rather than all together.

First few weeks

During the first few weeks of our baby moving into our home we had regular calls and visits from the social workers and health visitors. This was very straightforward, and they were all extremely supportive, and seemed to really share our happiness. Their visits did not feel intrusive at all! The social workers reminded us that if we had any concerns or needed anything we could contact them at any time which was reassuring. At this stage of the process we were classified as 'carers' for our daughter and we were told that if she needed any serious medical treatment we had to contact her social worker regarding consent. We were given an emergency telephone number for this.

Adoption order

After 10 weeks of our baby living under our care it was now the time where we were allowed to apply for an 'adoption order'. This order once granted means that both myself and my wife became legal adoptive parents over our daughter and all the rights of a parent would then lie with us. The adoption order was quite a straightforward form to complete and our social worker paid us a visit with the form and talked us through the form. We then completed the form and decided to take it by hand to the child's agency rather than post it. We were told that we would hear from the court within 6 weeks. There were

a few hurdles in our specific case as the mental capacity of the mother was being questioned at time of consent, so this delayed our process slightly. However we were finally sent a letter stating the judge was satisfied and that adoption had been granted. We were extremely happy, and the papers which we were sent in the post stated we were now 'legal adoptive parents'. This was a truly joyous moment. This happened in the month of Ramadan which we felt was a wonderful gift that Allah the Most High had granted us.

We were paid a visit from both our child's social worker and our own social worker congratulating us on the adoption order being granted. We were then invited to a 'celebration meeting' which was held at court. At this meeting the judge congratulated us on becoming our daughter's adoptive parents and a ceremonial document was given to us.

Alhamdulillah

I can honestly say from our personal feelings and experience this is one of the finest things we have ever done and Allah the Most Merciful has sent our daughter to us along with many blessings."

SISTER NAZIA'S STORY: On becoming an adoptive mother

(1) Why did you want to become a carer?

After going through fertility treatment both my husband and I had the intention to adopt a child if the treatment was unsuccessful.

(2) Describe your journey to becoming a carer...

To begin with we were considering adopting a child from abroad and began research into this via the internet. We also looked into adoption in the UK. We spoke to different councils and international agencies and it seemed international adoption was difficult and expensive so we decided to go ahead with adoption within the UK. Some councils we came across were not as good as others and we finally contacted our local council which was Bury. In a nutshell we filled out an application form, had an initial home visit, attended the training course, and after the assessment process began, we then went to panel and were approved as adopters.

(3) Who did you adopt? We adopted a beautiful little girl who is now three and half years old.

(4) Were there any difficulties?

We felt that our adoption process took longer than necessary. It was time consuming and we felt the questions were being repeated throughout the process. Our daughter's foster carer also found it hard to let go. When we were in the stage of home visits, the foster carer had invited her friends and family which was inappropriate and our daughter was even calling her 'mummy'. We reported this to our social worker and this was an emotional and stressful final leg of the adoption journey.

(5) Benefits of adoption

Going through your local council is the best route to adopt a child. Unfortunately many Muslims feel that they can't accept somebody else's child which is a sad mentality. There are many Muslim children out there who need homes and adopting a child is a great way to change a child's life and give them a better future. People also forget that from an Islamic point of view adoption brings you great reward insha'Allah.



AN ISLAMIC INSIGHT

The honouring of children

Childhood is a time for growth, enchantment and wonder- a period of development treasured in Islam. Children in particular always invited a special kind of tenderness from the Prophet ﷺ and he was open and free in his show of affection and love for them. The life of the Prophet ﷺ is boundless in lessons, particularly considering that as a single person he was not only orphaned himself but also watched his own children die before him- some in infancy, others in older age. He was only survived by his beloved daughter Fatima after his death.

