



FOSTER & ADOPTIVE CARE COALITION

FOR EVERY CHILD... A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Dear Prospective Foster or Adoptive Parent:

Thank you very much for your inquiry. Enclosed you will find an information packet that should answer most of your questions about foster and adoptive care. Although specific needs vary, there is always a shortage of families willing to open their homes and hearts to children in need. The greatest needs are for foster and adoptive parents who can accept children over the age of 6, or three or more younger children from the same family.

All foster and adoptive parents must be licensed. While there is no charge for this service, some of the things required for licensing, such as smoke alarms, physical examinations, etc., will cost money and are not reimbursable.

Licensed foster parents receive a monthly board payment ranging from \$418 to \$511 per child, depending upon the child's age, to cover board, allowance and clothing expenses.

Specialized foster parents receive additional payment. Other costs for children, such as medical care, dental care, and day care (if needed because of foster parents' employment or school attendance), are paid directly by the State.

If you have additional questions, or decide to pursue becoming a foster or adoptive parent, please call us at **800.FOSTER.3** (800.367.8373) between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. or email janjoeckel@foster-adopt.org. If you would like to learn about other ways to help children in foster care, please visit www.foster-adopt.org.

Again, thank you for caring.

Sincerely,

Jan Joeckel

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Basic Requirements

First, let's make sure that you meet the basic requirements to become a foster or adoptive parent. In Illinois you must be:

- At least 21 years old (you may be younger if caring for a relative)
- A citizen of the U.S. or a lawful immigrant
- Free of child abuse or criminal history*
- Employed or have another form of reliable income
- Able to accommodate additional children in your home
- Willing to attend a 9-12 week training program
- Willing to participate in a homestudy
- Willing to provide personal, employer, and medical references
- Complete a financial form

** Some offenses do not eliminate applicants*

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I have to be married? No. Licensing standards say that the licensees shall be either a single person or two persons in a marriage or civil union with each other. Each foster parent shall be willing and able to assume appropriate responsibilities for the child or children received for care. For those who are not married, the license will be in one person's name.

Can I become a foster parent if I'm LGBT?

Yes. Licensing Standards say that licensees shall be either a single person or two persons in a marriage or civil union with each other.

Can I / we work outside of the home? Yes. If foster parents are working or attending school leading to employment, child care for foster children placed in the home is paid directly by the state.

Do I have to own my home? No. Foster parents may own, rent or be buying their home, condo or apartment. Families who are renting need written permission from their landlord to become foster parents.

Does a child in foster care have to have his/her own room? No. Children of the same sex may usually share a room, but each child should have his/her own bed. Children may not share a room with an adult.

Where will the child go to school or day care? Foster children usually attend the local school in the foster parents' community. Foster parents decide where a foster child will attend day care and may choose any legal care arrangement.

Do I have to pay the child's expenses? No. Traditional foster parents are paid a monthly board payment ranging from \$418 to \$511 per child for board, clothing and personal allowance. The amount increases based upon the child's age. Foster parents caring for children with behavioral or other serious problems may be paid considerably more. All medical, dental and prescription costs for foster children are paid directly by the state. Day care expenses for children in foster care under age 13 are also state-paid, if foster parents are working or going to school.

Are there income requirements for foster parents? No, but traditional foster parents need to have enough income to meet their own family's needs.

Why do children enter the foster care system? Most children are in foster care because of child neglect and/or child abuse. While a child is in foster care, his/her case manager works with the birth family to help solve the problems that led to the child being removed from their home.

Do I have a say as to which child is placed in my home? Yes. Foster parents may turn down any child referred, and are encouraged not to accept a child when they believe that (s)he would not do well in their home.

Will the biological parents know where I live? Sometimes. Some foster parents are comfortable allowing biological parents to pick the child up or to visit in the foster home. Visits are always arranged by the child's case manager. Although case managers do not share this information without foster parents' permission, foster children may tell their parents where they are living. This has not proven to be a problem for foster parents.

How long will a foster child be in my home? There is no set length of time for a foster placement. Some children are returned to their parents' home within a few months, while other children remain in care for a longer period. Foster children are not returned home until the problems that led to their placement are resolved.

Who is legally responsible for foster children? Generally when children are placed in foster care, the state has or obtains guardianship of the child through the local circuit court. This allows the state to make certain primary life decisions for the child, such as where (s)he will live, to consent to medical treatment, and to sign other routine consents. The natural parents retain some rights, such as the right to visit.

Are foster children available for adoption? Usually not. The courts and the agencies that work with children are committed to permanency, meaning that children need and deserve a permanent home. If the biological family is unable to work out the problems that led to the child's placement after a reasonable period, the caseworker may return to court and attempt to have their parental rights terminated. If this happens, or if the biological parents surrender their parental rights, the child is free for adoption.

