

Time to spare? Help share the care.

Making a comments or complaints

If you ever have need to make a comment or complaint about the service we provide, please raise the matter with your social worker if you have one or a member of the Family Placement Team in the first instance.

If you are not satisfied with any response given at this time you can then begin a formal complaints process. To find out more, please contact our independent Complaints Manager:

Tel.: 0800 169 4491 (24hr answer phone)

Tel.: 01344 351558 (9 am and 4.45 pm weekdays)

Email: patricia.morris@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Children, Young people and learning



Short Break Care

Time to spare? Help share the care.

Bracknell Forest Family Placement Team

Tel.: 01344 352020

bracknell-forest.gov.uk/shortbreakcare

Your Views

We would like to make sure that we give you the information that you need, in the way that you need it. We would therefore like to hear your views and comments on both the content and format of this Booklet. It is easy to contact us and there are a number of ways in which you can get in touch with us.

Accessibility

This document can be made available in large print, Braille, audio or in electronic format. Copies in alternative languages may also be obtained.

Family Placement Team
Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Time Square, Market Street
Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 1JD

Tel.: 01344 352020 Fax: 01344 351521
Minicom: 01344 352045
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bracknell-forest.gov.uk/shortbreakcare

and carefully considered, observed and protected.

The National Minimum Standards for fostering services are issued by the Department of Health and compliance is monitored by a government body called the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

They focus on three aspects:

- The needs and rights of each child and young person
- The care provided by each carer
- The responsibilities of each local authority

Take the Next Step

If you have access to the Internet, please complete an Expression of Interest form which can be completed online at

www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/shortbreakcare

Alternatively, write or call us using the following contact details:

Family Placement Team
Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Time Square, Market Street
Bracknell, Berkshire, RG12 1JD

Telephone: 01344 352020

Fax: 01344 351521

Email: shortbreakcare@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

We also hold a number of fostering open evenings throughout the year. See our website or local press for details.

Where will children sleep?

You will need a separate room if a child is to stay over but during Home Study, your accommodation will be assessed to make sure that it is safe for a child. Other than that, what you have to offer will be matched to the needs of the children placed with you.

Do I need to buy equipment for children with special needs?

No. Generally we will be able to provide you with any necessary equipment such as stair gates, buggies, cots, hoists, etc.

Can we stay in touch with children when they no longer need our support?

Yes, but only if it is seen to be in the best interests of the child.

Do I have to go to training?

Being a carer means more than just being a caring person. We will require you to undertake regular training sessions mainly to ensure you are up to date with the law, regulations and policies. Many carers attend training events on lifestyle issues which often help them to become better carers.

How much support can I expect from the Family Placement Team?

You will be allocated a supervising social worker as long as you are a short break carer.

You can contact your supervising social worker at any time although he or she will visit you once a month for formal visits to see how you are doing, if your circumstances have changed or what training or other support needs you might have.

National Minimum Standards

As the majority of looked after children are cared for by foster carers, national minimum standards for short break care have been developed to make sure that the needs of children are fully

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Foreword

This booklet expands on the basic information on our website.

The shortage of carers in the South East means that hundreds of families and children are experiencing some kind of difficulty which could be eased by your help, guidance, experience and support.

This booklet is intended to give you a more detailed picture of what short break care entails, how the assessment process works and what kind of support you could expect to receive from us once you become a short break carer.

If you have any questions which this guidance does not answer, please call us on 01344 351582 or email us at shortbreakcare@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

What is the short break care scheme?

The scheme is a support care service run by the Bracknell Forest Family Placement Team.

Historically used for children with disabilities to give their primary carer a break, in Bracknell Forest we recognise the value of short term care breaks for other families too.

Sometimes referred to as *respite care*, it is mostly used as part of a package of support for families to help children remain at home.

What's a short break?

Short breaks can involve looking after a child for a few hours or a whole day. The maximum continuous period of care under the short break scheme is 4 weeks and no more than 120 days in the year.

scheme so that a tentative match can be made.

If the child, the family and carers and you agree, an initial introduction can then be made.

If all parties want to go ahead, the length of time for visits will gradually increase, until the agreed level of support has been reached.

