

Module 1

Preparing & adjusting to your new role

A Guide for Foster & Kinship Carers

Why this resource?

Stepping into foster or kinship care takes courage — not because you have to be perfect, but because you're willing to show up with an open heart, even when you don't yet have all the answers. This resource is here to walk beside you, helping you build steadiness, confidence and compassion — for the child in your care, and for yourself — as you begin this journey together

Opening Your Home: what to expect

Opening your home to a child in care is one of the most meaningful things a person or family can do. It's also completely normal for it to bring up a wide range of feelings, excitement, worry, curiosity, even self-doubt. Anticipation is a healthy sign that you care deeply about doing this well. You may find yourself wondering:

- *Will I be enough for this child?*
- *How will our family adjust?*
- *What will it feel like when they arrive?*

These are natural questions that show your willingness to show up with care, not perfection.

In trauma-informed care, we recognise that both adults and children arrive with histories, nervous systems and stories that shape how we connect. Acknowledge your own emotions is one of the most important steps you can take to help you stay regulated and responsive when challenges arise.

Rather than trying to 'get it right', focus on being present, predictable and kind to yourself. The way you care for your own wellbeing sets the tone for how safe and supported a child will feel in your home.

Preparation

Preparing your home is more than making space. It's about creating an environment that tells a child, "you are safe here. You belong".

Preparing your home focusses on the following:

- Physical preparation
- Emotional preparation
- Children's spaces
- Your needs



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Physical Preparations

Children entering care or coming from another placement often come from environments where safety is unpredictable or absent. The physical environment becomes one of the first ways we can build trust. But remember, you don't need a perfect home – you need a safe, welcoming one. Children entering care aren't looking for polished spaces; they are looking for people who feel safe, kind and predictable.

 *Tips:*

- *Prepare their room with essentials and a small welcome to show they are expected and cared for.*
- *Make space for their belongings and choices so they can begin to feel at home.*
- *Use simple routines, gentle transitions and visual cues to provide reassurance.*

Emotional Preparations

Emotional preparation means opening your heart and nervous system to a child who may have known loss, fear or disruption.

It is normal to feel both ready and unsure – noticing those feelings helps you stay kind and steady with yourself.

You don't need to be perfect – being aware, reflective and willing to repair is what builds real safety.

 *Tips:*

- *Pay attention to your body and use slow breathing or grounding to settle big feelings.*
- *Be clear about privacy, personal space and respect for everyone in the home.*
- *Keep the early days slow, focusing on warmth, food, rest and gentle connection.*

Your Children, Their Space Too

When a new child joins your family, your own children may feel the shift in attention and routine, even if they are excited. Naming those feelings with curiosity and reassurance helps them feel seen and secure.

Your children are part of the journey, but they are not responsible for another child's healing. Protect their sense of space and belonging by keeping some things just theirs while also gently inviting them into welcoming the new child.

 *Tips:*

- *Invite honest conversations like "How has this been for you?"*
- *Reassure them that it is okay to have mixed feelings and that your love for them has not changed.*
- *Keep one-to-one time sacred, even in small moments.*

Your Needs

Caring for a child in foster care begins with caring for yourself – your steadiness helps their nervous system feel safe.

Looking after your wellbeing is not separate from caring, it is part of the healing. You don't have to be perfect – just aware, gentle and willing to return to calm.


 *Tips:*

- *Take small moments to breathe, ground yourself and notice something gentle or joyful.*
- *Be kind to yourself when things feel hard and use repair when something goes wrong.*
- *Notice your stress signals and pause to ask what your body needs before you react.*
- *Honour your limits – boundaries protect your energy and your family.*
- *Reach out early to your agency or other carers for support...*

Further Reading & Resources

 Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) – Foster & Kinship Care

<https://aifs.gov.au/research/children-care>

 CREATE Foundation – Young People's Voices & Reports

<https://create.org.au/tools-and-resources/>