

Fosterline Wales Factsheet

Men who foster

Introduction

Men can foster as a single person, or as part of a couple. If fostering as part of a couple, they may spend most of their time on their fostering role, or may have a full or part-time job outside the home.

They may be the first positive male role model that a child has met. Living with male foster carers gives looked after children the chance to explore how to form trusting relationships with men and to have contact with men who understand their needs. It is vital that these children grow up with positive images of men being fun, creative, nurturing and, above all, safe in a domestic setting. Male foster carers have an important role to play within the fostering assignment.

Despite their significant role, social attitudes towards men in caring roles, particularly with children, often create challenges. They may experience more marginalisation, suspicion and gender discrimination than women who foster.

A positive role model – Men’s relationship with the foster children

Male foster carers play an important role in foster care, either as single carers or supporting their partner. It may be a child’s first positive experience of an adult male. Children may expect you to leave, be violent towards your partner (if you foster as a couple) and break promises to them. Men who foster give children the chance to learn how to establish a trusting and safe relationship with men.

[Simon Newstone’s](#) research showed children flourish when the men who foster them model these behaviours:

- Caring, non-threatening, non-violent
- Appropriately using power and authority
- ‘Breaking the mould’
- Showing (boys) right and wrong
- Social, reasonable drinking
- Being consistent
- Spending time with children, including one to one
- Providing a stable, loving environment
- Supporting (female) partner
- Showing feelings and emotions (not just anger)
- Humility

- Challenging stereotypes
- Promoting cultural differences and belief systems
- Sharing care and routine tasks such as cooking

Gendered roles and equality

Caring work, particularly with children, has traditionally been seen as women's work. This often leads to gendered assumptions about men who foster.

Men who foster may be greeted with suspicion, particularly if wanting to foster as a single man. It is part of society's assumption about gendered roles that needs challenging and changing. As part of this, it is good to make professionals aware when you feel they are treating you differently from women because of your gender. Fostering services do not always engage effectively with men who foster. There are still times when social workers only want to speak to the woman in a male-female couple who foster and training tends to be arranged around the needs of women who foster.

These are not issues that will change overnight. The Fostering Network has a publication for services (see Resources) about men who foster, and a good starting point, when you experience gender-based discrimination, is to ask the person or organisation to read that resource.

Safer caring

All foster carers need to think about safer caring issues, and for male foster carers this can be a particularly challenging aspect of the role. How can you balance the need to protect yourself alongside the need to provide care to those you foster?

Everyone needs to make sure children are safe, feel safe and foster carers don't put themselves in the position where a child may misunderstand the adult's behaviour. It is equally important that safer caring isn't turned into a man's issue.

A child's past experience may make them feel less safe with a man and more likely to misinterpret a man's behaviour. This needs to be taken into consideration when planning how to care for the child. Avoiding contact with the child is not a solution; for their future wellbeing, the child needs to spend time with a positive male role model. Sometimes you may need to behave in a way that is perceived as risky or breaks safer caring rules, because the needs of the child require it. In these situations it is wise to discuss the situation with your social worker, make a list of what you need to do to care for the child safely and act as a good role model, and get that list signed by yourself and your social worker.

Fostering services should provide male foster carers with targeted training, such as "Men who Foster", and provide a men's support group so that you can meet regularly with other male foster carers for support and to exchange tips and ideas.

Assessment, support, training and good matching will be especially important if you intend to foster as a single male carer, or as the main carer in a couple.

Discuss all of these issues thoroughly with your fostering service, and ensure that you receive the right level of support for you and your placement, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

For more information read The Fostering Network publication [Safer Caring](#).

Tips from men who foster

- Be willing to answer questions and discuss any concerns about the placement that may be expressed by the child's family. Many questions and concerns can be resolved with good communication. This does not mean you should put up with inappropriate questions or discriminatory attitudes.
- As a man who fosters, it can feel as if the odds are stacked against you. You may be afraid to hug a young girl who is upset, for fear of being called an abuser. Good communication, record keeping and open discussions about real-life interpretation of safer caring should make you feel more confident in your role.
- Reading together or doing homework together is an excellent way to build relationships with children.
- When a social worker phones and asks to speak to your partner, don't just hand the phone over. Ask what the call is about as it may be a fostering issue rather than an issue for your partner.
- If meetings and training are always arranged when you are not available, point this out and suggest more appropriate times.
- Assessment, support, training and good matching will be especially important if you intend to foster as a single male carer, or as the main carer in a couple.
- Discuss all of these issues thoroughly with your fostering service, and ensure that you receive the right level of support for you and your placement, and don't be afraid to ask for help.
- If your agency or local authority doesn't have a peer mentoring or buddying scheme for men who foster, suggest they start one. Men need to be able to talk to other men who foster, particularly because fostering is often seen as a 'woman's thing'.

Further Resources

To read:

Our book *Men Who Care: Experiences and Reflections from Male Foster Carers*, emerged from a storytelling workshop run by the University of Glamorgan's StoryWorks team. It contains personal stories that challenge the stereotypes around men and foster care.

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/men-who-care.pdf>

[Men Are Good Foster Carers Too](#): Supporting Male Foster Carers and Inspiring Confidence, focuses on how to make male foster carers feel more connected and

less marginalised within their fostering services. It aims to help fostering services engage more effectively with their male foster carers by raising awareness of the challenges they face while exploring the ways in which they acknowledge and support men.

Men Who Foster is written for services, to help them think through common problems faced by men who foster
<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/men-who-foster-251111.pdf>

How The Fostering Network can help

The Fostering Network offers advice, information and support. Our expertise and knowledge are always up-to-date and available through our vital member helplines, publications, training and consultancy.

Advice

Fosterline Wales

Call us on 0800 316 7664 from 9.30am - 12.30pm Monday to Friday.

If you call outside this time please leave a message and someone will call you back as soon as possible.

You can email us or write to us at:

Fosterlinewales@fostering.net

The Fostering Network Wales

1 Caspian Point, Pierhead Street

Cardiff Bay CF10 4DQ

Support and resources

Our website is an essential source of information, while our online community brings together foster carers for peer support and advice. You can login to share your experience and get advice from other foster carers. Our online community is a safe and secure area to discuss foster care matters.

thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

Training and consultancy

Wherever you are in your fostering career, as a foster carer, social worker or manager, The Fostering Network has a range of training designed to meet your development needs.

For more information contact our learning and development manager, Sarah Mobedji at <http://sarah.mobedji@fostering.net>.

About The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children to make foster care the very best it can be.

Contact

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