Prospective
Foster Family Resource Guide

FOSTERING FAMILY

Table of Contents

Introduction to Foster Care	3
Frequently Asked Questions	4
Steps to Becoming a Foster Parent	7
Questions to Consider When Choosing an Agency	10
It Takes a Village	12
The Babysitting Collaborative	13
Recommended Resources	14
Appendix A: Self-Assessment	16
Appendix B: Foster Family Profile	17

Introduction to Foster Care

When the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) finds evidence of child abuse and/or neglect, Child Protective Services (CPS) works to place the child/children in foster care. Foster care is a temporary arrangement whereby state-certified adults provide homes for children who have been separated from their birth parents. CPS may place such children with relatives, foster families, or group facilities.

The goal for foster children is typically reunification with birth parents, but adoption is a possible outcome in certain cases.

In the Houston area (Region 6), the need is overwhelming. There are currently more children in need of families than there are families available and willing to care for them. Many of these children are 6+ years old and/or members of sibling groups. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for conscientious Houstonians.

As you consider the possibility of providing a loving home for children in need, it's important to keep a few things in mind:

1) Foster Care is less about your family getting a child and more about a child getting your family, whether temporarily or permanently. Before asking, "What do we want?" begin by asking, "What is the need?"

2) Every child in the foster care system has experienced trauma. Many of their biological families have too. They need families who know how to bring healing through love, and their birth parents need communities who are willing to support, guide, and mentor them toward restoration and reunification with their children.

3) There is always a degree of uncertainty in foster care. Foster parents take on this uncertainty so that children don't have to carry it alone. If you are hoping to eventually adopt a child, remember that "unrelated adoption" is the State's last resort, and no case is clear cut. Embrace the uncertainty as the heart of foster care.

This Resource Guide is meant to help you through the discernment process. We don't pretend to have all the answers for you, but we're happy to walk with you and connect you with others. Please reach out to us at hello@fostering-family.org if you have questions or concerns not addressed in this guide.

Frequently Asked Questions

The foster/adoptive process is daunting, and many families have lingering questions as they begin their journey. The answers to those questions may vary slightly depending upon the child placing agency (CPA), but we have provided general answers to the questions we most commonly hear from families.

If you have a question that we have not included in this list, please reach out to us at hello@fostering-family.org. We'd love to help you find an answer.

What are the requirements for becoming a foster/adoptive parent?
Requirements differ depending on the agency (CPA), but generally include the following:

- At least 21 years old
- Financially stable
- 1 bed and 40 sq. ft. per child in the home
- No more than 6 children in the home, including biological, adoptive, foster, and children for whom you provide childcare (exceptions may apply)
- Vaccinated pets
- Agency application: references, home study, fire safety inspections, CPR/First Aid certification, TB testing, background checks and fingerprinting for household members 14 years+
- Annual training hours
- Non-physical discipline agreement (no spanking)

How long does it take to become a licensed foster home?
The process could take a few months or up to an entire year, depending upon how quickly you move through the training and documentation. However, some training isrequired annually, so it makes sense to try and complete the entire process within one year.

What is a child placing agency (CPA)?
If the court deems it necessary, children are removed from their homes and placed under the care of the Department of Family & Protective Services (DFPS or CPS), which then works alongside private child placing agencies (CPAs) to find temporary foster/kinship homes. CPAs contract with DFPS to provide safe, nurturing foster homes. There is no cost to getting trained and licensed through a CPA.

Why are children placed in foster care?
Children are placed in foster care in response to allegations of severe neglect, physical/emotional abuse, and/or sexual abuse. Children may be placed with

relatives (kinship) or emergency placements while an investigation is pending. Others are placed in foster homes. Unfortunately, due to a shortage of licensed foster homes, older children may temporarily stay at CPS offices or get admitted to residential treatment centers (RTCs) or group homes in the area.

