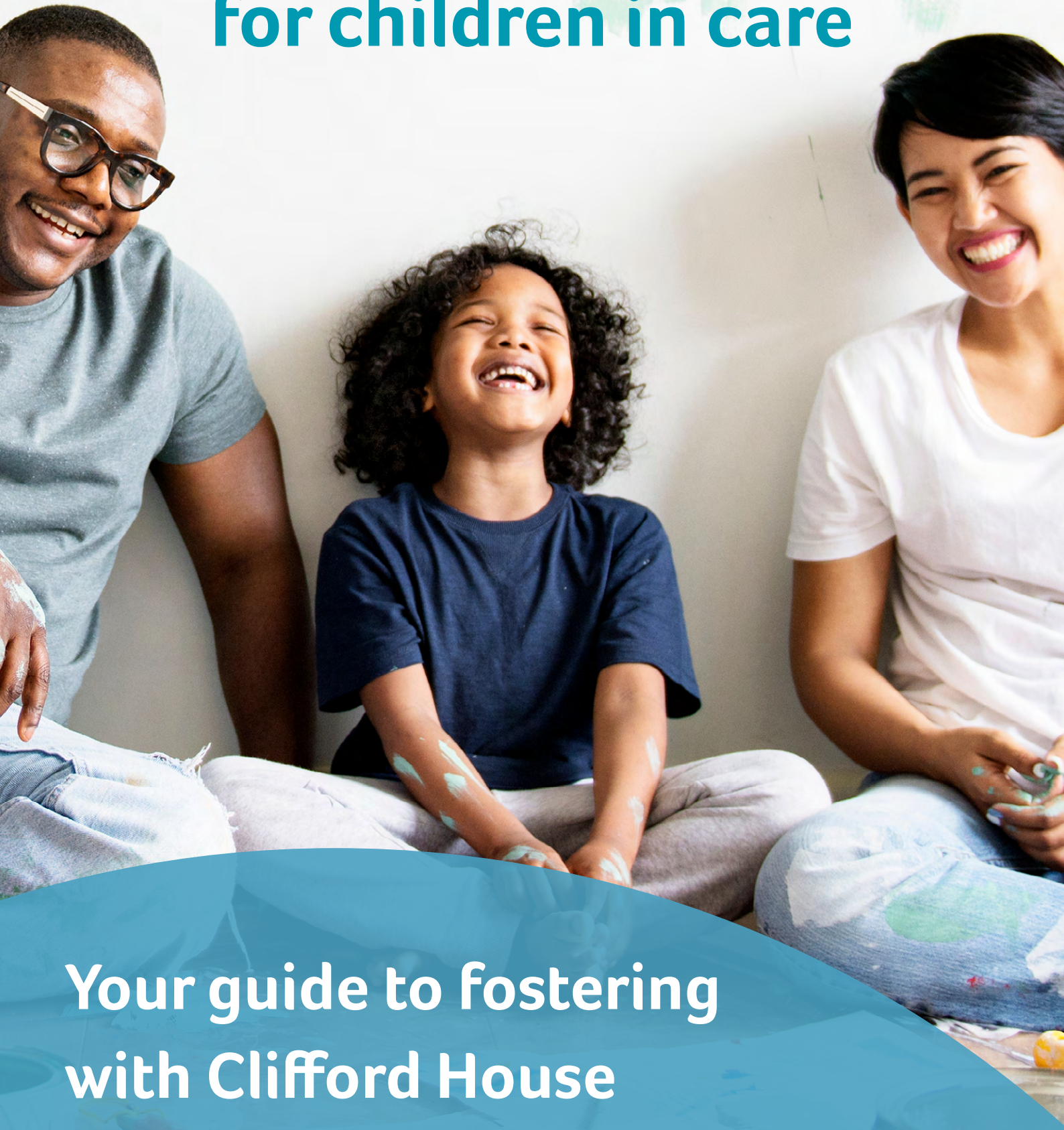




Brighter futures for children in care



Your guide to fostering
with Clifford House

A close-up, profile shot of a woman with dark hair, smiling warmly while holding a baby. She is wearing a blue top. In the background, another person is visible, slightly out of focus. A dark blue circular graphic element is overlaid on the bottom right of the image, containing white text.

**“Clifford House are a great agency
to foster with. The entire team is so
kind, empathetic and always there
to support you when you need
them the most.”**

Melanie, Foster Parent

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Introduction

We provide children in care with strong family foundations

Hi, I'm Lesley Greenfield, the Registered Manager for Clifford House. I just want to say thank you for enquiring about fostering with us.

I understand that deciding to foster can feel like a big decision, and you've likely got a lot of questions about how it all works. Hopefully we're able to answer a lot of your questions in this guide, but we're also only a phone call away if there's anything specific you'd like to know.

