

# Preparing for the years ahead

A Guide for Foster & Kinship Carers

## Why this resource?

Caring for children over time is a journey that unfolds in layers. There are seasons of settling, seasons of stretch, and moments where it helps to pause and take stock. Preparing for the years ahead is not about predicting what will happen. It is about noticing what has already been built, what has changed, and what support helps care remain steady and sustainable.

As you read, you may notice questions woven through the module. These are gentle invitations to reflect — you don't need to answer them all, or answer them at all.

## Reflecting on the past year

So much of caring happens quietly. The everyday routines, the repeated reassurance, the small moments of repair and connection often go unnoticed — yet they form the foundation of safety. You might pause and notice:

- When has this child seemed most settled or at ease in your care?
- What routines or ways of responding have helped your home feel calmer?
- What feels steadier now than it did earlier in the year?

Progress is rarely obvious. Often it shows up as shorter storms, quicker recovery, or a child seeking comfort in new ways.

## What you know now

Over time, carers develop a deep, practical understanding that comes from living alongside a child — not from training alone.

You may notice that you:

- Recognise signs of overwhelm earlier
- Respond differently than you once did
- Trust your instincts more than you used to

You might gently reflect:

- What do you understand now about this child that has shifted how you care for them?
- What have you learned about yourself through this experience?
- What would you want someone else to know if they were caring for this child?

This kind of learning is a strength. It reflects growth, not struggle.



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## Growing children, changing needs

As children grow, their emotional, social, and practical needs naturally change. Questions around identity, belonging, independence, and relationships may begin to surface. Family life shifts too.

Rather than trying to plan for everything, it can help to consider:

- What support might help this child as they move into their next stage?
- What changes might affect your family over the coming year?
- Where might flexibility or extra support help ease pressure?

Looking ahead in this way is not about worry — it is about care and preparation.

## Growing understanding through learning

Caring for children is ongoing learning. As children grow and circumstances change, new questions often arise about behaviour, emotions, development, relationships, or identity.

You might gently reflect:

- What situations do you feel most confident responding to?
- Where do you sometimes feel unsure, stuck, or wanting more understanding?

Learning can take many forms. For some carers it's formal training. For others it's conversations, shared stories, reading, or reflecting with someone they trust. All of these count. Choosing learning that fits your family and your capacity helps care remain sustainable and helps carers feel steadier and more confident over time.

## Considering the whole family

Caring affects everyone in the household, including biological children. They may show generosity and care, while also carrying mixed feelings such as confusion, jealousy, or worry. These responses are normal when attention, space, and emotional energy are shared.

It can help to notice how biological children have experienced the year, what they have managed well, and where they may need extra reassurance or space to be heard.

When biological children feel seen and supported, family life becomes steadier and care is more sustainable.

## Support that sustains care

Care is strongest when it is shared. Support helps care remain steady over time and works best when it feels like partnership rather than oversight.

Support may include learning opportunities, practical help, regular contact, or conversations where carers feel listened to and understood. When support fits well, it responds to real experiences and values carers' lived knowledge.

You might pause and reflect:

- What support from the agency has been most helpful this year?
- What has helped you feel more confident or supported in your caring role?
- As things change, what support might help care continue well?

## Further Reading & Resources

Wheel of Wellness - <https://www.headspace.com/mindfulness/wellness-wheel>

Reflection Tool - <https://learn.childhood.org.au/trauma-informed-relationship-based-recovery-reflection-tool-2/>