All of these tragic events contributed to the kind treatment of children which was always evident in the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

A Prophetic model

The Prophet ﷺ was always:

- positive in his attitude to his own children and grandchildren and towards other children as well;
- an example in treating children with tenderness and mercy
- keen to express this love verbally or physically in a number of ways: He would greet any child he met, ask how they were and would sometimes joke with them and visit them when they were unwell. [Bukhari, Adab]
- unbothered by children's playfulness- even in his salah, he never stopped his grandsons al-Hassan and Hussain from climbing over him as if he was their horse
- mild mannered when it came to discipline. When a child urinated on him he did not get angry, but simply washed it off. He never beat children. He forbid the killing the children of the enemy side during war and said "Do not do this! Kill neither a woman, nor a child nor an elderly person."
- keen to emphasise respect is not only to our elders , but to children also when he ﷺ said (in the meaning): "he who does not respect the young ones (children) and does not respect the elders is not one of us." [Tirmidhi]
- emphasising how it important is to be just and have equality with regards to children, when he told us: "Fear Allah and be fair among your children." And "One of the rights your children have over you is to be treated by you with justice" [Bukhari]

ADOPTING A CHILD IN ISLAM

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) once said that a person who cares for an orphaned child will be in Paradise with him, and motioned to show that they would be as close as two fingers of a single hand. An orphan himself, Muhammad paid special attention to the care of children.

He himself adopted a former slave and raised him with the same care as if he were his own son. However, the Qur'an gives specific rules about the legal relationship between a child and his/her adoptive family. The child's biological family is never hidden; their ties to the child are never severed. The Qur'an specifically reminds adoptive parents that they are not the child's biological parents:

"...Nor has He made your adopted sons your (biological) sons. Such is (only) your (manner of) speech by your mouths. But Allah tells (you) the Truth, and He shows the (right) Way. Call them by (the names of) their fathers; that is juster in the sight of Allah. But if you know not their father's (names, call them) your brothers in faith, or your trustees. But there is no blame on you if you make a mistake therein. (What counts is) the intention of your hearts. And Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful." (Qur'an 33:4-5)

The guardian/child relationship has specific rules under Islamic law, which render the relationship a bit different than what is common adoption practice today. The Islamic term for what is commonly called adoption is kafala, which comes from a word that means "to feed." In essence, it describes more of a foster-parent relationship.

Some of the rules in Islam surrounding this relationship:

1. An adopted child retains his or her own biological family name (surname) and does not change his or her name to match that of the adoptive family.
2. An adopted child inherits from his or her biological parents, not automatically from the adoptive parents.
3. An adopted child can be breastfed by the adoptive mother (a minimum of five times) to be made "mahram" to her, her husband and their birth children. This is expanded upon further.
4. Unless breastfed, when the child is grown, members of the adoptive family are not considered blood relatives, and are therefore not mahram to him or her. "Mahram" refers to a specific legal relationship that regulates marriage and other aspects of life. Rules of modesty exist between the grown child and adoptive family members of the opposite sex.
5. If the child is provided with property/wealth from the biological family, adoptive parents are commanded to take care and not intermingle that property/wealth with their own. They serve merely as trustees.

These Islamic rules emphasize to the adoptive family that they are not taking the place of the biological family –or pretending to be their birth family. Their role is very clearly defined, but nevertheless very valued and important.

It is also important to note that in Islam, the extended family network is vast and very strong. It is rare for a child to be completely orphaned, without a single family member to care for him or her. Islam places a great emphasis on the ties of kinship -- a completely abandoned child is practically unheard of. Islamic law would place an emphasis on locating a relative to care for the child, before allowing someone outside of the family, much less the community or country, to adopt and remove the child from his or her familial, cultural, and religious roots. This is especially important during times of war, famine, or economic crisis -- when families may be temporarily uprooted or divided.

"Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter? And He found you wandering, and He gave you guidance. And He found you in need, and made you independent. Therefore, treat not the orphan with harshness, nor drive away a petitioner (unheard). But the bounty of the Lord - rehearse and proclaim!" (Qur'an 93:6-11) (1)

The Prophet towards the orphans...

