

# IS FOSTER PARENTING FOR YOU?

## Some Frequently Asked Questions about Becoming a Foster Parent

### Who are foster children?

Foster children are children who have been removed from their home because of some form of maltreatment. They may have been physically or sexually abused, neglected, or abandoned. Foster children are “normal” children, plus more. They are much like your own children, nieces, nephews, and neighbors, but with different experiences. They are frequently filled with fear, confusion, and a sense of powerlessness because they’ve been removed from the only home they have known. They may be angry about what has happened to them. They need loving adults who can nurture them and provide support, stability, and care. Foster homes are needed in throughout Washington County so children can remain close and connected to their community, school and medical providers.

### What do foster parents do?

The foster family provides the home environment in which a child can safely fulfill their physical, emotional, spiritual, and cultural potential and so that they can become responsible adults. They provide nurturing, food, clothing, housing, supervision, recreation, and transportation to needed services, such as therapy, medical appointments and visitation. Foster parents help children who have been hurt, abused, and neglected. Foster parents are an active part of a child’s treatment team.

### As a foster parent can I pick the age of children I’d like to work with?

Yes. Our agency places Washington County children from birth to age 18. They agency will help you decide what age group of child(ren) will work best in your family based on your housing, child care accommodations, and if you have your own children.

### What do I do if a foster child gets sick or hurt?

Foster children have health care coverage through the local, state, and federal welfare system (Medical Assistance) which covers their medical and dental care.

### Children can be expensive. Is any financial help available?

Yes. You will receive a monthly stipend. This stipend is to be used for the child’s needs such as food, shelter, clothing, personal items, entertainment, allowance, school supplies, toys, socialization, etc. After six months in your home, the child will receive a clothing allowance on a quarterly basis to help offset the cost of seasonal clothes. Reimbursement for some travel expenses is also available.

### Can single people become foster parents?

Yes. Single people can give high quality care to an abused or neglected child. However, if you work, it may take some planning to solidify a structured child care plan that includes after school care and daycare for school breaks.

## Can I adopt the foster children in my home?

Maybe. Although most foster children do return to their birth parent(s), some foster children may become available for adoption. Once children have been in the court system for 15 out of 22 months, and reunification is no longer an option, you may be able to adopt. Generally in Pennsylvania, foster parents who have cared for children in their homes are considered a potential adoptive resource for the children in their home. It is important to remember, that foster care is meant to be temporary. Children should be with their family if at all possible, and that is what the agency works to accomplish. Even if children do return home, foster parents often form life-long connections with the children they care for.

## Can everyone be a foster parent?

No. Some families will be ineligible to become foster parents. For example people who have serious medical conditions, a history of child abuse or neglect in their family, or some criminal convictions are not eligible to become foster parents. Contact us for more information about the criteria for becoming a foster parent or if you have specific questions about your eligibility to become a foster parent.

## What are other things I should consider?

If you can say “yes” or “probably” to the following questions, **there are children in Washington County who need you.**

- Can you love and care for a child who has come from a difficult background?
- Can you help a child develop a sense of belonging in your home even though his stay may be temporary?
- Can you love a child who, because of fear of rejection, does not easily love you back?
- Are you secure in yourself and your parenting skills?
- Can you set clear limits and be both firm and understanding in your discipline?
- Do you view bed wetting, lying, and minor destructiveness as symptoms of a child in need?
- Can you tolerate major failures and celebrate small successes?
- Can you accept assistance and guidance from a trained caseworker?
- Can you maintain a positive attitude toward a child’s parents, even though many of the problems the child is experiencing are a direct result of the parent’s actions?
- Can you love a child with all your heart and then let go?

## What qualifications do I need to become a foster parent?

1. Foster parents and babysitters must complete and pass a ChildLine child abuse background check and criminal history background checks through the PA State Police and the FBI.
2. The foster parent(s) MUST complete free pre-service training. The training includes such topics as foster parent responsibilities, child abuse and neglect, the juvenile court system, and licensing regulations. The training also includes information about the kinds of behaviors to expect from children who have been abused and/or neglected and how to address these behaviors.

3. All foster parents are required to have a first aid class and be CPR certified. The agency does not regularly offer CPR or first aid classes, but Red Cross and most area hospitals offer courses, as do some fire departments and EMS services.
4. Foster parents must be physically capable of caring for children and be free of communicable diseases. A physician's statement verifying this is required.
5. Foster parents must submit a budget showing that they have adequate financial resources to meet their family needs and the ability to support itself without the foster care reimbursement.
6. The foster family must have adequate room in their home/apartment. Only two children may be placed in a bedroom and children five and older can only share a bedroom with a child of the same gender.
7. The foster home must meet state regulatory requirements. For example, smoke detectors must be installed on each floor of the residence and in all cooking areas; the home must have a carbon monoxide detector (depending on the heat source) and a Class B fire extinguisher. The agency will help the foster family determine what changes, if any, need to be made to the home to meet state regulations.

Most people have many questions about foster parenting. It is certainly not for everyone, but if you are willing to open your heart and home to a child who has experienced maltreatment, don't hesitate to contact our staff to learn more.

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