Could you foster?

Most people who wonder about fostering rule themselves out before they ever ask. Usually for a reason that was never a barrier in the first place.

What's inside

1. What actually rules you out — and what doesn't
2. What fostering with Sparks pays
3. What the process involves, start to finish

Sparks Fostering is an independent fostering agency working across the whole of England. We are rated Good, Good and Outstanding by Ofsted.

No form to fill in to read this. When you're ready, the quickest next step is our fifteen-minute quiz at sparksfostering.org/free-quiz.

SECTION ONE

What rules you out — and what doesn't

These are the things people most often assume disqualify them. Almost none of them do.

I'm renting	Not a barrier. We ask your landlord for a reference as part of the application, covering rent arrears, eviction notices and whether fostering would breach your tenancy.
I'm single	Not a barrier. Many of our foster carers are single. What matters is capacity — being available for school runs, appointments and meetings.
I'm too old	There is no upper age limit. The deciding factor is health, now and over the next few years. The minimum age is 21.
I have a criminal record	Usually not a barrier. A shoplifting offence as a teenager will not stop you. Certain offences — mostly serious offending against children — are excluded by law. If you're unsure, ask us; we'd rather tell you than have you not apply.
I have a health condition	Past health problems, and some current ones, do not necessarily prevent you fostering. We ask about your health at application and confirm it with a medical check.
I have a job	You can work and foster. What we do need is that your household isn't financially dependent on fostering income — there can be gaps between children, and the allowance is only paid while a child is living with you. There's a financial check at assessment.
I have pets	Pets are fine and are assessed — every pet, down to the fish tank. Dangerous dog breeds are the exception.
I have my own children	Not a barrier. Your own children are part of the assessment and their views matter.
I smoke	You can foster, but not smoke inside the home or in vehicles used for fostering.
I'm not a British citizen	Not a barrier. Nothing in the regulations requires a foster carer to be British or settled, and right-to-work rules don't apply because foster carers aren't employees.

The one that is a real requirement

You need at least one spare bedroom. A child we place can't share a room with anyone other than their own sibling, and only then if their social worker agrees. The room needs space for a single bed and storage for their things.

SECTION TWO

What it pays

Most agencies won't put a number in writing. Here is ours.

Our carers are currently paid £750 or more a week, per child.

That reflects the children we place — mostly teenagers whose needs are above standard care, though not high-level. The published range is £500 to £1,000 a week per child, linked to the needs of the child you're caring for.

How the money works

The local authority pays Sparks a fee for each child. Half of that fee goes to you. Your half splits again: one part is the child's allowance, covering their costs — food, clothing, mileage, clubs and activities, pocket money, the extra on the household bills. The other part is your fee, which is payment for the work itself.

What this compares to

Published weekly rates for other agencies in our region cluster around £450 to £500 per child for this age group, and the local authority's own rate for 11 to 15 year olds is £381 to £498. These are rates taken from providers' own websites.

Worth knowing before you count on it

The allowance is only paid while a child is living with you, and there can be a gap of some months between approval and a first placement. Fostering shouldn't be the income a household depends on — that's why there's a financial check during assessment. We'd rather say that plainly now than have it come as a surprise later.

SECTION THREE

What the process actually involves

Four stages. We've put the real numbers against each one.

1. The short quiz	About fifteen minutes. It tells us the sort of children you could care for, and tells you whether there's anything worth talking through before you go further.
2. Stage one — your application	Around 48 hours of your time in total: 17 hours working through our policies and therapeutic care guidance, 26 hours completing your own record, and five hour-long check-ins with the assessment manager. At three hours a week that's about sixteen weeks, and less if you can do more. Your references, DBS and medical all start in the first fortnight, because they depend on other people.
3. Stage two — your assessment	Your assessor picks up the application you've already part-written. Four meetings — two online calls and two visits to your home — which come to around nine to twelve hours together.
4. Panel and approval	An independent fostering panel reads your assessment and makes a recommendation. You get a copy of the report before it goes, and ten working days to add your own comments, which go to panel with it. Once you're approved we match you with a child and support you from the day they arrive.

Two things we won't do

We won't tell you how to pass an assessment. The assessment works precisely because it's honest, and an applicant who performs well is harder to match a child with, not easier. Say the difficult things early — almost all of them can be worked through.

We won't leave you to guess the pace. If life gets in the way, tell us and we'll agree a new plan and write it down. What doesn't work is silence.

What to do next: take the quiz

It takes about fifteen minutes and tells us the sort of children you could care for. It's the quickest way to get a real answer about your own situation, and there's no obligation at the end of it.

sparksfostering.org/free-quiz

Prefer to talk first? Call 07920 097 834 or email apply@sparksfostering.org. No one will chase you either way.

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