

Emergency foster care

Providing safety and stability in moments that matter most

**LIFE
WITHOUT
BARRIERS**

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Fostering eventually felt like a natural development, but it was important for us that we waited until we felt we were in the right place in life to be able to prioritise the care of a young person, before we jumped in,

[Chris and Sophiaan](#)

Emergency foster care is a type of short-term foster care where a child is cared for by a foster family on very short notice, often due to an urgent situation or crisis. These care arrangements are temporary and typically occur when a child cannot remain in their current home or care arrangement for safety reasons or unexpected situations arise. Emergency foster care aims to provide a safe, stable, and supportive environment while longer-term plans are made for the child's care.

Key features of emergency foster care

- **Immediate**

Children may come into emergency foster care at any time, often with little notice, such as during the night, weekends, or holidays. These care arrangements happen when a child needs to be removed from their home urgently due to child protection concerns or an unexpected breakdown of their current care arrangement.

- **Short-term**

Emergency foster care is intended to be a temporary solution, typically lasting from a few days to a few weeks, while a child's situation is assessed and plan made for their next steps, such as reunification with family, care by members of their kinship network, or a longer-term foster care arrangement. The timeframe of care can change at short notice.

- **Flexibility**

Emergency carers must be highly flexible, as they may not have detailed information about the child's background or needs before the care arrangement. They must be prepared to respond to the emotional and practical needs of children arriving in distressing circumstances. Emergency foster carers are responsive and proactive.

- **Emotional support**

Emergency foster carers play a critical role in providing immediate emotional stability for children who may be frightened, confused, or upset. Offering comfort and reassurance is key in the early days of emergency care arrangements as this may be their first time away from home and filled with uncertainty. Emergency carers must be resilient and emotionally intelligent to remain responsive rather than reactive to the behaviours they may experience.

- **Preparation for next steps**

While caring for a child in an emergency care arrangement, foster carers work closely with the child's care team to help plan the child's next move, whether it's returning home, being cared for by relatives, or moving to a long-term foster care arrangement. Carers who are committed to assisting with transitions are key in emergencies.

- **Uncertainty**

Emergency care situations are not only unplanned but there may also be a lot of uncertainty surrounding the length of care arrangement and the child's needs. Often, little is known about the child's experiences and level of need, so curious and observant carers play an essential role in uncovering and sharing information about the child's development and history. Emergency care arrangements may vary in length and depend on the outcome of assessments, legal action and next steps for the child and their family.

Why emergency foster care is needed

There are many reasons emergency fostering is needed; however, the following are some everyday situations whereby emergency fostering serves an important role.

- **Sudden Family Crisis:** A parent may be hospitalised, incarcerated, or otherwise unable to care for their child, necessitating immediate removal from the home.
- **Abuse or Neglect:** If child protection authorities believe a child is in immediate danger due to abuse or neglect, they may need to arrange care in emergency foster care while the situation is investigated.
- **Breakdown of Other Care Arrangements:** Sometimes, a child's previous foster care arrangement may break down, requiring an emergency solution until a new, more suitable care arrangement is found.

Qualities of emergency foster carers

Emergency foster carers are special people with unique qualities that help children feel safe, secure and heard during times of stress and uncertainty. They are:

- **Calm Under Pressure:** Emergency carers must be calm and patient when dealing with distressed children, offering them emotional support in times of uncertainty.
- **Adaptable:** Since emergency care arrangements can happen anytime and with little warning, foster carers must be adaptable and ready to take in children of different ages and backgrounds.
- **Resilient:** Due to the unpredictable and urgent nature of these care arrangements, emergency carers must be emotionally resilient and have strong support systems in place.
- **Prepared:** Emergency comes with little notice, so carers should have the supplies and resources in place to care for various children at any time.
- **Knowledgeable:** A strong understanding of the child protection system and a child's journey in care sets emergency carers up for success.
- **Financially stable:** In emergencies, children may come with a few of the basics they need, which carers may need to supply before reimbursement is possible.
- **Open-minded:** Emergency carers need to be open and ready to take on a variety of children from different backgrounds, displaying different pain-based behaviours and with various interests and needs.
- **Accepting:** In times of uncertainty and trauma, children may act out and need carers who can be accepting and understanding.
- **Communicators:** Emergency carers are a vital part of the team around children, and with their daily care, they will hold important information that will help inform decisions about the child's future and, most importantly, the child's voice.

Things to consider

When thinking about whether emergency fostering is right for you and your family, there are some things to consider:

- Do your current work and other commitments allow you time to be available for children at short notice? Can you be present for a child who may not be attending daycare or school when uprooted from home?
- Is your home a calm and predictable environment with the flexibility to adapt to children's needs at uncertain times? Would you be able to be calm in a chaotic situation?
- Do you have the resilience and emotional stamina to be a steady, stable sounding board for children who are hurting when taken out of their home environments? Do you understand the trauma involved in separation from family and how this may present? Can you separate your emotional response to behaviour from your relationship with children?
- Are you a good communicator who works well in teams? Are you willing and able to take on the administrative tasks of fostering in emergencies?

- Are you open to supporting family visits and communication during uncertain and emotional times?
- Is your home set up to meet the needs of various developmental stages at short notice? Can you maintain a supply of goods to meet the basic needs of multiple age groups?

Emergency foster care provides vital care, ensuring that children in crisis have a safe, secure, and nurturing environment to go to when they need it most. If you are ready for anyone and anything that lands on your doorstep, emergency care is something you and your family can provide to children in need. Get in touch.

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