

For the sons and daughters of foster carers

Thrive

**Your
problems
solved**

with Matt

**GWEN'S
TRUE-LIFE STORY**

**The
Fostering
Network**

You're a star!

**Ten awesome
skills you've
already nailed**

**FRUSTRATIONS,
FRIENDSHIPS AND FUN**

**What fostering is
really like**



Get the lowdown...

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- 3** What's **being part of a fostering family** really like? Here's the lowdown.
- 4** Gwen's family has fostered 40 children so far! **Here's a peek into her life.**
- 5** Don't get mad if other kids stress you out. Check out our **top tips for staying calm.**
- 6** Pants? **Sharing your stuff? No problem!** Matt's here to sort you out.
- 8** **Ten uber fostering talents** you've already nailed.
Listen up! **What your parents need to know about YOU!**
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- 10** Ellie and Maisy tell us about **the ups and downs of fostering.**

Hey guys!

This edition of Thrive is especially for sons and daughters of fostering families. Whether you're just starting your fostering journey or you've already got loads of foster brothers and sisters, there's something in this mag for you.

We know that sometimes life at home is complicated and that occasionally you'll feel angry or upset. And we know that other times are amazing when you're all enjoying things, having a laugh and knowing that you're doing a really important thing.

This edition of Thrive aims to help you learn more about the world of fostering - when it's great and not so great - to help make fostering better for everyone.

And finally, we know that you guys are often under-appreciated, so here's a massive THANK YOU from all of us for everything you do to welcome children and young people into your homes.

We know you're all helping to make other children's lives better - amazing!

This magazine has been written for you. Enjoy!



A big up to...

...all the young people who've shared their ideas and experiences with us.

When it comes to writing Thrive, we aim to tell our readers' real-life stories and reveal your smart solutions to problems. Who better to ask? You all live with the reality of fostering day in, day out. Without your contributions, we just couldn't create this mag. Thank you!

A shout out too to the fostering team at Carmarthenshire County Council and the parents and grandparents who have chatted to us about the experiences of fostering families.



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Let's Talk

'You may have to help more around the house and with the foster children if they're young.'

'Fostering is stressful, exhausting and infuriating, but I have gained so much.'



What's being part of a fostering family actually like? Sons and daughters of foster carers give us their views...

'It takes 15 minutes to get everyone into the car.'

'After you've fostered for a while, other people's houses are sooooo quiet!'



'Some children don't have supportive loving backgrounds like us and I like being able to share my family.'

'The foster children make me laugh. I like having lots of brothers and sisters because they keep me company.'



'It's strange at the start, but you get used to it.'

Gwen, 16, has two younger sisters and her family currently fosters two boys aged six and seven. She gives us a peek into her life at home...

Real life stories!

What do you think about fostering?

I love it. We've been fostering for 14 years - since my sister Ella was born. We've had 40 children join our family so far. It's brilliant for a child who hasn't had the same upbringing as us to be brought up in a big family so that they can learn about sharing and making friends.

What do your friends think about it?

My friends are really kind people and they're really supportive. I don't tell them confidential stuff, but they understand that we are a fostering family.

What are some of the challenges of fostering?

Sometimes when you have a child with challenging behaviour your parents may focus on them more and you feel left out. But if you chat to your parents, they'll understand that they need to give some attention back to you.

If it's stressing you out, what do you do?

We've got plenty of space in our house, so we can go and sit up in our bedrooms and clear our minds.

Do you have any advice for other young people whose families are thinking about fostering?

I think they need to discuss it as a whole family. It's not just the parents who foster, the children are a big part of it. But I'd say go for it because you are helping so many lives. Every child that we've had in our house has taken a bit of our hearts with them when they have moved on.

'We can go and sit up in our bedrooms and clear our minds'



DON'T FREAK OUT!

Sometimes it's challenging sharing your home with another child or teenager. But don't get mad. Instead, here's what you can do...



- ✓ If something happens that winds you up, stay calm. Try really hard not to lose it and shout.
- ✓ Go into another room and discuss it with your parents.
- ✓ You can talk to your family's social worker separately too.
- ✓ Try keeping a diary or writing a list of the things you find good and bad about fostering. If you show it to your parents, it will help them understand what your life is like and they can help you deal with the things that you're finding difficult.
- ✓ Find out if there's a group for sons and daughters of foster carers nearby - it's good to have mates who have things in common with you.
- ✓ Try to understand why some kids need extra attention - this might help you cope better.
- ✓ Make sure that you have some time out to do the things that you want to do.
- ✓ Ask your parents if you can have some one on one time with them.
- ✓ Some things are super-serious, like bullying. It's ok to say that you're upset or frightened - don't deal with this tough stuff on your own. Tell someone!



It's a cover up!

Q In the mornings I usually come downstairs to get breakfast in my boxers and a t-shirt. But my mum says I'm going to have to wear a dressing gown when we start fostering. Why do I have to do that? It's my home, after all.

Matt says: Some things have to change when you start fostering. There will be new people living in your house and **everyone needs to stay safe and feel comfortable** in each other's company. Together, your family will make a 'safer caring plan' which sets out some rules and guidelines about things like keeping some places in the house private - such as your bedroom - and dressing so that no one feels embarrassed or awkward. If you don't like wearing a dressing gown, maybe **a pair of shorts or some joggers will do the trick.**



Not fair, won't share

Q I know that it's good to share your stuff with foster children who come to stay, but do I really have to share everything?

