



# Where do I begin?

## Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About Foster Care

### What is Foster Care?

The State of Michigan is in need of caring individuals who can provide a safe and nurturing home environment for children who have been placed out of their home due to abuse or neglect. Foster Care is founded on the premise that all children have the right to physical care and educational and emotional nurturance. The family foster care program is designed to provide a substitute family life experience for a child in a household that has been approved and licensed by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services or by a private Agency contracted with the state to provide foster care.

Children may be placed in foster care for a temporary or extended period of time. The primary goal during foster care is to reunite the child with his or her parents. The foster family plays an important role in the treatment plan for the child and family. Under the “team” approach, foster parents or relatives, together with the worker, attempt to provide the specific kind of help a child and his family need for reunification with the parents. When the child cannot be reunited with the parents, the children are prepared for permanent placement, with relatives, the foster family or non-related adoptive families. For older youth, the permanency goal can sometimes be preparation for independent living.

### What is the first step in becoming a foster parent?

The first step is to find an agency to complete your licensing process. Every county has a local Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) agency, and many counties have private agencies contracted with the State of Michigan to provide foster care services to families.

A complete list of agencies providing foster care services can be found at: [www.fcnp.org](http://www.fcnp.org)

When you first contact an agency, be sure to ask them plenty of questions. You may want to ask:

How long will the foster care licensing process take?

What types of children are typically placed in foster homes through this agency?

What services are provided to me once my license is opened and a child or children are placed in my home?

When and where are the orientation and foster parent training classes held?

Feel free to call several agencies and ask them the same kinds of questions before making a final decision. Be sure you feel comfortable with the agency you choose; you will be working closely with them for a long time during the process, and will be sharing private and personal information. They will also become your strongest advocate in this process.

### What's the difference between foster care and adoption?

A foster parent assumes care and responsibility for the child in their care, but the State maintains all legal guardianship of the child. Adoption transfers legal responsibility and care over to the parents who are adopting.

A parent providing foster care has the primary role to help in efforts to reunite the child with their birth family. This may include visits between the child and birth parents (when appropriate), taking a child to counseling (if needed), and working closely with the foster care worker. Children may stay in the foster home for several days, weeks or months- perhaps even a year or longer- while birth parents are working to overcome the challenges that brought the children to the attention of Children’s Protective Services. Sometimes, a child is unable to return home; it is then that the court terminates parental rights and the child becomes available for adoption.

Parents who adopt become the child’s legal parent. Their lifelong commitment and responsibility are no less important than if the child was born to them.



To find out more information on children and youth currently available for adoption, please visit [www.MARE.org](http://www.MARE.org).



### What types of needs do children in foster care have?

It is important to remember that children in foster care have the same needs as children who live in a stable family environment. They are placed in foster care based on the actions or inactions of the adults, not because of something that they did wrong.

It is important to realize that children in foster care have had traumatic past experiences that may include physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and or neglect. Others may have been drug and or alcohol exposed. Children in foster care may have some level of special emotional, cognitive, learning, and physical, health or developmental need. All of these children have experienced the grief and loss of having been separated from their family of origin.

Your agency will ask you about the children for whom you are willing to care. The agency’s final recommendation will be based on your preferences and the agency’s assessment of your skills and abilities. Ongoing training opportunities are offered to foster parents to increase the knowledge and skills needed to meet the needs of the children placed in their home.

### Should I become a foster parent so I can adopt a child?

Because foster care is considered to be a temporary placement, not every child that comes into your home will be eligible for adoption. The expectation is that parents who fosters will work with the agency and birth parents, in the hopes that the family will be reunited. A foster parent must be objective and must be able to assist a child if and when it comes time for that child to leave the foster home.

There are times when children are unable to return to their home of origin. If parental rights are terminated, relatives and foster parents are given consideration for adoption.

#### **What does “foster-to-adopt” and “dual licensing” mean?**

“Foster-to-adopt” means families become foster parents with the hope and intent that they will adopt a child in foster care. This same process is also referred to as “dual licensing.” Families complete the foster care licensing and adoption requirements at the same time. It saves time and reduces duplicate paperwork.

#### **Do I have to be married to be a foster parent?**

You don’t have to be married to adopt or foster a child or children. Many children thrive in a single parent home. Only one parent of a non married couple can legally adopt a child in Michigan.

