

## Frequently Asked Questions: Becoming a Foster Parent

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- **What is foster care?**

Foster care is a temporary placement for children without parental care due to abuse or neglect. Foster families provide a safe and nurturing home while the biological parents receive support services to regain custody of their children.
- **Who are the children in foster care?**

Children in foster care range in age from birth to 21. Children enter foster care for a variety of reasons related to abuse or neglect. Most have experienced significant trauma, including the trauma of being separated from their families. Providing patience, understanding and unconditional love is paramount in assisting the child in the healing process.
- **What are the qualifications for becoming a foster parent?**

Many people believe you have to have children, be married or own a home to become a foster parent. This is not true. To become a foster parent, you must:

  - Be at least 21 years of age
  - Complete a child abuse/neglect check and criminal record check, including fingerprints
  - Be in good health; both physically and mentally
  - Have a stable income
  - Be willing to participate in, and complete a free training and assessment process
  - Be part of a professional team willing to voice perspectives and concerns
  - Be willing to partner with a child's family
- **Do I have to be married to become a foster parent?**

You do not have to be married.
- **Do I have to own my own home to become a foster parent?**

You do not have to own your own home. In fact, many foster parents rent their residence.
- **How do I get started?**

If you meet the qualifications for becoming a foster parent, contact the Children's Division at 573-522-1191 or [fostercare@dss.mo.gov](mailto:fostercare@dss.mo.gov), to set up a time to meet with us. During this meeting, you will go over the services available to foster parents and children, as well as the rewards and challenges of being a foster parent.
- **How do I apply for my foster parent license?**

After meeting with us, you will be directed to fill out and submit a foster parent license application. You will also need to complete a child abuse/neglect check and criminal record check.

- **What are the training requirements for becoming a foster parent?**

Once you are approved and you receive your Foster Parent license, you'll need to enroll in the free training program and complete the following online trainings:

- **Intro to Foster Care**
- **Intro to Respite Care**
- **Informed Consent**
- **Consent to Treat Webinar**

- **Do I have a choice in which foster children are placed in my home?**

When you become a licensed foster parent, we will document any specialized parenting skills, the number of children you can have in your home, and your child preferences (if any). This assessment will be ongoing and part of the continuing licensure process. We will contact you if we feel you may be a good match for a child placed in foster care. Even if we contact you as a match, it is always your choice whether or not it is a good time to take a foster child in. You have the option to decline placement.

- **What type of support services are provided after a child is placed in my home?**

A Children's Division team member will be assigned to you to help offer the support you may need. They will also work with you to make sure you get any needed trainings, supports, and respite care for the family.

You may also receive a monthly maintenance payment to help cover the costs of caring for the foster child. Medicaid is provided by the state for the child's medical, psychological and dental needs. Additionally, if you are employed or enrolled in school full time you may be able to receive child care services.

- **What is reunification?**

3 out of every 5 children in foster care return home to their parents or other family members.

**Reunification** - getting the family safely back together - is almost always the first goal in foster care

Federal law requires States to establish a "permanency plan" for each child in foster care

**Permanency Plan** – a plan for where the child will live when they leave foster care

Permanency plans may include:

- returning home to their family [reunification]
- living permanently with a relative [kinship care]
- placed for adoption

- **What are other ways I can help?**

If you are unable to become a foster parent, there are many ways you can still support foster families in Missouri, such as:

- Provide **respite care**
- Make a monetary donation
- Become a **volunteer**
- Tutor or mentor a youth
- **Donate** items to help youth in foster care and/or foster families
- Hold a backpack or luggage drive

To find a more comprehensive donation list, or to discover more ways in which you can help, visit [tinyurl.com/DSS-MO-FosterSupport](https://tinyurl.com/DSS-MO-FosterSupport)

- **What is respite care?**

If you are considering foster care, **respite care** may be a great way to get started. People who are approved to provide respite care temporarily help with children in foster care, offering relief to foster parents who need time to themselves or have an emergency situation. Respite care providers have a unique opportunity to bond with children in foster care by offering quality time and activities that help the child continue to thrive.

To get started, contact your local **Children's Division office** to set up a time to meet with us. You must apply and receive approval before you can provide care. For more information, visit: [dss.mo.gov/foster-care/respice-care.htm](https://dss.mo.gov/foster-care/respice-care.htm)