

## Want to Foster? 10 Insider Tips to Pass Your Assessment – Plus 5 Hazards to Avoid

Fostering assessments can feel daunting, but with the right preparation and mindset, you can approach them with clarity and confidence. Whether you're applying through **Sparks Fostering** or any other fostering provider, these practical tips and warnings will help you succeed.

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### ✔ 10 Tips to Pass Any Fostering Assessment

#### 1. Be Honest – Always

Social workers aren't looking for perfect people. They're looking for *real* people with integrity. Be open about your past, your challenges, and your motivations. Honesty builds trust – and that's the foundation of a strong assessment. Even small omissions or perceived dishonesty can cause the assessment to end prematurely.

#### 2. Show That You're Reflective

You don't need to have all the answers, but you do need to reflect on your experiences. What have you learned from tough times? How have you grown? Fostering requires emotional intelligence, and reflection is key.

#### 3. Be Open to Learning

You're not expected to know everything, but you must be ready to learn. Show that you're open to training, feedback, and support. Agencies value carers who are coachable and curious.

#### 4. Get Your Home "Assessment-Ready"

Your home doesn't need to be spotless or stylish – just safe, clean, and suitable for children. Ensure you have adequate space, working smoke alarms, secure windows, and that any pets are well-managed. You'll receive a copy of the assessment form at the start of your journey, which outlines the standards expected within your home.

#### 5. Prepare Your Household

Everyone living with you should be on board – from partners to teenage children. Social workers will want to see that fostering is a shared commitment and won't cause tension or instability at home.

#### 6. Understand the Needs of Looked-After Children

Do some research on trauma, attachment, and childhood adversity. This shows you're serious about meeting children where they are – not where we wish they were. The **Sparks Fostering website** is a great place to start, with a comprehensive A to Z of fostering topics to help you prepare.

#### 7. Keep Records and Stay Organised

During the assessment, you'll need to provide documents like references, GP details, employment history, and financial information. Having these ready early saves stress and shows that you're reliable. While the Sparks Fostering assessment is thorough, it's also structured and supportive. Just follow the guidance and keep us informed if any delays occur.

#### 8. Practice Good Communication

You don't need to be a public speaker – but clear, respectful communication is essential. Listen well, ask questions, and respond thoughtfully. This is a partnership, not an interview.

## **9. Think About Your Support Network**

Fostering can be emotionally demanding, and agencies want to know who supports *you*. Whether it's friends, extended family, or a community group, having a reliable support network is crucial – especially when caring for children with complex needs.

## **10. Be Clear About Your Motivation**

Why do you want to foster? There's no "perfect" answer – just be sincere. Whether your reasons are rooted in faith, personal experience, or a desire to give back, strong and child-centred motivation is what counts. Fostering – like parenting a traumatised child – is a rewarding but challenging journey.

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## **⚠ 5 Hazards Every Foster Carer Must Avoid**

### **1. Trying to Impress Instead of Being Yourself**

Don't just say what you think the assessor wants to hear. Social workers are trained to notice inconsistencies – and trying to "perform" can backfire. Authenticity matters.

### **2. Withholding or Minimising Past Issues**

Whether it's a past relationship, debt, or personal difficulty – hiding it won't help. Most challenges can be worked through, but only if you're honest about them.

### **3. Thinking It's "Just Like Parenting"**

Fostering is a form of parenting – but it comes with added complexity. Many children in care have experienced trauma and loss. Underestimating this can set you up for disappointment or failure. You can learn more about trauma and attachment on the Sparks Fostering website.

### **4. Being Overconfident or Resistant to Change**

Confidence is helpful – but humility is essential. If you resist feedback or assume you know everything already, assessors may be concerned about your ability to adapt to a child's needs. At Sparks Fostering, we value your experience, and we expect a culture of mutual respect – one that honours both your skills and the expertise of the wider professional team.

### **5. Ignoring the Impact on Your Own Family**

Fostering affects everyone in the household. If you haven't thoroughly discussed the emotional and practical implications with your family, it will become apparent during the assessment.

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## **✨ Final Thought**

Fostering is one of the most rewarding things you can do – but it also comes with real challenges. The assessment process is there to ensure children are placed in homes that are safe, stable, and loving. If you approach the journey with humility, honesty, and a heart for children, you're already off to a strong start.