What is the legal process for children in foster care?
Having placed a child in foster care, DFPS will continue to assess what is in the best interest of the child. Children may be reunited with their biological families (usually following a "service plan," whereby the biological parents demonstrate the ability to provide safe and nurturing care). Alternatively, an extended family member or close friend may be willing to assume responsibility for the child (kinship care). Otherwise, the child will remain in foster care, becoming adoptable if/when the court terminates biological parental rights. Typically, a child's case will last 15-18 months, but any number of factors may prolong or abbreviate the process.

Do I have any control over which children are placed within my home?
During the licensing process, prospective foster parents are permitted to submit preferences with regard to age, gender, ethnicity, and level of care (basic, moderate, or specialized). Once licensed, your agency will match children based on your preferences. And ultimately, the foster home makes the final decision before each and every placement.

Do I have to be married or a stay-at-home parent to foster?
No. There is no requirement that a foster parent be married or stay-at-home. However, as with any other parenting circumstance, arrangements must be made for taking children to daycare, school, medical/dental appointments, etc.

Do I have to own a home to become a foster/adoptive parent?
No. There is no requirement that foster parents own a home. However, moving to a new home while fostering requires an update to your home study. Foster children must have adequate living space as required by the DFPS Minimum Standards.

How much does it cost to foster?
Aside from miscellaneous costs during the licensing process (background checks, fingerprinting, TB testing, fire inspection, CPR certification, etc), foster care is inexpensive. Licensed foster families are given a monthly stipend to assist with costs of caring for the child. This stipend is based on their foster child's level of care. Children are also provided with medical and dental insurance through Medicaid and qualify for nutritional assistance through WIC. Additional resources may be available depending upon the needs of the foster family (i.e. day care, transportation, etc).

How much does it cost to adopt through foster care?
The cost to adopt through foster care is minimal. In many (but not all) cases, the adoptive family will qualify for State subsidy, which covers all legal fees, grants health care coverage, and offers an ongoing monthly stipend.

What is the likelihood that I will be able to adopt through the foster care system?
The primary goal for children in foster care is family preservation and reunification. When reuniting with biological family is no longer an option, there may be an opportunity to adopt a child through the foster care system. If you are considering foster care as a means of growing your family through adoption, we gently recommend examining your motivations (see Appendix A). Children in foster care need loving families who will support them and put their needs first, even if it means reunification with biological family. In other words, foster families are called upon to assume a degree of unpredictability, and there is no guarantee that you will be able to adopt your foster child.

That said, at any given moment, there are hundreds of children in Houston's foster system who are awaiting adoption.

What are the responsibilities of a foster parent?
Foster parents are expected to provide daily care, nurture, and support to children in your home. This includes advocating for children in their schools and communities, acting as a positive role model, and helping children to learn the life skills necessary to thrive in adulthood.

Foster parents are required to keep up-to-date documentation for the children placed in their home, informing caseworkers of progress, adjustments, and any problems that may arise, including illnesses, accidents, or the need for some sort of therapy.

In addition, we encourage foster parents to pursue relationship with biological family members (if/when wise and appropriate) and work with caseworkers to see families preserved and children reunited with their biological parents.

What ongoing support or training is available for foster/adoptive parents?
Most CPAs provide ongoing support and training for their foster families. In addition, some nonprofits and faith-based communities in Houston are committed to making sure families are well-supported and thriving. There are a growing number of support groups, parents' night outs, resource closets, Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) training, and other helpful resources. Email us, and we'd be happy to get you connected to resources in your area.

Steps to Becoming a Foster Parent

The licensing process can be confusing, and there is a lot to consider. Please review our recommended next steps below.

1. Assess your motives.

There are a variety of reasons to foster and/or adopt, and to be honest, some reasons are better than others. Maybe you have always wanted to foster and/or adopt. Maybe you first considered it after having struggled with infertility. Maybe you have a particular burden to care for vulnerable children. Or maybe, having had a number of biological children, you're looking to continue growing your family.

