

# **Northern Ireland Fostering Services Minimum Standards - CONSULTATION -**



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

## **Young Person's Version**

The Department of Health is in charge of making sure that all children and young people in Northern Ireland are well cared for and grow up safely. Usually, children and young people live with their families but sometimes, for all sorts of reasons, they can't. When this happens the Department of Health needs to make sure that children and young people live with other family members, in a care home, or with foster parents in a foster home.

It is important that all fostering services are checked regularly. In Northern Ireland, this will be done by an organisation called the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). We need to make sure that good decisions about children and young people are being made, and that children's welfare and rights are looked after.

The new Minimum Standards will apply to everyone who provides fostering services. The RQIA will use the new standards to make sure that all children and young people in foster care have the best care, are safe and supported while in foster care.

## **Background**

There are about 4,000 children and young people in care in Northern Ireland. Around half of them live with people in their wider family, like aunts, uncles or grandparents. This is called kinship care. About a third live with foster parents who aren't part of their family.

**We believe every child in care should have a safe, loving home where they feel supported.**

People who want to become foster parents can do this through their local Health and Social Care Trust or through an independent fostering agency. Before any child comes to live with them, foster parents have to be properly checked and approved. This is to make sure they can give the best care, and so they can get the help they need to support the children they look after.

The new Minimum Standards are for all foster parents, no matter if they're related to the child or not, or whether they foster through a Trust or an Agency. These standards will help make sure that every child gets the same level of care and support.

The Minimum Standards also work with something called the Northern Ireland Framework for Integrated Therapeutic Care (NIFITC). This is a plan to help Trusts and Agencies understand what a child has been through and make sure children in care have the best chance of the life they deserve which respects their feelings and their rights.

# Values and Principles

## What We Believe Is Important for Children in Foster Care



Your safety and wellbeing  
always come first



You should have a happy childhood and  
get help to grow your skills and talents  
for the future



You should feel loved and  
cared for as you grow up



Your thoughts and feelings matter,  
and adults should listen to you and  
take you seriously



You are unique, and you should get  
the right support to feel confident  
in who you are



If you have a disability or need extra help,  
you should get the care and support  
that's right for you



Your culture, background, and  
beliefs are important and should  
be respected and supported



Staying connected with your family, like  
birth parents and relatives, is important,  
and you should be able to have family  
time when it's safe and right for you



You should be treated fairly and given the  
chance to experience life without being  
stopped from doing things unless there's  
a really good reason.



Having a good relationship with  
your foster parents matters



Foster parents should get all the  
information they need to be able  
to look after you properly



Foster parents should be given support  
and training to help them care for you



All the adults in your life should  
work together to give you the  
best care possible



Children and foster parents should  
be treated fairly, no matter where  
they live in Northern Ireland

**The Minimum  
Standards for  
Fostering Services  
are based on these  
beliefs.**

# The Standards

There are eleven standards for how fostering services should be managed, to make sure children, young people and foster parents are supported, and that care is the best it can be.

## **Standard 1    Each child in foster care experiences integrated care that supports their wellbeing**

This means every child living with a foster family gets help from caring adults who work together to keep them healthy, safe and happy.

## **Standard 2    The needs of each child in foster care are understood and met**

This means adults listen to what each child needs and make sure they get the right support.

## **Standard 3    Foster parents, staff and other caregivers have the right skills and support to care for children**

This means adults involved in a child's care know how best to look after them, and they have people to turn to for help.

## **Standard 4    Leaders inspire and enable high quality care that delivers the best possible outcomes for children**

This means the people in charge make sure everyone does their best to help children grow up safe, healthy and happy.

## **Standard 5    The physical environment within the foster home is welcoming, safe and inclusive for children**

This means children living with foster families feel safe, welcome and that they belong.

**Standard 6 Children and their foster parents and parents are meaningfully involved**

This means children and their foster parents get to share their thoughts and ideas, and are part of important decisions.

**Standard 7 The intrinsic worth of each child in foster care is valued and promoted**

This means every child living with a foster family matters and is important just as they are.

**Standard 8 The unique experiences of each child in foster care are recognised and responded to with tailored support that acknowledges and addresses adversity and trauma**

This means people understand that every child living with a foster family has their own story, and they get the right kind of support and care for what they've been through.

**Standard 9 Children benefit from relationships with foster parents, birth families and people important to them**

This means children in care feel safer and happier by having good relationships with foster parents, their birth families, and other people who are special to them.

**Standard 10 Children benefit from well-managed, positive and individualised transitions**

This means when a child moves to somewhere new, adults help make the change smooth, positive and right for them.

**Standard 11 Children in foster care with more complex needs receive timely, high quality specialist interventions to help them recover and thrive**

This means children that need extra help get special care quickly, so they can feel better and do well.

## What do you think?

Now that you have read the standards, we want to know what you think of them. If you have any ideas that might help make the Standards better, then please send us your ideas by:

**Sunday 7 September 2025**

You can fill in the questionnaire online at the below link:

<https://consultations2.nidirect.gov.uk/doh-1/consultation-on-fostering-services-min-standards>

You can fill in the word version of the consultation questionnaire (available in the same link) which can be emailed to the Department of Health at:

[lookedafterchildren@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:lookedafterchildren@health-ni.gov.uk)

