

Becoming a Foster Parent FAQ

Q: Who can apply to be a foster parent?

A: Persons from all racial/ethnic/cultural and religious backgrounds, renters and homeowners, persons who identify as LGBTQ+, persons with any education level, all are welcome to apply!

Q: Does a person need to be married to become a foster parent?

A: No, that is not required. You can be single, partnered, or married.

Q: At what age can someone apply to become a foster parent?

A: You need to be at least 21 years old to become a foster parent. If you are 18 and a relative to the child, there may be exceptions made for this requirement.

Q: Are there income requirements to be a licensed foster parent?

A: Yes. We evaluate your financial situation during the home study process. We want to ensure that you can meet the financial needs of your family without relying on the foster care reimbursements for foster children in your care. Exceptions may be made to this requirement for relative caregivers.

Q: What is a home study?

A: All prospective foster parents must participate in the home study process to assess their ability to care for children placed in their home. The home study is an assessment that looks at the individual's background in many areas that include, but are not limited to parenting abilities, relationships, support systems, finances, mental health, medical, and home environment. We assess people on their ability to provide a safe and healthy environment for every child, which is essential to a child's well-being.

Q: How long does it take to complete the home study process?

A: It takes around 120 days. We depend on you to return information quickly. The time frame depends on many factors including engagement and collaboration with applicants as well as the completion of background checks.



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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Q: Do you have to be a US citizen to become a licensed foster parent?

A: It is not a requirement to obtain US citizenship to become foster licensed. However, you or a co-applicant on the license must have an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) in order to receive foster care reimbursement.

Q: Can I be a foster parent if I have a criminal background?

A: Having a criminal history does not automatically disqualify a person from becoming a foster parent. All foster parents must pass a criminal background check that includes FBI fingerprinting. In some instances, an additional review of criminal history may be required.

Q: Can I be a foster parent if I had a CPS case?

A: Having a past CPS case does not automatically disqualify a person from becoming a foster parent. DCYF will review your CPS history and assess whether the information may compromise a child's safety and well-being.

Q: If I am a kinship caregiver, should I become licensed?

A: Yes! Kinship caregivers are strongly encouraged to be licensed; however, it is not a requirement. Being licensed provides additional support including a monthly reimbursement of costs associated with caring for a child in out-of-home care. If you are a relative to the child in care, you may also qualify for some licensing exemptions in order to become licensed.

Q: What is the average length of time a child might stay in a foster home?

A: All children in care have different case plans and their length of stay will depend on their situation. There are times where it may be just a few days until a relative is found and able to take the child. For other children, it could be several months. With all children in care, permanency is always a priority. Permanency for a child could include returning home, adoption, guardianship, long-term foster care (in rare circumstances), and non-parental custody agreements.

Q: How does DCYF support the children's parents through this process?

A: Reunification is the process of actively working with parents to address issues that brought their child into care so the family can come back together. Children need safe, stable, quality care during this time. It is important for the child to stay connected to their family. Most foster children have regular court-ordered family time with their parents. Children and parents need to have regular contact to stay connected and work toward children returning home safely. The child's caseworker will work with you and the child's parents to decide the location and time of

family time. The court decides the level of supervision and family time plan developed (frequency and location). The child's caseworker will work with foster families to ensure family time is manageable and meet the needs of the children, their parents, and the caregivers that support them.

Q: Can children share rooms?

A: Most children may share bedrooms. They must have a separate bed and children of the opposite gender can only share a room if they are under six years old. Some children cannot share bedrooms because of supervision concerns. There are various circumstances that impact the ability to share rooms. These are case-specific and will be addressed with the child's caseworker. Children age 6 and above need to share a room with the same gendered child. In certain cases, there may be exceptions to this rule depending on the circumstances of all children. Children of the foster family are able to share rooms with children placed in their care.

Q: As foster parents, do we get to choose the age and gender of the child/children placed in our care?

A: Foster parents, with the help of their licensor, determine how many children, what ages, and what gender they will be licensed for. Families are able to choose what developmental stages work best for their family and home environment. Families are able to note their preference for children they wish to have placed in their care. This is taken into consideration during the home study process and the licensor makes the final approval based on physical space available, meeting the licensing requirements for different age ranges, parenting skill level, and experience.

Q: What information will we receive prior to placement of a new child in our home? Will there be an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the child prior to placement?

A: In general, foster parents are provided with detailed information, prior to placement, to help inform their decision about whether or not they are able to meet the child's needs. Foster parents are encouraged to ask questions where they need more information. We suggest foster parents make a list of questions and identify areas where additional information is needed to help guide the decision. It is always okay to ask more questions and take time to gather more information. You will also receive the Child Information and Placement Referral form (CIPR).

It is important to remember that children are individuals and no picture is ever complete. A child's behavior may look very different with you than they did in previous placements. Often, DCYF does not have a lot of information about children who are new to care.

Q: Are foster parents able to determine what may or may not be a good fit in their home?

A: Yes. Foster parents have the right to accept or decline placement requests. Please think about how each child may affect the other children in your home before accepting a placement.

It is important for foster parents to know what is and is not a good fit in their home. It is equally important that the family be aware of these and ask questions to have a better understanding of the child's needs prior to placement. Foster families should never feel like they need to take a placement that they are not equipped to care for. Feel free to reach out to your assigned licensor if you are unsure or need additional information.

Q: What discipline options do I have for foster children?

A: DCYF stresses positive discipline, creating structure and boundaries, and having natural consequences combined with warmth and caring. You will receive training during the licensing process on appropriate forms of discipline. Foster parents are encouraged to utilize positive discipline methods, assisting the child with coping skills and the ability to navigate their emotions. There is also ongoing training support once you become licensed. No forms of physical punishment are allowed.

Q: Can foster children go on vacation with our family?

A: Yes, but if the travel will be more than 72 hours or out-of-the-country the foster parent will need prior approval from the child's caseworker. It is essential that the foster family communicate the travel plans with the caseworker to ensure that the travel does not impact family time and other obligations necessary for the children placed in their care.

Q: Can foster children be left with others, such as a babysitter, for short periods of time?

A: Yes, foster children can be cared for by others, they must be 16 years of age. Background checks and CPR/First Aid are necessary for those who care for the children on a regular basis. Respite care is also an option for families who need additional support. It is important that the foster parents maintain good communication with the child's social worker, keeping them informed of the child's and foster family's needs.

Q: What financial support does DCYF provide to foster families?

A: The agency provides reimbursement for foster care using standard rates that reflect the child's age and additional financial support will be assessed for identified special needs. Reimbursements are provided to licensed foster families. There are individual assessors who determine the need of the child and what the appropriate reimbursement rates are. In

addition, foster parents receive mileage reimbursement for travel to support the child's case plan. If the family is a two-parent caregiver family, childcare is covered when both parents are employed and working out of the home. There are organizations throughout Washington that may be able to help with one-time financial supports.

Q: Can I be a foster parent if I have a roommate or a significant other that stays over?

A: Yes, adult household members are required to pass a background check, provide negative TB test results, and meet certain immunization requirements if caring for children under 2 years old. There are additional requirements if they are also providing care for children.

Q: Do I need to meet the requirements in [WAC 110-148](#) before becoming licensed?

A: You must meet the requirements in this chapter prior to becoming licensed. There are some exceptions for relatives as defined in [RCW 74.15.020\(2\)\(a\)](#). Exceptions are assessed individually as each family will have unique circumstances.