THE SKILLS TO FOSTER ASSESSMENT
Frequently asked questions

What is The Skills to Foster Assessment?

The Skills to Foster Assessment is a complete assessment process for potential foster carers. It provides the essential tools to take each applicant from their first enquiry to panel.

It is an evidence-based system which looks at the skills, experience, abilities and aptitudes needed to foster and helps you examine the capabilities of each individual.

How does The Skills to Foster differ from other assessment materials?

The Skills to Foster has been designed with the needs of the modern foster care workforce in mind. It is informed by our knowledge as the UK’s leading charity for everyone involved in foster care, and recognises that fostering is a unique role which requires particular skills from those that undertake it.

In addition, The Skills to Foster offers an integrated approach to assessment, pre approval training and meeting the Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Care (TSD Standards). This integration means that processes become more efficient, saving you time and money.

How were the materials developed?

The materials were developed by experienced assessors who have worked with a range of assessment models over the years. After extensive research into what was currently available, and talking to a broad range of fostering services and assessing social workers we went back to the beginning to look at what applicants and fostering services need from an assessment process.

An advisory group of fostering team managers, assessors and foster carers helped shape the materials. Drafts were commented on by a range of professionals from across the sector.
What are the key advantages of *The Skills to Foster Assessment*?

In developing these materials we are confident that we have met the needs of both fostering services and potential foster carers by ensuring objectivity through an evidence-based approach. *The Skills to Foster Assessment*:

- involves applicants in the process
- reinforces the professional tasks of fostering
- recognises the importance of foster carers providing a positive role model
- acknowledges the importance of exploring each applicant’s history to ensure children are safeguarded
- requires analysis and verification of evidence.

What are the key features of *The Skills to Foster Assessment*?

- A new assessment report format has been developed which allows the assessor to describe the applicant’s family and its dynamics in a narrative style but also requires the applicant to provide evidence of the required skills, making the assessment a shared process.

- The CD Rom includes an *Assessor’s toolkit* - a suite of materials to promote consistency across assessments.

- *The Skills to Foster* requires the assessor to be analytical and to verify statements made by the applicant using a variety of evidence. Conversely, it provides clear evidence if the applicant is not ‘good enough’ - essential if the applicant requests an IRM hearing.

- *The Skills to Foster* accepts that the applicant is not the ‘finished product’ and allows for gaps in knowledge and skills to be legitimately highlighted towards the end of the form and on the personal development plan which can accompany the form to panel. The toolkit provides a format for an initial personal development plan as well as for a review 12 months after approval.

- The process recognises the important role sons and daughters of foster carers play in achieving successful placements, and so takes much greater account of their views as part of the assessment process.

- It also recognises that some foster carers are often lacking in practical support from their friends and family at difficult times and, consequently, requires a much closer examination of their support.
network during the assessment, including interviews with significant people who pledge their support.

- The process also allows assessors to explore the applicant’s attitudes to learning and future development in a more rigorous way than ever before and reinforces the requirement for foster carers to participate in ongoing professional development

- The report contains a stand alone *Family Profile* section which can be used to send to placing social workers instead of the whole assessment when looking for a match and to give to young people prior to a placement being made. The profile contains a description of the family’s environment and their family lifestyle, including leisure activities and weekend routines which is intended to be written by the applicant. The purpose of this is two fold – it highlights the importance of the routines and leisure opportunities that a young person will be given and allows the applicant to demonstrate their literacy skills as it will be hand written.

**Will it help my team ensure we are compliant with standards, legislation and guidance?**

*The Skills to Foster Assessment* recognises the vital importance of the assessment process in identifying risks, safeguarding children and young people, and ensuring foster carers are well placed to meet their needs. It is our intention that this process goes above and beyond minimum requirements to create an integrated, consistent and efficient process to assess foster carers against their ability to provide safe and suitable care.

In developing the assessment materials, we have referred to legislation across the UK, drawn good practice from amongst our fostering service members and consulted experts in the field of fostering.

Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations (2002) sets out the information that should be collected by the fostering service during the assessment process and presented to the fostering panel. This information will be gathered through full completion of the assessment report form.

In addition, the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2002) set out good practice for fostering services. As per Standard 17, adopting *The Skills to Foster Assessment* process will ensure: *"there is a clearly set out assessment process for carers which defines:*

- the task to be undertaken
- the qualities, competences or aptitudes being sought or to be achieved
- the standards to be applied in the assessment
• the stages and content of the selection process and the timescales involved
• the information to be given to applicants”

In addition, the process will also ensure that assessors examine the particular ‘qualities, competences and aptitudes for fostering’ identified in NMS 17.11.

*The Skills to Foster Assessment* also recognises and implements the recommendations from Brighton and Hove (2001).

Updated National Minimum Standards for England are currently being developed. The Fostering Network has seen draft materials. We expect *The Skills to Foster Assessment* to be more than sufficient to meet the new Standards. More information will be made available to licence holders on publication of the new standards.

What are the **Skills?**

The ‘job description’ for a foster carer has been broken down into four key Skills areas, which are assessed through the process of gathering evidence.