If a foster child becomes free for adoption, may the foster parent apply to adopt? Yes. Under Illinois law, a foster parent receives first consideration if a child living in their home for twelve consecutive months becomes legally free for adoption. It is the foster parents' decision whether or not to apply to adopt.

Can a foster child attend church with his/her foster family? Yes. Foster children are often able to attend church with their foster parents. Always check with the child's case manager to determine if specific religious instruction is required.

Can I help out in another way if I'm not ready to foster yet?

Yes, there are many volunteer opportunities available to help children in foster care, such as mentoring, granting a child's Little Wish, becoming a Birthday Buddy, providing office support to an agency, or donating children's clothing to ReFresh/KidStore. We can help direct you to what matches your interests.

Foster Care Approval Process

All Foster and Adoptive parents are licensed. The process includes the following:

- **Interviews** by Licensing Representatives with **all members** of the household of a prospective foster family. These interviews allow a prospective family to learn more about foster care & what to expect as foster parents. Interviews will generally take place in the foster home. During these visits, the Licensing Representative will examine the foster home to make sure that all Licensing Standards are met.
- At least **three references** who are not related to the prospective foster family members will be contacted by Licensing Representatives.
- Licensing Representatives will conduct **background checks** to determine if household members have criminal convictions or have been perpetrators of child neglect/abuse.
- All members of the household will be asked to submit a **medical report** signed by a physician to confirm that they are free of communicable disease or physical/ mental conditions which would affect the family's ability to provide care. Licensing Representatives will provide the necessary forms to the prospective foster family later in the licensing process.
- Prospective foster parents are required to attend **PRIDE** pre-service **Foster Parent Training**. The purpose of **PRIDE** is to thoroughly prepare foster parents for their new responsibilities as members of a caring team.

Pre-Service Foster / Adoptive Parent Training (PRIDE Training)

Foster and adoptive parents throughout Illinois are asked to attend **27** hours of pre-service training (called **PRIDE TRAINING**) in order to develop skills and better understand what will be asked of them and what they can expect as foster and adoptive parents.

The training is organized into **9** sessions of **3 hours each**. Another **6 hours** (2 more sessions) of educational advocacy training is also provided. The training is held on weeknights and on Saturdays at various locations in the Metro-East area. The training is team-taught by an experienced foster or adoptive parent and by a social worker.

Agencies realize that attending **PRIDE** training requires a large time commitment and are grateful for your willingness to participate. The training is thorough and practical.

Foster PRIDE / Adoptive PRIDE (Overview of Sessions)

Session One: Connecting with PRIDE

Session One connects participants with the Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE program. Participants learn how the pre-service training involves assessment, selection, licensing and approval. The competencies needed for successful fostering and adopting are reviewed in relation to the PRIDE pre-service sessions and the process of becoming a foster or adoptive family.

Session Two: Teamwork toward Permanency

This session introduces the importance of family relationships and the role families play in supporting the child's identity and self-esteem. Participants identify major tasks in planning for permanence, including ways to preserve connections and continuity through times of change. Teamwork is presented as the best way to promote permanence for children and families. Trainees discover the unique role of foster parents and adoptive parents as members of a professional team.

Session Three: Meeting Developmental Needs - Attachment

This session reviews the "basics" about child growth and development, particularly in family foster care and adoption. Participants learn the types of losses children encounter before entering foster care. They learn how placement can deepen the child's sense of loss. Participants review the stages of loss and consider how they influence the child's feelings and behaviors. Loss is presented as a universal issue. Foster families and adoptive families consider how they have dealt with losses in their lives. They discuss how they might approach losses that come with fostering and adopting, and how they can be "loss managers" for children.

Session Four: Meeting Developmental Needs - Loss

This session helps foster and adoptive parents understand the feelings that children have about the loss of their birth families, how these feelings may affect their behaviors, and ways/strategies to deal with the behaviors and reactions of children who are responding to grief. Participants will learn the categories and types of loss, responses to loss, and the factors that influence the experience of separation, loss and placement. They will further learn how to help children cope with feelings resulting from separation and loss and how to minimize the trauma of placement.

Session Five: Strengthening Family Relationships

This session revisits how families promote identity, cultural identity, and self-esteem in children. Participants review the concept; that children in placement should rejoin their families whenever possible. They discuss how the team can support reunification. The role of visiting in strengthening family relationships is explored. Concrete information explains how to plan for visits, how to prepare for them, and how to handle reactions afterwards. The importance of families to children in the adoption process is discussed in regard to lifelong needs for identity and self-esteem.