Matt says: You're amazing for sharing so many of your things with the foster children in your family. But I know that some things are really precious to you. **Talk to your mum and dad about having a safe place to keep some of your treasured belongings** and ask them to help you explain to the young children why they are in a safe place. Then you can share some of your things, but not everything.

A PROBLEM SHARED **Ask Matt...**

Get an answer you can trust, right here.

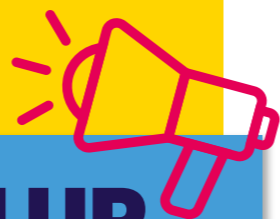
Q We've had a little girl called Alice living with our family since she was one. She's going to move on soon to be adopted. We were her first real family and it upsets me to think that I'll never see her again - we want to be sisters forever.

Matt says: I know it's a really difficult time for you both, but try to remember that your foster sister is going to a new family where she'll be loved and cared for in the same way that your family loved and cared for her. **Tell your parents how you both feel.** Alice's social worker can make sure that you and your family are involved in helping Alice settle into her new home. And, in most cases, there's no reason why you shouldn't see the children who have been living with you again - in fact it's usually really important that you do - so you can all make a plan for how you can keep in touch with Alice after she's moved.

Together but not forever?



You've got life skills!



Be proud of these ten uber-talents you've developed as part of a fostering family

- 1 Patience:** remember that time you spent listening to the same song again and again with that teenager? It made him super-happy though!
- 2 Empathy:** your mates have no idea what some children's lives are really like, but you do.
- 3 Self-control:** you're really good at biting your tongue when you want to SCREAM!
- 4 Sharing:** you're the best at lending your foster bro your hair wax.
- 5 Tolerance:** some people behave differently – that's all.
- 6 Listening:** you've heard some mad stories and most of the time you manage not to look shocked at all!
- 7 Reflection:** when you chat about what's happened and how it's made you feel.
- 8 Caring:** you can feed a baby while singing a lullaby – you rock!
- 9 Creativity:** you can turn any kid's frown into a smile with potato prints or origami.
- 10 Tech-savvy:** the little ones can't get the iPad to work. Lucky you're on hand to help!



LISTEN UP

Hey, you! We're still here! What parents need to remember about their own children when they're fostering...

- ✓ **Treat us all equally – be fair!**
- ✓ **Don't expect us to be BFF with all foster children. We'll try, but it might not work out.**
- ✓ **We know that foster children might need some extra attention from you, but make some chill-out time for just us to be together too.**
- ✓ **Make sure we've got somewhere safe to keep our most precious things.**

A whirlwind of fun!

When a new foster baby suddenly arrived at her home one Friday evening, Evie was excited. She writes about her experiences that day...

One Friday in school, my mobile buzzed from under my coat, so I decided to take a cheeky peek to see who it was.

It was my mum, with some fantastic news: a new baby was on the way! I was so excited. We hadn't had a short-term foster child in a very long time and I had missed having a little one in the house.

When the bell rang for the end of the day, I whizzed out of the school gates. For the whole walk home, I couldn't stop imagining what the new baby was going to be like. Boy or girl? Dark hair or blonde?

I arrived home to find four adults sitting around our dining table. I just wanted to see the baby. But forms had to be filled out and signed, so I decided to make myself scarce until they had gone.

When the house had quietened down, I made my way downstairs. There he was. The smallest, cutest, cheeriest baby I had ever seen. I scooped him up in my arms and gave him a tight hug. I knew that looking after him was going to be a whirlwind of fun.



'There he was. The smallest, cutest, cheeriest baby I had ever seen!'

Real life stories: Changing children's lives

Ellie, 18, and Maisy, 17, have three older brothers and LOADS of foster siblings. At the moment, they're fostering a two-year-old, an 11-year-old and a group of siblings aged five, seven and eight

Ellie:

We got everyone together in the family and had a discussion to find out what everyone felt about fostering. **I was kinda excited about something different happening** and we've been fostering for seven years now.

Maisy:

If a family is thinking about fostering **you need to let the children understand what's involved**. Some children who come to live with us have different challenges and health problems.

Ellie:

It's going to affect the children in the family, but it's nice seeing how you can change someone's life.

Maisy:

I'm home schooled and I play a lot with the younger ones. Some of them are behind with learning so **I help them with colours and counting and singing**.



Ellie:

My friends like coming over and playing with the little ones too. I take nice photos of us and the kids and it would be nice to post them on social media, but we can't, **you've got to be careful about that sort of thing** in case you put someone at risk.

Maisy:

Because I'm at home a lot **I often meet the foster children's mums and dads**. And I like to know where they are going to when they move on. If they are being adopted, I can sometimes visit the adopters' home, which means that I get to know what their bedroom is like and what type of life they are going to have.

Ellie:

We fostered one little girl who left to be adopted and her new family said they'd keep in touch, but they didn't. That was difficult. **We were waiting for news all the time and it never came**. Lots do keep in touch though - one sent me an 18th birthday card recently.

Maisy:

It's really rewarding when they go to new families. And you know we've helped them to change.