As you begin to ask whether fostering/adopting is for you, you may identify with several of these motivations. It's important to recognize, consider, explore, and discuss your expectations and motivations, because foster care is challenging. Children who have experienced significant loss need loving adults who are willing to shoulder heavy burdens. They don't need perfect families, but they do need families who have counted the cost and opened their homes for the right reasons. Our Self-Assessment Questionnaire (Appendix A) will help you to process your expectations and motivations.

2. Read the FAQ for prospective parents.

You already did this (pages 4-6).

3. Connect with other foster/adoptive parents.

We highly encourage you to discuss foster care and/or adoption with wise and humble people who are further along in their foster care/adoption journeys. Ask questions, gain insight, and learn from their experiences. Good mentors can help you manage your expectations, provide ongoing support, and answer the multitude of questions not addressed in the FAQ.

Some certified placing agencies (CPAs) have a process for connecting prospective foster/adoptive families with seasoned mentors. If your agency does not, we would love to help you find a mentor in your area. Email us at hello@fostering-family.org.

4. Select a placing agency.

The city of Houston is home to a number of certified placing agencies (CPAs). All CPAs contract with the State of Texas and adhere to the State's Minimum Standards, but they may differ in their approach to licensing, training, and support. CPAs who partner with Fostering Family's Babysitting Collaborative have taken an important step toward ensuring that foster/adoptive parents have the support they need.

There's no such thing as a perfect agency, but it's important to do some research and find the best fit for your family. Visit www.fostering-family.org/agencies to see a map of our partner agencies, and please review our list of recommended questions to ask an agency (page 11).

5. Begin the training and application process.

Once you have narrowed down your list of CPAs, register to attend an orientation class (or several). This class should give you a feel for the organization and help to answer your lingering questions.

Your agency will provide you with a list of trainings and documentation that will need to be completed during the licensing process. Be patient, take your time, and keep copies of all documentation!

6. Grow a support system.

Foster/adoptive families do not thrive in isolation. As you begin your journey, it's important to identify and enlist friends, family, and/or neighbors who can provide ongoing support for your family. We highly recommend that the members of your support system get certified to babysit so that you can have the time and space to rest and receive ongoing training. Visit www.fostering-family.org/babysitting-collaborative to see upcoming opportunities to certify babysitters, and see Appendix B for our Foster Family Profile.

7. Prepare your home and heart.

After you submit your application and complete your trainings, you will be scheduled for a home study. Your agency will have further instructions on how to prepare.

In addition, begin preparing your heart to show love and compassion no matter what comes your way. And if you have children in your home, begin having conversations about love, patience, selflessness, and hospitality. Your entire family

will be called upon to make room, both physically and emotionally. See page 12 for our list of Recommended Resources.

8. Wait for a call.

As you wait for your first placement, we encourage you to continue learning and preparing. If you pray, it's never too early to start praying for your foster/adoptive child(ren) and their biological family. They are somewhere in the city, and they need your love even now.

Questions to Consider When Choosing an Agency

Foster care and adoption agencies (also called child placing agencies or CPAs) work in partnership with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to train parents and find homes for children. While all CPAs must adhere to the State's minimum standards for operation, their specific policies and procedures may differ substantially.

We encourage prospective foster/adoptive families to do their research before choosing an agency, and we recommend starting with the list of agencies who partner with our Babysitting Collaborative (https://www.fostering-family.org/agencies). To help you find the agency that fits best with your family, we have compiled the following list of questions:

General

1. Where are the agency's offices located. How far will you have to drive for trainings?
2. What is the agency's general reputation in the community? What do other foster/adoptive families have to say about them?
3. What is the size and scope of the organization? (Typically, larger organizations have more flexible training options, but smaller organizations may be more attentive to your individual needs.)

Licensing

1. What are the agency's requirements for licensing?
2. What is the anticipated timeline for becoming a licensed foster/adoptive home?
3. How many families are currently licensed with the agency?
4. How many foster children are currently placed through the agency?
5. Does the agency currently have any constraints in the licensing process (i.e. longer than normal review process, staff shortage, approval committee)?
6. Does the agency have an electronic system for documentation and/or submission of licensing requirements?
7. Are there any costs related to the licensing process?