- When two girls were orphaned in the Battle of Uhud and when their uncles tried to confiscate their property, Prophet Muhammad intervened and prevented this from happening, ensuring the newly orphaned girls were given their full dues. [Tirmidhi, ibn Majah]

- The Prophet Muhammad immediately rushed to comfort Bashir bin Aqraba (a boy who had just been orphaned). The Prophet Muhammad went to him and when he saw that he was crying said: "Do not cry! I am your father; would you not like Aisha to be your mother?" [Bukhari]

- The Prophet always encouraged us to be affectionate to the orphan when he said: "If someone strokes the head of an orphan for the sake of Allah they will receive blessings for every hair that they touch." "If one takes an orphan that is among the Muslims and takes them to their home to give them food and drink, as long as they have not committed an unforgivable sin, Allah will certainly put them in Heaven." [Musnad I. Ahmad]

- The great virtue of caring for an orphan was highlighted in the hadith "I and the custodian of an orphan are like this (together) in Paradise (and he joined his forefinger and middle finger together)." Ibn Majah also narrated on the authority of Abu Huraira that Prophet Muhammad said: "The best Muslim house is a house in which an orphan is well treated; and the worst Muslim house is a house in which an orphan is badly treated."

Breastfeeding an adopted child

Rada'ah or the breastfeeding that makes the child a mahram means giving five or more feeds within the first two years of the child's life. If you breastfed a child in this manner, then he becomes a son for her and her husband through breastfeeding, and he becomes a brother to all their children through breastfeeding.

"The best Muslim house is a house in which an orphan is well treated..."

And it was proven that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Relations through radaa'ah (breast-feeding) makes all those things unlawful which are unlawful through corresponding birth (blood) relations (i.e., prohibited marriages)." Narrated by Maalik, 2/601; a similar version was narrated by al-Bukhaari, 3/149; Muslim, 2/1086.

And it was narrated that 'Aa'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: "One of the things that was revealed in the Qur'aan was that ten recognized breastfeedings makes all those things unlawful which are unlawful through corresponding birth (blood) relations, then that was abrogated and replaced with a verse that mentioned five, and the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) passed away when that was the ruling." Narrated by Maalik, 2/608; Muslim, 2/1075

It should be noted that what is considered to be one breastfeeding is when the child takes hold of the nipple and sucks milk from it; if he lets go, then comes back and sucks more milk, this is a second breastfeeding, and so on.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

On adoption and fostering

Am I too young/too old to foster?

We have a minimum age of 21 before you can be considered as a foster carer but there are no upper age limits, as long as you are generally healthy.

Will the child have contact with his or her birth family?

All children who are adopted have some form of contact with their birth family. This may be face-to-face contact as some children need and wish to continue to see their birth family occasionally, usually no more than twice a year. These arrangements are initially discussed and agreed between yourselves, your social worker and the child's social worker and birth family. The meeting may be at a family centre or can take the form of an outing together.

Will I be told about the child's background?

It is very important that you know as much as possible about the child's past. The law says the adoption agency must give you information about the child, which includes details about his or her background, time in care, school history and any medical needs. This information will help you decide if you could realistically parent and adopt a particular child/ren.

I have lived abroad. Can I adopt a child in the UK?

In order to adopt, applicants need to have been resident in the UK for at least a year, ending with the date of application.

Can I adopt if I am undergoing fertility treatment?

Some prospective adopters have not been able to have their own children and may enquire about adoption whilst still trying to conceive a child through assisted conception. We ask you to let us know if this is the case. Experience shows that you will need time to come to terms with your childlessness before you are ready for adoption, understanding that adoption will be different.

Pursuing adoption whilst still trying to conceive a child of your own is not in the interests of children who need adoption, as a child could be born to you just before or after another child is placed for adoption. We therefore will not start your preparation if you are still undergoing treatment. We advise you to wait until your treatment is complete and have taken enough time (at least 6 months) to adjust to this so that you are ready to consider adoption.

Can I adopt if I have birth children?

If you have a child or children already, either as a single parent or as a couple from a previous relationship, whether or not they live with you, you will need to consider the impact of adoption on them.

