



## 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 \$396 - \$490 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](mailto:janjoeckel@foster-adopt.org). If you would like to learn about other ways to help children in foster care, see the last page of this packet or please visit [www.foster-adopt.org](http://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 Missouri 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

**What types of children are in State care?** Most children enter foster care because of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. If the problems leading to placement are resolved, children may be returned home. If not, children may become free for adoption. Children in state care range in age from birth to 18 and have various backgrounds.

**How long will a foster child be in my home?** There is no set length for a foster placement. It depends on the circumstances of the child and his/her birth family. When a child is placed in your home, there may be an estimated length of time the child is expected to stay.

**Do I have a say as to which child is placed in my home?** Yes. Foster parents specify the race, age, gender, and number of children they wish to care for. You have the option to decline a placement.

**Where will the child go to school or day care?** Children attend the local school in your community. If the child is not school age, working foster and adoptive parents may choose a daycare home or facility for the child as long as it's state licensed and contracted. The state may also reimburse for before and after school care until the child is 13.

### **What types of support services are provided after a child is placed in the home?**

When a child is placed in your home as a foster placement, you will receive a monthly board payment ranging from \$396 - \$490 per child for board, clothing and personal allowance. The reimbursement rate depends upon the child's age and level of care required. Medical and dental insurance is provided by the state. A yearly clothing allowance is also available for children in foster care. If counseling or therapy services are needed, the state may also provide for those services. Along with monetary supports, there are support groups and continuing education training available to foster and adoptive parents.

**Do I have to own my home?** No. Foster parents may own, rent, or be in the process of buying a home, condo, or apartment. Families who rent must have their landlord's permission to become foster parents. Your local municipality may also require an occupancy permit.

**Do I have to be married?** No. You do not. You can be single, divorced, or legally separated.

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

Yes. Per [Missouri Children's Division](#) policy, "a license will be issued to either married couples or a single individual. Only one license can be issued per household, so the license will be in one adult's name. All adults in the household who will have child care responsibility will be required to attend state approved foster parent training. Personal information elicited during the home study include: Lifestyles and practices, including sexual orientation of the foster parent(s)."

**What's the difference between foster care and adoption?** Foster care is a temporary arrangement until a child can either be reunified with their birth family or placed with a permanent caregiver if reunification is not possible. Adoption is making a lifelong commitment to a child.

**How long does it take to become a foster or adoptive parent?** It takes four to six months to become a licensed parent, but having a license does not guarantee an immediate placement. Well-trained, competent families are needed, so there is an in-depth training and home-study process to complete.

**Why do we need training?** Fostering and adopting is not the same as parenting a child born to you. They often have unique needs due to the trauma that they have experienced so early in life. Over time, you will need to talk with the child about his/her birth family or help the child manage feelings about being in foster care or being adopted. The training provided helps you understand the unique needs of children in foster care. Some think that children who have been abused or neglected will be grateful for being “rescued” and placed with another family. However, most children really love and care about their birth families and want to return to them. Even if they were abused, there were probably good times, too. One of the biggest challenges for children is feeling that they have to “choose” or that one family is “better” than another. It takes patience, skill, and training to help them understand that it's okay to care about all of their families and that families can be different.

**What does it cost to foster or adopt?** There is no fee associated with becoming licensed to foster or adopt. You may have to purchase items such as a fire extinguisher to meet licensing standards or pay for your medical exam which is necessary in order to become licensed.

Foster parents receive a monthly payment to help cover the cost of the child's food, clothing and personal allowance. The first check will not come until a month or so after the child does, so foster parents' need enough money in the budget to support their families and the new child/children until the reimbursement arrives. The reimbursement amounts vary with the age of the child and whether or not there are special medical or behavioral needs. People on public assistance or who are on small or fixed incomes generally find it difficult to foster because the reimbursement system is so delayed. This could cause hardships for some families and is considered on a case by case basis. Adopted children also qualify for an adoption subsidy. This allows for continued support from the State, even after the adoption is finalized.

## **Are you ready to begin training?**

Let's get started! You're about to embark on one of the most rewarding and challenging journeys in your life. Remember, the [Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition](#) is always here to help you along the way (800.FOSTER.3). After you've read the information in this packet, please call or [email us](#). We'll answer any additional questions and help you get enrolled in the STARS training.

This training program is a resource for you and for you and for the children you will serve. It provides much of the information you need to decide whether or not this is right for you – and that you are right for the program. It will help you develop and broaden your knowledge and skills about abused and neglected children and what they need. It will help you be the best parent you can be, and it's free.

You may be thinking, “But I already know a lot about children. I've raised my own children or taken care of others for years. Why do I need this program? You experiences will definitely help you. However, most of our kids have very special needs and some have extraordinary needs. Kids who have been physically or sexually abused, neglected, or exposed to drugs and/or alcohol are more challenging to raise. Often, they feel angry or upset because of the trauma they've experienced. They need to learn and believe that adults can be trusted, that they won't be hurt again, and that there are acceptable ways to express their feelings. Experienced foster/adoptive parents tell us that helping children learn these things takes special knowledge and skill. The PRIDE/STARS training and assessment process is meant to teach you what our kids need you to know. Also, the training and assessment process will help us decide if the program is right for you and if you are right for it.

Although people want to help, not everyone can develop the knowledge and skills necessary to foster or adopt. There may be other ways that are a better match so that you can still help children in need. Through the classes and individual meetings with your family, we can figure this out together. To foster there is 27 hours of training (one 3 class/week for 9 weeks). In Missouri, those interested in adoption will take an additional 12 hours of training.