How much time will I be expected to give to a family?

How much time you can offer to a child, their family, or carers is up to you.

Your availability will be noted as part of your assessment and we will use the information when planning matches.

- If you decide that you can only offer a weekend a month, your social worker will not approach you in relation to a child requiring a day each week.
- If you have more or less time to give, let your supervising social worker know so that your file can be updated.

What about insurance?

You should contact your household and car insurance companies and let them know when you become an approved short break carer. It is an expectation that you will have fully comprehensive car insurance and your allowance will cover this aspect of care.

What will I know about a child before they arrive?

You will have the opportunity to talk to our social workers and will be introduced to the child and their parents.

What will the child know about me before they arrive?

Depending on the child's age and level of understanding, we will show the child a pictorial profile of you and your home to help them prepare to meet you and your family.

How should I prepare for assessment?

Our aim is to help you discover your strengths so think about your life experiences, your own memories of being parented and your relationships with siblings, and other family members. Consider also the knowledge you have gained in the workplace, or as a member of an organisation or club or from hobbies and interests.

The sort of areas we will might explore are:

- Examples of you interacting with children, caring for, playing with, explaining to or instructing a child, either your own or someone else's, or where you have shown an ability to work with a young person or their family in an open minded way
- Providing a safe and caring environment to keep children safe from harm or abuse
- Working as part of a team and working or communicating with other professional people
- How you have used or shared your experiences with others or how you have learned from others' and have been willing to take on new ideas

Can I care for more than one child?

The overall aim is that short break carers are linked to a child with whom they can develop a relationship. Some links may be required indefinitely, whereas others may be required for more defined periods of time.

If a short break carer has a lot of time to offer the scheme, they may be matched with more than one child. However, it is not intended that they care for different children at the same time.

How will I be matched to a child or family?

When a request for short break care is received, we consider the support needs of the child and the abilities of any carers on the

Typical examples of a short break include:

- Having a child come to your home one day a week for "supper and sleep over"
- Supporting a child to join a mainstream activity at school, at the weekend or during school holidays
- Looking after a child for one weekend every month

Is short break care different from private fostering?

Private fostering is where an informal agreement is made by a parent to have their child cared for by someone else for 28 days or more and the arrangements are not made by the Council or a voluntary organisation.

Private fostering arrangements only apply when a child or young person is aged up to 16 (or 18 in the case of a child who is disabled) and the person who will care for them is NOT a parent, grandparent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, step parent or an approved short break carer.

If this situation applies to your family or someone you know, please call us on 01344 351582 to request additional information.

Who benefits from short breaks?

Children

A child on the scheme can benefit from the:

- Chance to widen their horizons and experience time away from their own families
- Chance to try new activities, to make new friends and go to new places
- Chance to develop independent living skills and increased confidence in their abilities
- Enjoyment of spending time with their short break care family

and other people who they know and trust

Families

Families can benefit from a short break to:

- Relax and “recharge their batteries”
- Concentrate on other children in the family
- Spend valuable time together and reconnect with their partners, families and friends
- Have breathing space to obtain constructive help to reduce any family tensions

Short break care allows families to take “time out” to take stock, recharge their batteries and have the space they need to cope with issues before long-term care becomes a necessity.

Different types of short break care

Children can only be considered for short break care if they are aged 16 years or younger (18 years or younger if disabled). Children in the scheme come from various family backgrounds and between them have a diversity of different needs and disabilities.

Short breaks for disabled children

Most disabled children using the scheme attend special schools and for this reason they may not always have the chance to socialise and develop friendships with other children.

Despite their disability, they are first and foremost children and just like every other child, have their own individual characters, preferences and needs.

Short breaks for families and children in need

All families need support from time to time. The scheme links families going through a tough time with short break carers who

- Understanding child development
- Safe care
- Drugs awareness
- Leaving care

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ)

There is now a way to give formal credit for the work carers do and the skills they have acquired without taking exams.

It is our policy to provide the opportunity for carers to obtain a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Care (Level 3) "Caring for Children and Young People". However, there are a limited number of spaces per year and you should ask your supervising social worker about opportunities to take this course.

