



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 \$453 to \$554 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 or hollykieu@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 39 hour 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 \$453 to \$554 per child for board, clothing and personal allowance. The amount increases based upon the child's age. Foster parents caring for children with some special needs may receive a higher payment. 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 should not accept a child if they feel they will not be a good match for the child.

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 biological 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 case manager 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 six 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/ReSource. 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 **39** 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 **12** 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

This session gives you the unique opportunity to learn about the world of foster care and adoption through the stories of children receiving child welfare services. You will discover how families are licensed and certified for this important work.

Session Two: Teamwork toward Permanency

This session lays the foundation for understanding how to support a child's birth family relationships by first exploring the ways in which families support a child's identity, cultural heritage, and self-esteem. You will also learn why we value permanence in the lives of children and how we seek to provide it. You will learn why teamwork is the best way to promote permanence for children and families.

Session Three: Meeting Developmental Needs – Attachment

This session reviews some of the "basics" of child growth and development. You will be asked to consider how important it is for children to form deep and lasting attachments. It also explores how abuse, neglect, and trauma impact a child's attachments, development, and behavior. You will review case vignettes to explore ways to building positive attachments with children to meet their developmental needs.

Session Four: Meeting Developmental Needs – Loss

When children are separated from the only family they have known, an overwhelming sense of loss may slow growth and development. This session covers the types of losses children have, stages of loss, and their impact on the child, along with how loss affects the child's behavior.

Session Five: Strengthening Family Relationships

This session focuses on how families instill identity, cultural heritage, and self-esteem in children. It also considers how the team can support the goal of reunification. Session Five gives very practical information about how to plan for visits, how to get children ready for them, and how to handle their reactions when the visit ends.

Section Six: Meeting Developmental Needs – Discipline

Session Six explores the challenge of discipline. It includes a definition of discipline, a set of goals, and a discussion about how discipline is different from punishment. You will review the agency's policy on discipline and discuss why physical punishment is not permitted.

Section Seven: Continuing Family Relationships

In this session, a “Job Description for Permanency Planning Team Members” outlines the specific tasks needed in order to help children achieve their permanent goal. Goals for reaching permanence are detailed, starting with efforts to support families, and to place children back in their birth families or in the home of a relative.

Section Eight: Planning for Change

Session Eight takes a practical view of what to expect during the first hours, days, and weeks of a child’s placement in a home. You will learn what to ask the worker and how to talk to the child. You will also have the opportunity to explore how placement will impact your family, and particularly your own children.

Session Nine: Making an Informed Decision

In this closing session, you will hear from a panel of experienced members of the foster care team. Birth parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, workers, and other members of the child welfare team present their views and answer questions. You will be on your way toward a final decision about making a commitment to becoming a foster or adoptive parent.

PRIDE Pre-Service Supplemental Training Overview

Trauma – This session reinforces the important role foster and adoptive parents assume in helping children recover from traumatic events. It is based on the premise that the more foster and adoptive parents learn about how traumatic events affect children, the more they will understand the reasons for children’s behaviors, and motions, and be better prepared to help them cope. This session provides participants with a chance to explore the Resources for Parents and Caregivers page on the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, or NCTSN website. This training suggests that they will need to continue to explore trauma as they proceed in their foster and/or adoptive caregiver experience. The NCTSN site is recommended as an excellent resource they can utilize as a member of the Child Welfare professional team to help children in their care recover, heal and grow

Social Media Training for Caregivers – This training provides information and guidance on Department policy and the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved (including foster caregivers) with youth in care relative to usage of social media and digital communication devices.

Life of the Case – Part I- Every child wants and deserves a permanent home and family. In foster care we try to help foster children return to their birth families. This training, which is the first of two parts, walks participants through events in this journey.

Life of the Case – Part II – This training will enable the participants to continue through the Life of the Case. Participants will examine three components from the foster caregiver’s perspective.

Keeping Children Connected (Maintaining Sibling relationships) - This session examines the subject of keeping children connected to their brothers and sisters. Participants learn effective communication and relationship building techniques to use in their work with youth-in-care. They will also gain clinical insight and skills to foster positive connections with families while learning how to support and guide youth-in-care.

Human Trafficking Training for Caregivers - This training explores Human Trafficking from the perspective of the foster caregiver. The participants examine the essential components of human trafficking and the threats it poses due to the child’s risks based on their history of abuse and neglect, lack of positive connections and mental health or behavioral issues. This session will help participants learn enough about child trafficking to do all they can to help keep our children safe.