To give you a little idea about who we are, we're a small independent fostering agency based in the West Midlands with a big beating heart. One of the most important things to us is creating a strong sense of family in everything we do. We're small enough to know all our families and children, and have a friendly and professional team who will provide you with the quality training and support you need to make a real difference.

Being a foster parent is life changing - for you, your family and the children in your care - and we're committed to making it the very best experience it can be for everyone.

I hope to speak to you soon and help you on your journey to become a foster parent.

Lesley Greenfield
Registered Manager



Our story

A small fostering agency with a big focus on family

Covering the West Midlands, Clifford House has been specialising in fostering for over 25 years. In all that time, we've supported hundreds of children and foster families, so we've built up loads of expertise and experience. We've also developed a very distinctive way of working.

What we always try to do is create a strong sense of family – for children of course, but also for our foster parents. Family matters to us and working in a small geographical area really helps us stay close to everyone. Join us and you'll share the feeling of being part of something that always pulls together.


That means always being there with support and training. It means coming to see you and talking regularly about your feelings and needs. And it means giving you the skills and confidence to help children and young people. We're all in this together, and you'll feel all of our care and commitment in everything we do.

As a result, we have excellent relationships with our foster parents and children, and with local authorities who appreciate our high standards and commitment to always going the extra mile. They trust us to put everything into place to make every fostering placement as successful as it can be. It's a commitment that underpins our whole culture, and it's this that makes fostering with Clifford House so special and rewarding.



“I’m impressed with the warm-hearted support I receive from Clifford House for both myself and the young person in my care. I feel valued for all my efforts.”

Linda, Foster Parent

A photograph of two young girls, one of Asian descent and one of Caucasian descent, hula hooping with orange hoops in a grassy field. The girl on the left is wearing a white t-shirt, denim overalls with star patterns, and blue knee-high socks. The girl on the right is wearing a white t-shirt, pink shorts, and blue sneakers. Both girls are smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a soft-focus green field with trees.

**“Before I knew it, I had a set of twins.
She was the sister she never had. It’s
been lovely to see their relationship
blossom over the years.”**

Jennifer, Foster Parent

Jennifer and her husband, Simeon, have been fostering for over 20 years and have cared for over 50 children and young people. Today, the couple share their experience and what makes fostering the most rewarding career in the world.

Talking about the many rewards that the couple gain from fostering, Jennifer said: “The most rewarding part is watching the children grow, develop and become valuable individuals. The majority of the children we have fostered are grown up and have moved on, but they still come to visit us. They know that our door is always open.”

The couple’s daughter, Samantha, also found the experience positive and formed a wonderful friendship with the first child they cared for, Jennifer explained: “Samantha had always dreamt of having a sister. She was just 9 years old when our first foster child arrived. She was also a nine-year-old. Before I knew it, I had a set of twins. She was the sister she never had. It’s been lovely to see their relationship blossom over the years.”

Samantha and her former foster sibling, now both in their thirties, continue to regularly meet up with their own sons in town now – testament to the strong bond the pair have formed over the past 20 years.

Speaking about the support she receives from Clifford House, Jennifer said: “Clifford House helps us as foster parents with 24-hour support, training and payments to enable us to do this delicate job. They have a team of professionals ready to support us, so we can offer the best possible care to our children and young people.”

“We feel part of the Clifford House family and there’s always someone ready to help us if we ever need it.”



A closer look at fostering...

Helping children and young people reach their full potential

In England right now, more than 80,000 children are living in care. Typical reasons include abuse and neglect, or because of family illness or the loss of a parent. There are also many unaccompanied refugee children seeking asylum.

Whenever a child is at risk, the local authority steps in until the child can be returned safely to their family. Sometimes this happens quickly, sometimes it doesn't happen at all. In between, they're looked after by foster parents.

Local authorities have their own carers, who usually look after babies, toddlers and younger children. However, they often don't have the resources to cope with the number of children in care and rely on support from specialist fostering organisations like us. We have great relationships with local authorities across the West Midlands, who place a large number of children with our foster families. Many of these children are aged 5-18, who have faced difficult childhood experiences and need the support of a loving foster family.

We provide a number of different types of foster placements to meet the needs of children in care, including:

- **Emergency** – usually with very short notice and generally for just one or two nights.
- **Respite** – foster parents care for a child so their usual foster family can take a short break – usually at weekends or during school holidays.

- **Short-term** – this means providing a foster home to a child for up to 2 years.
- **Long-term** – these placements can last until a child reaches the age of 18.
- **Parent and child** – providing care to a vulnerable parent – usually the mother – and their baby or child for a short period of time.
- **Disability fostering** – a specialist type of fostering where you'll care for a child with a physical or learning disability.
- **Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children** – supporting children who enter the UK without a parent or guardian.
- **Solo placements** – caring for a child with very challenging needs, who cannot be placed alongside another child.
- **Siblings** – helping to keep brothers and sisters together in a stable, loving foster home.

