

What is foster care?

Foster care is when the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) temporarily places a child in a home other than his or her own. DCFS does this when it is necessary to protect the child from abuse, neglect, or other family problems. When possible, DCFS or another agency works with the child's parents to help them do whatever needs to be done so their child can come home. When that cannot be done, steps are taken to find a more permanent home for the child, such as an adoptive home.

What children need foster homes the most?

Children of all ages and nationalities need foster homes. Children who currently need homes the most are:

- Brothers and sisters who need to stay together
- African-American infants and children
- Teenage mothers and their babies
- Children with special medical needs and those who have behavior and emotional problems
- Teenagers
- Latino children
- Babies born with the HIV (AIDS) virus or with cocaine or other drugs in their system
- Native American children

Can we choose the child we want?

You can state the age, race, and sex of a child that you think would best fit in with your family. You do not have to accept a child. You may feel that a child would not fit in or you may feel that you cannot give a child the care he or she needs. If so, just tell the staff person who asks you that you prefer not to care for that child.

Can a single person become a licensed foster parent?

Yes.

How many foster children can we take?

That depends on many factors such as your ability, your commitment, how many children currently live in your home, and how much room you have in your home. The maximum number, including other children who live in your home, is set by DCFS licensing standards.

Do all foster children have problems?

Most of them do, to some degree. Many are frightened and confused at the sudden separation from their parents. Some are angry. These problems may lessen, though, as they begin to feel safe and nurtured in your care.

What kind of support will we receive?



Personal Support

As a licensed foster parent, you are an important part of the child welfare team. The child welfare agency who supervises your home and your child's caseworker are responsible for supporting you to help you be a good foster parent. Each agency, including DCFS, has developed supports, which may include foster parent support groups, newsletters, after hours telephone numbers, and community resources. You may always call the caseworker, and most agencies have experienced foster parents whom you may call for advice or help.

Financial Assistance



Foster parents in regular foster care programs receive a monthly check to cover the child's food, clothing, and personal allowance. The amount of the check is based on the child's age and any special needs.



Medical Care

Each foster child gets a medical card from the state which pays for all necessary medical care. You will be given a number to call to get help in finding a doctor for children placed with you. The medical card is also accepted by many hospitals and for approved prescriptions. You will not have to pay any medical bills yourself.

Education Services



Foster children go to regular public schools unless they need education which public schools cannot give. Private or parochial school tuition cannot be paid by the State. Foster children may attend private or parochial schools, but only if the tuition is paid by some other source and only if DCFS approves.

How do we become foster parents?

You must be licensed to be a foster parent. Call 1-800-624-KIDS to express your interest. Then, a local DCFS or private child welfare agency representative will contact you about foster care. He or she will then make an appointment to come to your home. That person's job is to decide, with you, if foster care is a good plan for your family and, if so, how you can best help foster children.

The representative will also give you a foster home license application and medical forms to have completed for everyone who lives in your home. The law requires that a criminal background check be run on all applicants and other adults in the home, so you and other adults who live in your home will be fingerprinted. In addition, you will be asked to provide the names of three people who know you well, and they will be contacted. Checks of the DCFS Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking System will also be run.

While these checks are being run, you must attend training classes to help prepare you to be a foster parent.

What types of foster parents are there?

Most foster parents care for children whose goal is to be reunited with their parents or other family members as soon as possible through a regular foster care program for abused or neglected children.

Sometimes children in foster care need extra or special care from the foster family. If so, the family must have the skills, knowledge and experience to meet the individual needs of the children. Foster parents who either already have necessary skills, or are willing to be trained to meet the special needs of these foster children, may become part of a specialized or treatment foster care program which provides extra or special care to children. These foster families receive extra payments each month.

In certain circumstances it may be that children placed in your home can never return to their parents. When this occurs, you may have the option of helping to prepare these children to be adopted by you, or you may be asked to help them get ready to be adopted by someone else.

DCFS also offers another option for permanency. It is called Subsidized Guardianship. Under this program, you do not adopt the child, but you become the child's legal guardian, and you receive supports from DCFS.

How long does it take to get a foster child?

The licensing and training process takes about 90 days. When that process and your training is completed, and after you have received a license, children can be placed in your home.

How will our children react to foster children?

That is very hard to predict. It is important that you talk with your children and other family members before you apply for a foster home license. If you've prepared them well for the coming of foster children and they understand foster care is temporary, there should be few problems. It's not unusual for your children to be a bit jealous at first—just as they might be jealous of a new baby in the family.

Do foster children need individual bedrooms?

No. A foster child can share a room with your children or other foster children of the same sex. Usually, the child must have a bed of his or her own. A foster child may not share a bedroom with an adult, except for brief periods such as a child's illness. These requirements are in the foster home licensing standards, and they will be explained to you by your licensing worker.

Can we take our foster child on vacation with us?

Usually you can. But if it involves out-of-state travel, you must call your child's caseworker and get his or her approval.

Can our foster children go to church with us?

Usually, the answer is yes. Many children attend church or worship services with their foster families. Sometimes, though, the parents ask that their child be taken to the place or denomination of worship that the child has been attending.

Do a child's parents visit him or her?

In most cases, yes. In fact, visits between parents and children are an important step toward helping children to go back home. The caseworker will talk with you and the child's parents to work out the time and location of the visits.

Can we ever adopt a foster child?

DCFS generally tries to return foster children to their families when it can be done safely. However, if the child becomes available for adoption, you may be considered as an adoptive home for the child.

Won't it be hard on us when the foster child leaves our home?

Yes. That is, in fact, the hardest part of being a foster parent. You will certainly feel sad for a time. It's only natural—just as it's natural for your foster daughter or son to want to return to their parents or to have a permanent family of their own. Your foster parent training will help prepare you to deal with these situations.



A Campaign for Children

A public/private partnership launched in April 1993 with Ronald McDonald Children's Charities and 12 state agencies. Help Me Grow is a public awareness campaign that gives parents and other caregivers better access to information about existing prevention services for children and family services.

Call 1-800-323-GROW

(Voice & TTY)

DCFS is an equal opportunity employer, and prohibits unlawful discrimination in all of its programs and/or services.

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About Foster Care



Answers to Common Questions



**Illinois Department of
Children and Family Services**

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