Training

1. How much of the agency's training curriculum is Trauma-Informed?
2. Is childcare offered during annual training classes?
3. How much assistance does the agency provide with regard to annual training requirements?
4. Are any of the trainings available via livestream or online access?

Support

1. Is the agency staff trained in Trauma-Informed Care?
2. Are they willing to come to your home to offer assistance with severe behavioral challenges, if necessary?
3. How often do agency representatives attend court hearings, mediations, and/or permanency conferences?
4. Is the Placement Coordinator a full-time employee? Are they able to take phone calls directly from a potential foster family?
5. How often does the agency conduct unannounced home visits?
6. Do they offer support groups or other types of support for families?
7. Do they offer post-adoption support?
8. What are the agency's requirements for babysitters and respite care providers? Will it be reasonably easy for you to get the childcare support you need?

It Takes a Village

We encourage all foster/adoptive families to reach out to their immediate community for support. If you do not have a community, please consider joining one. We'd be happy to help you get connected!

Why is this so important? First and foremost, foster/adoptive families do not thrive in isolation. You will need some sort of support system. And by inviting others into your journey, you give them opportunities to serve you and your family. Incidentally, this is a great way to serve children all over the city, because the members of your support system are the foster families of tomorrow. So by being honest about the support you need from others, you also help the city of Houston to recruit additional foster and adoptive families.

The best places to begin building your support system are (1) your biological family members, (2) your faith community, or (3) your neighborhood. Not only do you get the support you need, but sharing the load fosters community and makes our city a better place to live. To that end, Fostering Family is committed to helping your faith community to be your greatest advocate and support network. Email us at hello@fosteringfamily.org if you would like to connect us with your faith community. We would be happy to provide resources and tools for serving and supporting current and future foster/adoptive families.

For a list of local community resources including support groups, parent night out events, closets for tangible needs, etc, visit fostering-family.org/resources.

The Babysitting Collaborative

Becoming a certified foster care babysitter can be time-consuming, confusing, inconvenient, and expensive. Different agencies have different requirements, including background checks, fingerprinting, and CPR/First Aid certification. As a result, most foster families operate on a very short supply of certified babysitters. This is a key indicator that foster families are isolated and under-supported.

When foster families are isolated, communities miss out on the privilege of loving and serving vulnerable children. When foster families are well-supported, communities are exposed to the need and more likely to foster themselves.

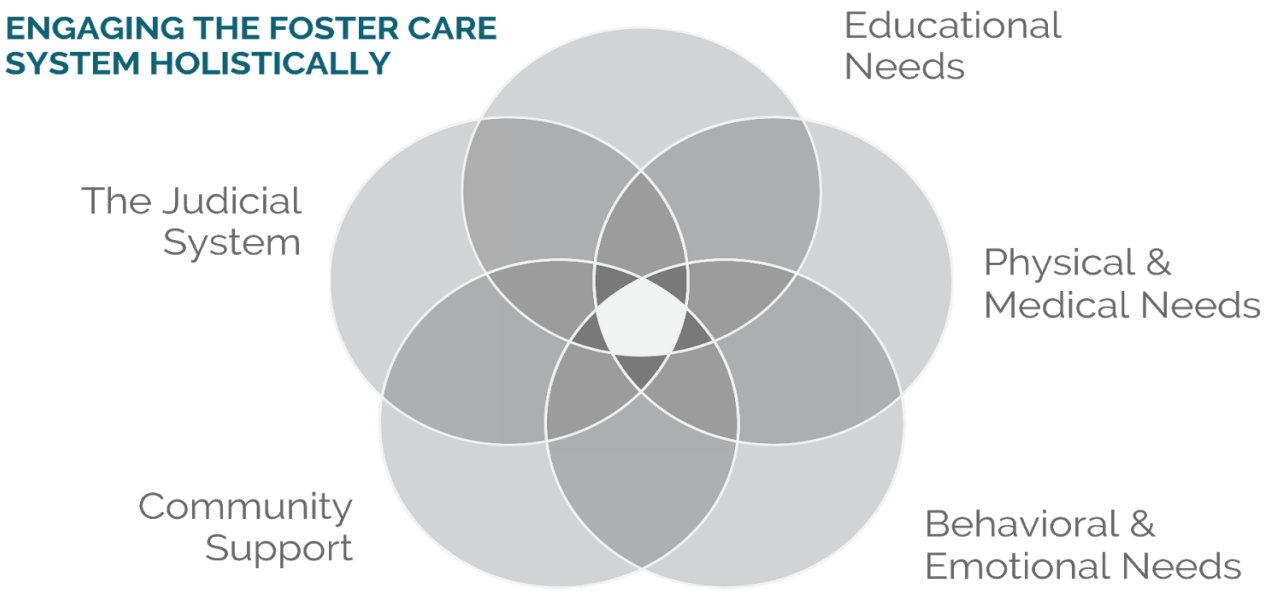
Fostering Family has created a streamlined, multi-agency babysitter certification course for foster care babysitters. This one-day training course allows babysitters to complete most of the training and documentation necessary to serve and support foster children and families in their communities.