We can help you find the type of fostering that's most suited to you and your family. This might be specialising in one type of fostering, or working across them all. It's an individual choice, and each will bring you the challenges and rewards of fostering. Every child you care for is unique, but your role as a foster parent is constant: to provide love, support and stability, which helps children reach their full potential. You can find out more on the next page.



What's the difference between fostering and adoption?

There are some key differences between fostering and adoption. The main difference is around legal responsibility for the child. When you foster a child, the legal responsibility often remains with the birth parents or the local authority, however, you become the legal guardian when adopting.

Other key differences include:

- **Duration** - when fostering, you can care for a child for as little as a day or two, and up to 18 years until they reach independence. With adoption, you'll care for the child as you would your own birth children and they'll be part of your family forever.
- **Age of children** - children who are looking to be adopted are generally younger, whereas with fostering – especially long-term – the child is likely to be 5 and older or in foster care with their siblings.
- **Allowances** - foster parents receive a fostering allowance to cover the cost of caring for a child and provide them with a professional fee. This financial package is not available to adoptive parents.

Both fostering and adoption can be incredibly rewarding, so it's really about finding out which is most suited to you and your family. We're always here to help provide you with all the information you need to make this decision.



The role of foster parents

Providing a safe and welcoming home – for one day or more...

Quite often, the children and young people we care for have had challenging childhoods and are coping with trauma. They're vulnerable, and often frightened. What our foster parents provide is the foundation of a stable family home.

By providing this security, support and encouragement, foster parents do what all other parents do. However, there are additional responsibilities that will form part of your role when caring for a child who has faced adversity.

Supporting a child's education

School is often the only constant a child in care has in their life, and part of your job is to make sure they get there on time – and get the most out of the experience by encouraging their learning. This will likely involve travelling to their original school, not necessarily your local school, especially while they're still settling in.

Maintaining contact with their birth family

In most cases, it's important for children to stay in touch with their family and extended family, including siblings, parents and grandparents. This can sometimes be upsetting for them, and you're there to offer support – and to drop them off and pick them up after visits of course!

Working with Clifford House

All of the children and young people we care for have their own unique care plan, which involves us all working together to ensure the child receives the support they need to thrive. As a key member of the team, you'll attend regular training, as well as meetings with your social worker, the child's school and other professionals involved in their care.

Keeping records

We like to know how children are getting on, so we ask foster parents to keep accurate records of their achievements and milestones. This helps everyone understand the progress they're making.

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue patterned shirt, and a young girl with long brown hair, wearing a light blue striped shirt. They are both smiling and looking at a laptop screen. The woman is pointing at the screen with her right hand. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor setting.

“The support Clifford House gave to us when my husband was seriously ill was beyond words. I never felt alone; they felt like an extended family. They were there with support, for me, our family and the child in our care.”

Stephanie, Foster Parent



Who can foster?

Almost anyone can be a foster parent. All we ask is that you have the time, commitment and passion to care for a vulnerable child, have a spare bedroom in your house, and the legal right to live and work in the UK. After that, there's really nothing to stop you from applying. In fact, we actively look to recruit a diverse mix of people to meet the varying needs of children.

Age doesn't matter as long as you're over 21 and fit and healthy enough to look after children. You can be married, single or in a long-term partnership, including those from the LGBTQ+ community. We welcome all faiths and cultures. We don't look for any qualifications and you don't need to have brought up children of your own.

That said, there are certain qualities we look for: kindness, patience, commitment, resilience, an open mind, the willingness to work as part of a team and put the interests of the child front and foremost... if you have these qualities, our training can give you all the skills you need.

Here are some answers to questions we're often asked.

Do I need experience of working with children? You'll need to be able to connect with young people, so it helps if you've had children - or you have children in your close

family and friends network - or if you've worked with them in a professional capacity. But it's not essential.

Am I too old to foster? They say you're only as old as you feel. That's true for fostering. There's no upper age limit as long as you're physically capable of meeting the demands.

Can I foster if I have a pet? Definitely. Pets can really help children settle in and form bonds, but we'll just need to check that your beloved pet is comfortable being around children. We'll also just need to check that it's not a breed listed on the Dangerous Dog Act.

Can I foster with birth children? Yes. Many of our foster parents do this and it's a rewarding experience for everyone. Birth children play an important role in fostering and we've watched some incredible bonds formed over the years. We do speak to birth children as part of our assessment process as it's important that they know what to expect and are open to the idea of fostering. Once you're approved, we'll provide them with the support they need and ensure they're considered when we look to place a child with you.