Ideally there should be a minimum two year age gap between your own child and the adopted child. The adopted child will always be the youngest when placed with you as this keeps your child's place and relationships in the family the same. Adopting a child when you have a birth child or children will mean parenting in a different way and we offer specialist training to parents of birth and adopted children to support and advise you on how to manage the needs of different children.

Do I need experience of looking after children?

Adopted children can present challenging behaviour because of their past experiences and you will need to be confident in managing this. Therefore you will need to gain some experience of looking after other people's children before we can take your interest further. This could involve caring for young family members, friends' children, volunteering in nurseries or playgroups etc. The Adoption Team can give you advice on how to do this.

Will I get any financial help?

You will, as the child's parents, meet the costs of bringing up an adopted child. There are adoption allowances for some children but these are to meet an additional needs that the child may have. The allowance is paid to those people on lower incomes, reviewed each year and increased in line with inflation.

Can I adopt a child from a different ethnic background?

Wherever possible children are placed with adopters who reflect their family of origin. However we work hard to avoid delay in placing children with adoptive parents. If this was likely to cause a delay, the child will be placed with adopters who were sensitive to the child's needs. The adopters would have to show an ability to help a child develop a positive identity and to challenge racism and discrimination.

Do I need a spare bedroom?

Yes, there must be adequate bedroom space for all members of the household and a separate bedroom for a potential fostered child or children. Bedrooms for children under 11 years should be on the same floor as the carer to provide adequate night time supervision.

Can my children share with a foster child?

Your own children can share with a birth sibling but not a foster child.

Can brothers and sisters share rooms?

Siblings can share a bedroom space. If the children are of different genders they must have their own bedrooms on reaching 9 years of age. Same sex siblings can continue to share.

Can I work?

It would depend on the type of fostering you were interested in. If you were considering short term fostering for children under 3-years / pre-school age, then we would ask for one of the foster carers to be at home full time. Fostering children long-term and providing supported lodgings offer some flexibility in working arrangements. However, you will need to be available to meet the fostered child's needs, for example if they are off school ill, and to attend meetings.

What if I am a smoker?

All foster carers have to sign a smoke free home agreement, agreeing not to smoke in the house. We will not consider people who smoke to foster babies and children under 2 years.

What if I am disabled or have a medical/mental health issues?

All prospective foster carers must have a medical. Your own GP/specialist will comment on whether there are any medical issues that may affect your ability to foster. Each case is looked at individually with consideration for the needs of our fostered children.

What if I have convictions?

Convictions do not necessarily bar you from fostering but we advise you to notify us of any previous offences at the earliest opportunity, not telling us in advance may delay your application. All prospective foster carers will require an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. Certain convictions involving violence and crimes against children will prevent you from becoming a foster carer.

What if I am recently married?

If you are in a new relationship and intend on applying to foster jointly we require you to have been together a minimum of 2 years. If you are recently married or residing together we require you to wait 6 months before proceeding to foster.

What level of English literacy/language do I need?

It is very important that foster carers can advocate for fostered children, a reasonable level of reading, writing and spoken English is therefore required. As part of your assessment and continuing development, you will be required to put together a portfolio. You will also be expected to be able to record effectively and report on the child's progress. If English is not your first language or you feel you need help in improving your skills, your local college will be able to help you with locating a suitable course such as ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language), these courses are often free of charge. We may also require feedback from such a course to progress to assessment.

What if my partner and/or I don't have British residency?

The main carer must be a British resident or have indefinite right to remain in the UK to foster.

What if I live in a flat?

If you live on the ground floor, this may be suitable accommodation to foster. High-rise flats are not considered appropriate for fostering young children as living at height poses health and safety risks. We would also assess whether there is an area for safe playing, and that communal areas are clean and tidy.



FURTHER READING

<https://www.bemyparent.org.uk>
<http://www.baaf.org.uk/info/fostering>

Appendices

- (1) Understanding Islam by Christine Huda Dodge
- (2) <http://www.adoptioninsomerset.org.uk>

Web: myfosterchild.org.uk

Email: info@myfosterchild.org.uk

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