1. **Understanding the role of a foster carer**
   - Child care experience and skills
   - Support networks
   - Working with a fostered child’s family
   - Confidentiality
   - Working with the team
   - Organised, reliable, dependable
   - Promotion of equality and diversity
   - Communication skills
   - Literacy skills

2. **Health and safety and healthy care**
   - Providing a suitable environment
   - Fire safety
   - Healthy care
   - Medical treatment
   - Safer caring

3. **Understanding children and young people**
   - Understanding development
   - Understanding and managing behaviour
   - Understanding attachment and resilience
   - Play and activities
   - Supporting education
4. **Develop yourself**
   - Understanding the impact of fostering
   - Providing a positive role model
   - Dealing with stress
   - Professional development

**Can we adapt the materials?**

Yes. No assessment process can be a ‘one size fits all’ and the *Skills* model has been designed to offer flexibility. Those assessing for a specialist scheme will be able to emphasise some *Skills* areas and spend less time on others. Those looking to assess foster carers for a particular child will also be able to adapt the materials accordingly. However, because the format will remain the same it will be easy for the panel to digest the information presented.

There is guidance on adapting the *Skills* in Chapter 9 of *Assessing foster carers: a social worker’s guide*. This covers assessments for children with disabilities, named children and for long term fostering.

**What about the Training Support and Development Standards?**

*The Skills to Foster Assessment* is closely linked to the *Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care*, and will be a useful tool for social workers and foster carers working together towards the Standards. The process is designed to enable both the foster carer and fostering service to readily see the areas of the *TSD Standards* that are covered by the assessment.

We have mapped the *Skills* to the Standards, so you can easily cross reference. Because the process is evidence-based you will build a multi-purpose portfolio that can be used both for the assessment and for the *TSD Standards*.

**How does it work with The Skills to Foster training?**

The training and the assessment process work together to ensure that potential foster carers understand the role of the foster carer and the impact fostering will have on them and those close to them. Both allow applicants time to reflect upon whether fostering is right for them.

*The Skills to Foster* recognises that fostering is a varied and demanding role, and that foster carers therefore need to be well prepared for the challenges it will bring. Both the assessment and the pre-approval training are the initial steps on an ongoing journey of personal and professional development.
The activities in the *Record and Resource Book* have been mapped to the assessment *Skills* so can be used as evidence that the applicant has the knowledge and understanding required.

**What materials are available?**

*The Skills to Foster Assessment CD Rom* contains the final assessment report form for the panel. This has seven sections:

- A cover sheet with contents
- A record of checks and references made
- A family profile (that could be removed and used for matching)
- Details of family members and other members of the household
- The *Skills* assessment
- Assessor’s summary and recommendations.

The CD Rom also contains an *assessor’s toolkit*, which has a range of forms, charts and example letters to help you complete the assessment.

Guidance on using the assessment materials can be found in the *accompanying social worker’s guide*.

There is also a *workbook for applicants* which will help them understand the process and start to assess and evidence their own skills.

**How would we implement *The Skills to Foster*?**

The new skills based assessment model is not complicated but it is different from previous assessment methods and will require a whole systems’ approach. It is essential for training to involve the panel chair, panel advisor and fostering service managers as well as the assessors and team managers who will be carrying out assessments.

The Fostering Network has developed a number of training courses to help you ensure everyone involved is getting the most out of the materials. There are courses for experienced assessors new to *The Skills to Foster Assessments* as well as more in depth training for those who are new to assessments. We also provide training for panel members.

**1 day course for experienced assessing social workers**

This course is aimed at experienced assessing social workers and will guide them through the new format whilst enabling participants to use the accompanying materials.
2 day course for social workers new to assessment
This course looks at the fundamentals of assessment, what we are assessing, how to evidence skills and abilities and how to produce a logical and well-written report. It will also guide them through the new format and provide opportunities to use the new materials.

1 day training course for panel members and chairs
This course will familiarise experienced panels with the assessment material. On request, we can also deliver training for new panel members.

The Fostering Network is also offering half day consultations for any fostering service making the transition to the new model. The time will be spent within the service to plan an implementation process prior to social workers attending the training.

How much will it cost?
The CD Rom containing the forms and the toolkit is supplied on an annual licence basis.

Assessing foster carers: a social worker’s guide is priced at £30, or £105 for a pack of five.

Applying to foster: an applicant’s guide is priced at £10, or £85 for a pack of ten.

All are available to buy online at www.fosteringresources.co.uk or by calling 0844 335 1892.

Training costs are dependent upon your needs. Contact our training department on 020 7620 6429.

For fostering services moving to the materials, we offer a comprehensive, discounted package for the first year, including a licence, multiple copies of the books, training for assessors and consultancy. Prices start at just £1600, contact us for a quote for your fostering service.

How do I find out more?
We can send you some sample materials to look at, and book a time to discuss the process in more detail with one of the staff who worked on the development.

Alternatively, come along to one of our FREE showcase events. The following dates are booking now and we will add more if there is sufficient demand:
22 April Chester
25 May Birmingham
27 May    London
7 June    York
9 June    Bridgewater

Contact the publications team on 020 7620 6445 or email publications@fostering.net.