#### **Do I have to own my own home?**

You don’t have to own your home to adopt or foster a child. The home must be free from health and fire hazards, must have a safe play area for children and adequate bedroom space per child.

#### **Do I need to be a stay-at-home parent to be a foster parent?**

Being a stay-at-home parent is not required. Foster parents are eligible for day care payments for the time that they are working or continuing their education.

#### **Do I need to make a lot of money to foster or adopt?**

You do not have to be rich to adopt or be a foster parent. You are eligible to adopt or provide foster care as long as you have adequate financial resources, which may include forms of assistance, to provide for your family and the additional children you wish to bring into your home.

#### **What is a home study?**

The home study (also called a family assessment) is done by a social worker at a licensed Child Placing Agency, and typically takes several months to complete. The home study consists of a series of meetings between the family and the licensing worker, with at least one meeting occurring in the family’s home. It provides an educational opportunity for the family to learn more and seriously consider their motivations and expectations for foster care. It also gives the licensing worker a chance to get to know the family.

#### **The home study generally includes the following:**

Personal History – A complete history and evaluation of your current family life and past experiences- and how they will affect your capacity to parent children in foster care- is written. This helps the licensing worker decide how a child will fit into your family, and determine what type of child might do best in your home. Children living in the home are also interviewed (depending on their age and level of understanding) about how they feel and what being a foster family means to them. Any other adult in the home (parents, aunts, cousins, live-together partners), will also be interviewed.

Health Statements – Everyone in your home will need to provide a medical history and recent physical (within 1 year). A medical condition, such as diabetes or high blood pressure that is under control will not usually prevent a person from becoming licensed.

Criminal Background Check – All adults living in the home will need to complete a State Police check, Protective Service clearance and provide fingerprints. Some counties may require local police checks.

Income Statement- You will be asked to provide proof of your income, such as a copy of an income tax form or paycheck stub. Bank statements and insurance policies may also be requested.

Personal References- You will be asked to provide names, addresses, and phone numbers of three unrelated individuals who can share their knowledge about your experience with children, the stability of your household, and your motivation to provide foster care.

Training- You will need to complete a minimum of 12 hours of Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE) training.

#### **What happens once my license is opened? Is there any guarantee that children will be placed in my home? How long will it take for a child to be placed in my home?**

There are no guarantees that a child will be placed into your home. Becoming a licensed foster home makes the placement of a child possible. Having a child placed is dependent on the needs of the children, availability of homes in the community, and the placement specifications for each foster home. The timeframe for placement of a child in a newly licensed home varies widely.

Your agency will contact you about any possible placement of a child or children in your home. You will have the opportunity to discuss the known needs of the child with the agency prior to the placement and to decide whether you are willing and able to meet their needs. Foster parents are not required to take any child into their home at any time.

#### **Is there some kind of financial assistance available if I choose to foster a child?**

There is financial assistance available for those who provide foster care. Foster care payments are not meant to cover all expenses incurred in raising a child. These payments are meant to help offset some of the cost. Foster parents are given a modest initial and semiannual clothing allowance as well as a holiday allowance for youth placed in the home.

The amount paid is dependent on the needs of the child, not the family. The amount is set by the State agency responsible for the child’s care.

Children in foster care are also eligible for dental, medical and vision coverage through Medicaid, daycare subsidies, free school meals, WIC, high school graduation and prom expenses and tuition assistance for older youth. Eligibility for these and many other supportive services for families caring for youth in foster care are not based on the foster parent’s income.

**Foster care is seen as a short term solution to an emergency situation. Agencies need committed individuals who are willing to work with the child’s birth parents, supportive of efforts to return the child home, able to work with children who have significant emotional and behavior needs, as well as encourage teens toward independent living**

**Anyone applying to become a foster parent must be over the age of 18 and be able to complete a licensing application, successfully complete background clearances and provide medical statements for all adult household members, have an environmental inspection, provide three acceptable references, pass on-site visits to the home by the licensing worker and attend training pertinent to foster care issues. Training is required annually after the license for each person named on the license. You will need to keep the agency informed about your family and to maintain compliance with the foster home licensing rules.**



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