Adoption and fostering

Adoption is a way of becoming the legal parent of a child who cannot live with their birth family. It is permanent and you become a legal guardian. Many people can adopt. Some people choose to adopt over having biological children in order to give vulnerable children a loving home. You can adopt if you:

- are over 21 - there is no upper age limit
- are married, single or living with a partner of any gender
- have somewhere to live – whether rented or owned
- are in reasonable health
- have enough energy to care for a child during their dependent years
- have finished any fertility treatment
- have been a non-smoker for six months
- have lived in the UK for at least a year
- have no children
- have a child/ren that are 3 or over

It can cost between £4,000 and £9,000 to apply to adopt a child.

Fostering is when you temporarily care for a child to provide them with a safe and stable home. This temporary care can last forever! The foster family will share parental responsibility with the local authority (council) and birth parents for the child.

All sorts of different children need foster care, including teenagers, babies, children with disabilities and sibling groups. It might be because their family isn't able to look after them or there is a problem at home. Some children have experienced trauma or have been separated from their families. Local authorities decide when a child can't stay with their family. For example, Essex County Council are responsible for all the children in care in Essex. They help decide if children need foster care and then they match them with suitable families to give them the best possible outcome.

Typically, fostering has a much higher demand than adoption. There are around 75,000 children and young people in foster care in the UK – and around 6,800 of these children still need a foster home. On the other hand, with adoption, there are around 6,000 children in need of adoption each year – showing that there is much higher demand for foster carers to help change a young person's life. Foster carers are paid by the local authority for the care they provide, this money covers expenses like food and clothes.