Foster PRIDE / Adoptive PRIDE (Overview of Sessions)

Section Six: Meeting Developmental Needs - Discipline

This session focuses on the challenges of instilling discipline in children. The content and activities focus on protecting and nurturing children and meeting their developmental needs. The session defines discipline, identifies its goals and illustrates how discipline differs from punishment. Discipline is defined, the goals of effective discipline (teaching appropriate behaviors) are identified, and the difference between discipline and punishment is illustrated. Participants review the agency's policy on discipline and discuss the negative effects of physical punishment. Participants learn about the knowledge, skills and personal qualities needed to instill discipline. They explore the meaning of a child's behavior and the factors that influence behavior. The session outlines the methods foster and adoptive parents, as team members, can use to meet the goals of effective discipline.

Section Seven: Continuing Family Relationships

This session looks at different ways the team can help to connect children to safe and nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime. Permanency planning goals are outlined, starting with efforts to support families and reunite children with families and kin. Adoption, long-term foster care, and independent living are presented as other ways to provide lifelong connections when children cannot grow up with their families.

Section Eight: Planning for Change

How placement impacts the foster or adoptive family is the focus of this session. The first hours, days, and weeks of a child's placement in the home are viewed practically. Trainees learn what to expect, what to ask the caseworker, and how to talk to the child. Longer-term impact of placement is also discussed, including how placement changes the foster or adoptive family. The notion that fostering and adopting carries risks is highlighted through a discussion of abuse allegations. Use of the team for support and focus is emphasized.

Session Nine: Making an Informed Decision

This session offers foster parents and adoptive parents a chance to learn first hand from experienced members of the foster care team. Panelists including foster parents, adoptive parents, caseworkers, and family members present their perspectives and answer participants' questions. Participants will reflect on their growth and development regarding the pre-service competencies. They begin to make a final decision regarding their commitment to foster and/or adoptive parenting.

Children in Foster Care are Eligible for:

- Monthly maintenance payments
- Monthly clothing & personal allowance
- Healthcare coverage (includes medical, dental, & pharmacy bills)
- Day care if foster parents are working or attending school
- Free school lunch program
- Respite care
- Various other services, depending upon individual needs

**Adoptive children may qualify for a monthly subsidy*

Key Players for Foster/Adopted Children

Child Protective Investigator - Investigates child abuse/child neglect allegations and determines if neglect/abuse took place, may recommend that a case be unfounded (not proven by evidence) or indicated (evidence supports the allegation), takes protective custody of children if necessary, and may place them in foster care. Writes reports and provides testimony for the Juvenile Court, shares information with the Police and State's Attorney when indicated.

Child Welfare Specialist/Caseworker/Case Manager Works with children in foster care and their parents to address the problems that led to foster placement. Works to arrive at and implement a permanent plan for children. Makes appearances in Juvenile Court to provide evidence and report on progress. Monitors children in foster placement and works closely with foster parents and other team members. Represents the state (guardian). Shares information with foster parent. May petition court to terminate parental rights if progress toward reunification has not been made.

Adoption Specialist Consults with Child Welfare Specialist/Case Manager in permanency planning. May prepare petitions for the court asking that adoptions be finalized. Meets with and assesses prospective adoptive parents. Discuss post-adoptive services and adoption assistance policies with prospective adoptive parents. Works with caseworker to advise foster parents of options if a child in their care becomes adoptable.

Foster Parent Provides critical support, care and nurturing to foster child. Shares information with case worker about foster child. May assist in work to reunify child with birth family, may apply to adopt children in their home if parental rights are terminated. May assist in preparing children for move to adoptive family. Works with school personnel to facilitate child's educational progress. Vital team member in planning and caring for foster children.

Adoptive Parent Becomes legal parent of child placed for adoption with all rights and responsibilities after finalization. Must be licensed as a foster parent when children are placed.

Juvenile Court Judge - Makes judicial determinations regarding abuse, neglect and abandonment, and custody, guardianship and termination of parental rights. Approves adoptions.

Guardian Responsible for primary life decisions for children under guardianship in foster care. Consents to medical procedures, signs legal papers requiring guardian's consent.

Licensing Representative/Family Development Specialist

Visits prospective or current foster families in their home and meets with all household residents to determine that foster home licensing standards are met. Reviews medical examination forms and other written materials for content and completeness.

Administrative Case Reviewer Chairs a meeting with a foster child and significant persons his/her life (parents, case worker, foster parent, etc.) within three months of a child's entry into foster care to determine that a permanency plan has been established. Re-convenes two times per year thereafter to review progress and identify barriers until the permanent plan is achieved.

Guardian Ad Litem Represents child's interests in the Juvenile Court, appointed by Judge.

Public Defender Private Attorney Represents the parents of children referred to the Juvenile Court due to allegations of abuse/neglect, etc. May also represent parents when a petition is filed to terminate parental rights.

State's Attorney Represents the people of IL, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and its private agency partners in child welfare matters.