Department for Education

A new rulebook for fostering

Government call for evidence response for children and young people

June 2026

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Introduction

In February 2026, the government launched a call for evidence about A new rulebook for Fostering. We asked children what they think about how fostering works now and our new ideas to make fostering better.

We asked some general questions to understand what foster care is really like. This included good and difficult experiences, feeling safe, relationships, and support.

We also asked about two issues:

1. Changing how many children a foster carer can look after
2. Making it easier for family and friends to care for children who cannot live at home

What is this document about?

Thank you to everyone who shared their thoughts. We have listened carefully to what you told us and thought about all the different ideas. Your views help us understand what works well and what could be improved.

We used computer tools (called artificial intelligence) to help us look at everyone's answers, but real people checked everything to make sure it was correct. You can find more about this in Annex A.

This document explains what you told us and what the government will do next. It starts with the main points, then gives more detail about each topic.

Summary

The online survey was on the website, GOV.UK, for six weeks, from 4 February to 17 March 2026.

The Department for Education (DfE) received 33 responses to the online questionnaire from children.[1]

We also spoke to foster carers, social workers, charities and other people about our ideas. We asked them to share their views in an online survey. What they told us, and what we will do next, in explained in the Fostering reform: proposed changes to assessment and handling allegations of abuse consultation response and Fostering for the future: improving the foster care system call for evidence response.

What children told us

Children told us that feeling loved, safe and part of the family is very important. They said that they like foster carers who are kind, patient and support their school, friendships and hobbies. Children also said that staying in touch with their family they don't live with is very important, when it is safe.

They shared some things that could be better. They said that their social workers change too often, that they are not always listened to, and that not all decisions are explained to them. Some children also said they feel frustrated that foster carers cannot make everyday choices like other families, such as whether they can go to a sleepover at a friend's house.

Children want to know where they will live next year and that they won't get moved suddenly, to understand what is happening and why, and adults who listen and care. Keeping siblings together, getting the right support and living close to people and places they know, also matters.

What we will do

We know many children want changes to make fostering better. We heard different views about how to do this.

We are re-writing rules which foster carers and the people who support them have to follow, to make them better and clearer so children have better experiences and

[1]In this document, 'children' includes children and young people (i.e. anyone under 18)

outcomes. We will use these responses to help us think about what changes to make to the current rules.

We also understand that some ideas need more thought. We will keep learning and listening to make sure changes are safe, fair, and helpful for children.

Detailed feedback

This section shares more detail about what children told us in the survey. It looks at each topic we asked about and explains the main ideas and themes we heard.

What children told us about the general questions

Children shared that feeling loved, safe and part of a family is the most important part of foster care. They liked carers who include them, listen to them, and treat them like their own children. Everyday things like spending time together, having fun, and feeling accepted by everyone in the foster family all helped them feel like they belong. One child said that in their foster home:

> *'I was part of the whole family. My carers mom would come over most days and we called her Nana.'*

Support from carers was also very important. Children valued help with school work, making friends, and trying new hobbies. They also appreciated carers who speak up for them. One child said their carer would:

> *'always have my back even when the social worker doesn't.'*

Children told us that feeling heard matters. Many felt carers listened to them, but some said social workers did not always listen or changed too often. This made it harder to build trust. Children wanted clearer explanations about decisions and for people to listen to their opinions. One child said:

> *'I would like my social worker to explain properly why I am in care.'*

Strong relationships helped children feel settled, especially with friends and teachers. Being able to see friends, join activities, and live like other children their age helped them feel 'normal'.

Children also shared what they find difficult. This included being far from family, not always being treated equally in the home and their social workers changing often. Some were upset about being separated from siblings or not understanding why decisions were made.

Children said adults should be kind, listen carefully, and keep promises. As one child said, they want adults to remember:

> *'I am a person not just a tick box.'*

Many children hope to do well in school, have a job they enjoy, and build a happy, stable family life. They said adults can help by supporting their learning, listening more, and being consistent.

What we will do

The government understands that many children want changes to make fostering better. People had different views about what should change and how this should happen.

We are re-writing the rules that foster carers and the people who support foster families have to follow. We will use what children told us, including how important it is for children to feel safe, supported, and listened to, when re-writing the rules

The government is working to make strong, loving relationships which last a long time the most important part of how we support children in care.[2] We want every child to have people in their life who care about them and stay with them as they grow up.

We will change rules and guidance to focus more on helping children to keep and build relationships. We will support family connections and help children stay close to people they know.

We are also testing new ideas, sharing what works well, and checking that services are doing the right thing. Our aim is to help children feel safe, loved, and supported.

What children told us about Issue 1: The fostering limit (how many children carers can look after)

We asked what children thought about the rule that most carers can look after a maximum of three children.

Children said having fewer children in a home can mean more time, attention, and space, helping them feel safe and calm. This can help make their foster home feel more like a family home. Many said carers could look after more children to keep siblings together. Most children felt it is very important to check everyone is safe and happy.

However, some said that the rule can also mean siblings are split up or carers cannot help more children. Living with more children can feel fun and like a big family, but also noisy, with less attention and more arguments.

What we will do

We have not made a decision about whether changes to the 3 child limit are needed. We will think more about this and consider how we can ensure that children have the space,

[2] While the legal term is ‘looked after children’, this document uses ‘children in care’, reflecting the terminology preferred by children themselves.

attention and support the need, while making sure siblings can stay together and carers can help each other e.g. by having weekend sleepovers with more than 3 foster children.

We will make sure these decisions are safe and right for every child.

We will keep listening to children to understand their experiences and what they think.

What children told us about Issue 2: Removing barriers for kinship care (making it easier for family and friends to look after children who can't live at home)

We asked children what they thought about staying with family and friends as their carers.

They shared mixed experiences saying it sometimes was not possible due to space or safety.

They said family and friend carers need the right training, checks, and support to help them feel confident and keep children safe, just like other foster carers.

What we will do

The Law Commission is a group of experts who look at laws and suggest ways to make them clearer and better.

They are reviewing the rules about carers who are friends and family and will soon ask people for their views on new ideas. We will wait for their final report before making bigger changes.

In the meantime, we will work with councils to make sure they follow the guidance and support family and friends carers properly.

Department for Education

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