### **What are the steps to becoming licensed?**

Call or [e-mail](#) us to get questions answered. If you're ready, participate in a short screening process so you can be referred to an agency and enrolled in a training. The referred agency will set up an initial visit with you at your home with a Family Development Specialist. The goal is to meet you, answer questions, and do a safety check (licensed homes must meet physical standards). Don't panic! This isn't the white glove test. They are looking for safety, cleanliness, and good repair of furnishings. If there are a few things you need to do to get your home ready, they will be explained and you'll have ample time to meet requirements. Four basics that will be discussed at an initial visit.

- **Your family must have sufficient income to meet its needs.** You do not have to be wealthy. Most foster/adoptive families have modest incomes, but manage their finances well.
- **Your family life should be stable.** You should not be in the midst of a divorce, a move or any other major change or crisis. Discuss any marital or family situations with the Family Development Specialist.
- **You must agree to a background screening.** Each adult in the prospective foster or adoptive family/household (age 17+) is subject to screening for child abuse/neglect history and criminal history. Having a criminal record does not automatically mean you cannot foster or adopt. The seriousness and nature of the offense and when it occurred will be considered. It is very important for you to be honest and share information with the Family Development Specialist.

If your home is suitable, your family is meeting its own financial needs, and there are no concerns about background screening or family status, you are ready to begin training. Some counties have an orientation meeting as well. You may or may not be required to attend orientation. When it is clear that a family has problems in one or more of the above mentioned basics, the agency will be honest and tell you that it is not possible to proceed into training at this time. This is called "selecting out". Families can be re-considered if circumstances change or improve.

PRIDE/STARS is a mutual selection process. Families may select themselves out of the process at any time.

## **PRIDE/STARS Training**

Pre-service training is 27 hours (9, 3-hour sessions) and is offered in various locations on weekday evenings or Saturday mornings. Classes are led by a team of trainers. One is an experienced foster or adoptive parent. The other has professional experience in children's services. Successful foster and adoptive families have knowledge and skills in five areas called "competencies." The competencies which are covered in STARS are:

- Protecting and Nurturing Children
- Meeting Developmental Needs and Addressing Developmental Delays
- Supporting Relationships Between Children and their Birth Families
- Connecting Children to Safe, Nurturing Relationships Intended to Last a Lifetime
- Working as a Member of a Professional Team

**Protecting and Nurturing:** Children placed with foster families and adoptive families need to live in a safe place that is friendly and where people show that they care. Some kids may not understand your efforts at first, others are starved for attention. The pre-service training will help you understand a child's feelings and reactions and help you deal with them.

**Meeting Developmental Needs:** For most of us, growing up is a natural, predictable process. Kids who need foster/adoptive families did not have the encouragement or opportunity to grow. They may be behind in some areas or ahead in others when compared to other kids. Training helps you understand the reasons for these developmental delays and differences and how to cope with them.

**Supporting Relationships Between Children and their Birth Families:** Relationships include siblings, relatives, and parents. Kids have personal histories. Even infants who have never been held by their parents have a pre-natal, birth, or hospital history. The memories, experiences, and attachments will vary, but most have some positive relationships in the past. The classes prepare you to deal with and understand the importance of a child's history.

**Connecting Children to Safe, Nurturing Relationships:** We know that children are entitled to permanent, lifetime family relationships. If the parents are unable to regain custody of their children, we look to adoptive parents to help the child make loving lifetime connections. Foster parents should make connections with children as well, even if for a brief time. In fact, most adoptions occur because the parents have fostered and grow to love children.

**Working as a Professional Team Member:** Foster/adoptive parents, agencies, courts, and others, work together to secure permanent, loving relationships and stable homes for children. It is far too much work for one person to do alone.

**Do you want to help but can't make the full-time commitment now?**

**Consider volunteering! Ways to help:**

**Mentor.** Become a positive adult role model in a foster child's life by being a caring, stable mentor, helping improve his/her self-esteem and peer relationships. According to one study, young people who were matched with a mentor were 52% less likely to skip school, 46% less likely to start using drugs, and less likely to resort to violence to solve problems. A mentor spends two to four hours every other week doing fun activities with the child. This may include going to the movies, cooking together, playing at a park, or just hanging out and talking. Mentor one-on-one with a child or married couples may be matched together with a child.

**Tutor.** Work one-on-one to improve a foster child's reading skills and/or help them complete homework assignments. Children in foster care require special academic attention. Because of circumstances that caused them to enter foster care, many children in the foster care system are performing below grade level. Tutors generally help 1-2 days a week.

**Volunteer, Shop, or Donate to [RE]FRESH.** Help foster families access fashionable, high-quality clothing. Foster parents often struggle to meet the clothing needs of their children due to growth spurts and the high cost of clothing. [\[RE\]FRESH](#) and the [KidStore](#) offer new and gently-used clothing at reduced pricing to foster/adoptive families. Volunteers select merchandise, dress mannequins, organize clothing drives, and more. [RE]FRESH is open to the public at 1710 S. Brentwood Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63144), and all of the proceeds benefit youth in foster care. You help children every time you shop, donate clothing, or volunteer at [RE]FRESH. Learn more [here](#).

**Help grant Little Wishes.** Provide office support by helping process and grant the thousands of wishes that we receive from foster and adoptive children in December.

**Become a [Birthday Buddy](#).** Provide birthday gifts for a child in foster care.

**Act as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).** Help an abused or neglected child move through the foster care system and into a safe, permanent home by advocating for the child in Court. Children in St. Louis who are represented by a CASA spend 50% less time in foster care than children who do not have an Advocate.

**Help a foster home.** Give foster parents some time off by helping watch their foster children in a supervised setting; drop a meal off for the family; or coordinate a child's party.

**There are many more opportunities available.** Please contact us at 800.FOSTER.3 (toll free) or 314.367.8373 Monday through Friday between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Or, visit <http://www.foster-adopt.org/>.