Can I foster if I have another job? It's possible, but we'd need to be sure you could manage this without compromising the quality of care. We'll explore all of this during your application.

The application process

Supporting you every step of the way

Becoming a foster parent will be one of the biggest life changes that you will ever make, and it's not something to be taken lightly. The application and assessment process is designed to ensure that fostering is right for you, and that you're right for fostering.

You'll have time to think and explore what it means to be a foster parent. We'll also answer any questions you have, honestly and openly so you understand exactly what's involved. The whole process can take up to 6 months. There's no pressure, and you can withdraw at any time – though of course we hope you won't. And once you've made up your mind, we'll be by your side every step of the way.

Five steps to becoming a foster parent

Once you're ready to start your fostering journey, simply call us on **0800 369 8515** or visit our website and fill out our online enquiry form. There are then five steps you'll take to become a foster parent.

First Step

Home visit - we'll either visit you at home or speak via a video call so we can get to know each other a little better, after which you can choose to take the next step and apply.

Second Step

Application - if you're ready to take the next step, you'll need to submit an application. We'll then review your application and if accepted, you'll be given a dedicated social worker who will begin your assessment.

Third Step

Assessment - the fostering assessment involves a series of social work visits, background checks and references as well as some initial training. Your social worker will guide you through this.

Fourth Step

Panel and approval - the final big step is what's called a 'fostering panel', which is where your assessment is reviewed by an independent group of care professionals. It sounds daunting, but we always make sure our foster parents are well prepared.

Fifth Step

Welcoming your first child - this could happen straight away, or it might take a little while, but before long you'll be enjoying the challenges and rewards of being a foster parent.



Supporting you professionally...

A strong foundation for fostering success

Understanding, care and commitment. These are the cornerstones of our service, and they provide a great foundation for everyone we work with. Foster parents know they'll be listened to and supported, and children and young people know they'll be looked after and encouraged. We're one big family, focused on helping people reach their full potential. But how does this work in practice?

Experienced practitioners at your side

As a foster parent with Clifford House, you'll have your own dedicated social worker who will visit you regularly to review progress and answer questions. Beyond that, there's the support of a wider professional team covering therapy, education and health as well as our managers and support staff. We're all here for you.

Tailor-made training


Expect plenty of training throughout your career. It even starts before you're approved with our 'Skills to Foster' course where you'll learn the basics during your assessment. Then there's our mandatory training that you'll need to complete during your first year of fostering. After that, there's a huge range of courses covering everything from county lines and asylum-seeking children through to dealing with trauma and abuse. These aren't obligatory, but they're great to attend because they broaden your knowledge and develop your skills.

A 'Secure Base' model

At Clifford House, we follow the 'Secure Base' model of fostering, which provides a powerful framework for caring for children with complex needs. It helps you understand their needs and behaviours, so you can respond in the most appropriate way. We'll train you in how it all works, so you can foster with confidence.

A family of foster parents

We hold regular get-togethers and social events, giving you the opportunity to catch-up with other foster parents to share news, ideas and experiences. It's a ready-made support network.



"Clifford House offers such a supportive community. Since joining as new foster parents, we've been welcomed by everyone. We have completed so many courses and attended many meetings with continued educational and emotional support. The support never runs out."

Lisa, Foster Parent




... and financially

The biggest payback from fostering is the reward of seeing a child develop and take positive steps forward – and knowing you’ve played a big part. This takes time, commitment and patience. It also takes money, because as a foster parent, you’ll be responsible for the child’s clothing, entertainment, days out and all their day-to-day living expenses.

We’ll give you a generous allowance to help cover these costs. On top of this, we’ll pay a fee to recognise your hard work and the fact that fostering is a professional career. The amount you’ll receive will depend on a number of factors, including your experience and the age of the children.

There’s more too. You’ll also receive a birthday and festival allowance for the children in your care, membership to FosterTalk, 2 weeks of paid respite per year, and access to exclusive discounts for shops, restaurants and family experiences through our rewards platform.

We also have an exclusive refer-a-friend scheme where you’ll receive up to £3,000 for every family you recommend who goes on to be approved and completes 12 months of fostering.

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark curly hair and a young girl with dark hair and bangs. They are both smiling and looking down at a tablet computer. The woman is on the left, and the girl is on the right. They are in a dimly lit room with warm string lights visible in the background. A large red semi-transparent circle is overlaid on the bottom left of the image, containing the text.

“Sometimes all you need is a friendly ear to listen - the team at Clifford House are just that and always have a positive attitude.”

Lynne, Foster Parent

Speak to a member of our team today

Call us on **0800 369 8515**

Or visit our website:
www.cliffordhousefostering.com

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