Many carers have found the qualification helps them to explore in more depth different issues and ways of doing things that make them a better carer. Others find it a tremendous boost to their confidence and aspirations.

Questions Asked by Prospective Carers

I don't have any children, could I still be a carer?

Yes. Whether you have experience of bringing up children or not, you may have other experiences that will make you a good carer, for example you may have:

- Cared for the children of family or friends
- Experienced separation from or the loss of people important to you, common feelings for children coming into the care system
- A responsibility for health and safety at work
- Experienced bullying, intimidation or exclusion at school or work and so be able to support a child in a similar situation

provides legal support to carers.

Local Discounts

Short break carers and their immediate dependent family members are given free access to all leisure facilities provided by Bracknell Forest Borough Council. You will need to apply for an e+ card at your local Bracknell Forest library. If you already have one, this facility can be added.

Training

We want you to enjoy being a short break carer, to be confident in what you do and proud that you are doing it to the best of your ability. We therefore provide a range of training and development opportunities.

Training Programme

Every year we arrange a programme of training for carers. In recent years we have covered a range of topics, including:

- Child protection
- Anti-discriminatory practice
- Managing difficult behaviour
- First aid for carers

We are also responsive to carers' own suggestions and have run sessions on a range of other issues that meet very specific needs:

- Managing contact with birth families
- Caring for children who have been neglected/abused
- Bereavement and loss
- Caring for toddlers
- Caring for teenagers

offer planned, time-limited, short breaks to children and young people to give parents and carers space to explore solutions to their problems.

Relief care

Short break carers also offer relief care to other carers.

Occasionally a carer needs time to devote to a particular family issue. Sometimes foster carers have a holiday planned and due to specific arrangements for the child in their care are unable to take their foster child with them.

Could you be a short break carer?

Anyone can apply to be a carer. You can be single, in a relationship, married or living with a partner. You may or may not have children of your own. You can be in full or part-time employment or unemployed and on benefits. You can be disabled, retired, male, female, from any cultural background, or of any sexual orientation.

Although there is a minimum age limit of 21 years, there is no upper age limit – as long as you are healthy and able to fulfil the necessary requirements to be a carer.

Carers don't need specific experience of raising children. We only ask that you be prepared to understand the needs of children and provide a safe, secure, stable and caring environment for them to live in.

Temporary exclusions

It is unlikely that you will be considered as a short break carer if you are:

- Pregnant
- Have a child aged 12 months or younger
- Undergoing fertility treatment

- Experiencing serious financial problems
- You live in temporary accommodation
- Planning to move within the next 6 months
- Have suffered a separation, loss or bereavement of a child or partner in the last 12 months
- A couple and have been in a relationship for less than 3 years

If any of these circumstances are likely to change in the next 6 months, you should still contact us.

Permanent exclusions

We cannot consider you as a short break carer if you:

- Or any member of your household has a conviction for a serious criminal offence (please speak to us in confidence if you have questions about this)
- Live in short-term or seasonal housing arrangements and plan to continue to do so
- Already provide short break care for another local authority or agency
- Have applied to adopt a child and are waiting for approval
- Have a child of your own being looked after by a local authority

How you become a short break carer

The law requires applicants to be formally assessed and the process can take anything from between 6-8 months. As you can see the process is led by YOU and you can withdraw at any time – all we ask is that you let us know.

1. You contact us on 01344 351582 (or via the internet at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/shortbreakcare) and we answer any questions you might have. We arrange a *Home Visit* to

Support for our Specialist Carers

- 2 weeks paid holiday relief per year
- Regular day-time support
- 24 hour emergency support
- On-going training (including NVQ Level 3 in 'Caring for Children and Young People' subject to application)
- £392.99 per child per week to recognise the extra work entailed

Taxation and Benefits

The rates do not affect any Department for Work and Pensions benefits already being paid to a carer.

National insurance contributions can't be deducted from your allowance.

From 6th April 2003 new tax rules applied.

- Short break carers are exempt from tax on the first £10,000 per year of their fostering income.
- In addition, short break carers enjoy further tax relief for every week (or part week) that a child is fostered with them.