As you continue on in your journey toward becoming a licensed foster family, it's important to gather your team of support. Sending those you trust to become certified babysitters allows you to take time for rest, attend required trainings, and have options for childcare in case of an emergency.

For upcoming training dates and locations, a list of participating agencies, answers to frequently asked questions, or other details regarding our Babysitter Certification Trainings, please visit https://www.fostering-family.org/babysitting-collaborative.

Recommended Resources

Houston has a variety of resources for children and families involved in the foster care system, but unfortunately, many struggle to access these resources. As a community, we can work together to make sure our neighbors are getting the help they need. In doing so, we believe Houston can become a city where children can thrive and families can heal.



For a list of local resources, visit www.fostering-family.org/resources.

Books

- *The Connected Child* by Karyn Purvis, Ph.D
- *The Connected Parent* by Karyn Purvis, Ph.D & Lisa Qualls
- *The Whole Brain Child* by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D
- *Integrative Parenting: Strategies for Raising Children Affected by Attachment Trauma* by Debra Wesselmann, Cathy Schweitzer, & Stefanie Armstrong
- *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.
- *Parenting From the Inside Out* by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. & Mary Hartzell, M.Ed.
- *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew* by Sherrie Eldridge
- *Dear Birthmother* by Kathleen Silber
- *In Their Own Voices* by Rita J. Simon and Rhonda M Roorda
- *Black Baby White Hands: A View From The Crib* by Jaiya John

Additional Websites/Online Resources

- Empowered to Connect
- Jason Johnson Blog
- Christian Alliance for Orphans- Resources
- Foster the Family Blog

Podcasts

- One Big Happy Home: The Empowered Parent Podcast
- CAFO: Foster Movement Podcast
- CAFO: More Than Enough Podcast
- The Honestly Adoption Podcast
- Creating a Family: Talk about Infertility, Adoption, & Foster Care
- The Real Mom Podcast by Foster the Family
- Archibald Project Podcast
- The Forgotten Podcast
- Mama's Well Podcast

Appendix A: Self-Assessment

Before you begin your foster/adoptive journey, it's wise to honestly assess your motives and expectations. This document will guide you through that process. If you're unsure how to answer a question, we recommend asking a mentor or someone who knows you well. Please don't be intimidated; you do not need to answer "yes" to every question. Just keep these questions in mind as you move forward.

Click to Download

Or visit fostering-family.org/adopt

Appendix B: Foster Family Profile

Foster/kinship families do not thrive in isolation; they need friends and relatives who are willing to walk alongside them through the joys and sorrows and daily uncertainties. This worksheet is designed to (1) help foster families voice their needs and (2) help communities discover how best to serve and support. Feel free to utilize this resource however works best for your community.

Click to Download

Or visit www.fostering-family.org/resources