At the end of every financial year (31st March) we provide you with a full statement of the allowances you have received over the past 12 months.

For more information, contact the Inland Revenue on 0845 302 1444 or email Child.Benefit@ir.gsi.gov.uk for information on benefits. Their web site is found at <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk>

Legal Assistance

In addition to allowances, all short break carers receive free membership of the national charity which champions short break carers and professionals - the Fostering Network - and which

- Family Support
- Allowances
- Legal Assistance
- Local Discounts
- Training—short break carers now have to meet a set of new standards devised by Children’s Workforce Development Council, which offers extra opportunities for training and development. Bracknell foster carers now receive £100 for completing five designated training events working towards these standards

Family Support

As well as ongoing support to you and your family from your supervising social worker, a number of formal and informal support mechanisms will become available to you to help you develop as a short break carer. They include social events and activities, carers’ support group, child carers support group and out-of-hours telephone support.

Financial Support/Allowances 2011/2012

TBC—contact Family Placement Team for details

visit you and your family if you want to talk further.

2. You attend *Preparation Group* which gives detailed information, advice and guidance about fostering and the potential issues involved in caring for looked after children.
3. You formally apply to become a short break carer.
4. We begin a detailed and objective evaluation of you and your household called Home Study to help better us understand what you can offer a looked after child. We also begin statutory CRB checks.
5. A detailed report to support your application to become a short break carer is written by your social worker and presented to Foster Panel for consideration, it will set out your strengths and capacity to look after looked after children and what kind of children you are best suited to care for.
6. The final decision about whether you can become a short break carer is made by someone called the *Agency Decision Maker*. Their decision follows a recommendation made by a Panel.

What is a Home Visit?

The home visit is a chance for us to give you more information about short break care and the process of becoming a carer. It also gives you the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

We’ll also outline the kind of information we will need from you as part of the assessment and why we need to ask you for it.

What is a Preparation Group?

The preparation group is an opportunity for you to meet others who are also preparing to become carers. The groups use situations and exercises to introduce and explore different parenting situations which might arise as a carer.

What is a Home Study?

One of our supervising social workers will visit you in your own home. We do this to get to know you as people and potential carers and use the time to get all the information we need to make the best possible recommendation to Panel.

What is a Supervising Social Worker?

All applicants are linked with a supervising social worker who provides supervision and support for carers and their families. They will visit and help prepare you as you go through the assessment process.

When you are approved, they will play an important role supporting you, checking that all is going well and talking through any issues or concerns you might have as a carer.

What are “CRB” checks?

The law requires us to make checks with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to confirm that you have no serious convictions. Other references from your doctor, chosen referees and employers will also be taken.

What’s Foster Panel?

The panel reviews the information and evidence in the report your supervising social worker writes for you and then makes a decision to recommend you as a short break carer or not.

The panel is made up of a number of people according to specific regulations and include:

- Panel Chairman and Vice Chairman
- Local councillors
- Medical advisor
- Director of Independent Fostering Agency
- Social work representatives

- 4 independent people

Can you attend the Panel?

Yes. The panel likes you to be as fully involved as possible and welcomes the opportunity to meet you. Many applicants find it useful to attend panel to answer any questions that arise straight away. This avoids having to go back to panel at a later date.

What happens at Panel?

First, the panel meets with your social worker. Then the Chairman meets with you before you meet the panel and join in the discussion. The panel asks you questions and you have an opportunity to ask questions of your own.

You then go into a waiting room and your supervising social worker rejoins the panel for the final discussion. They will then be able to tell you of the panel's recommendation.

After Panel

The final decision as to whether you become a carer or not is made by a senior manager within the Family Placement Team known as the *Agency Decision Maker*. Applicants will be sent a formal notification of this decision.

What happens if you are not approved?

You can write to the Agency Decision Maker within 28 days to have your application reviewed. Once additional questions have been asked and other points clarified, your report is returned to panel for a revised recommendation.

If you are not approved after resubmitting your report for a second time, we cannot take your application further.

What support is available?

You will have access to a range of guidance, support and information services as a carer including: