

Common Questions about Foster and Adoptive Parenting

THE NEED FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS IN LOUISIANA

Children come to the attention of the agency because of concerns from a teacher, police officer, family member, friend, doctor, neighbor, or mandated reporter. Any one can make a referral that they suspect a child has been abused or neglected. Referrals that meet the criteria for a report of child abuse or neglect will be investigated. If the agency finds a family needs help, every effort is made to provide services to help the family resolve their problem and prevent the removal of the children from their home. Only if reasonable efforts fail, will the agency seek authorization from the court to remove children from their family.

WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?

Foster care is a protective service for children and their parents who must live apart because of child abuse, neglect or special family circumstances requiring the need for out-of-home care. Foster care is intended to provide temporary/short-term care for a child. The goal of the foster care program is to maintain the child in a safe and nurturing environment, which is supportive of his development while assisting his parents in resuming responsibility and custody or until an alternative permanent placement for the child is found.

The first goal of foster care is to reunite the child with his or her biological family.

WHAT IS ADOPTION?

Adoption is the method provided by law to establish the legal and social relationship of parents and children between persons who are not related by birth with the mutual rights and obligations that exist between children and their birth parents. Adoption is one of the case plan goals of the Foster Care system within the Office of Community Services.

WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO FOSTER CARE/ADOPTION CERTIFICATION?

1. Orientation- Informational meeting to provide an overview of the agency and the foster/adoption programs.
2. Application- The application is the beginning of the certification process and is required to proceed through the process.
3. Fingerprinting – Every applicant and adult (over the age of 18) in the home will be fingerprinted.
4. Pre-Service Training - Training generally consists of 7 sessions- 3 hours each. **All spouses must complete pre-service training to be certified. CHILDREN ARE NOT ALLOWED AT TRAINING.**

5. Home Study – This process occurs while you are completing your training. This includes a series of interviews, home visits, a safety and fire inspection, and additional paperwork. During this process you will become familiar with the Home Development Worker.
6. Placement- After you are certified, a child or children will be placed in your home. This may happen immediately or may take longer, depending on what age and type of child you are able to care for. The agency will try to place children with you that match your strengths and preferences. You can always refuse any placement you are offered. During the certification process you will explore what age(s), gender(s), race(s), number and type(s) of child(ren) you are able to care for and you will be certified accordingly.

WHAT IS DUAL CERTIFICATION?

This certification means that a family is certified to foster and adopt. A family may specify that they only wish to foster or only wish to adopt, but they will still be certified for both. Dual certification is the certification offered by the State of Louisiana.

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN NEEDING FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE HOMES?

The agency receives custody of children ranging in age from infants to teenagers. They may have an emotional or physical illness, have been neglected, abused, or abandoned, or have experienced a breakdown in the family, or the death of a parent.

The children are of different races and religions. They identify with their own cultures and need help with maintaining their identities, staying connected to their birth families, and learning how to feel lovable, capable, worthwhile and responsible.

Some of the children waiting for a permanent home are older, have medical, emotional or intellectual problems, or are part of a sibling group that needs to be placed together. The important thing to remember is that all children deserve a family.

WHAT DO FOSTER/ADOPTIVE PARENTS DO?

Foster/Adoptive Parents do everything that birth parents do, and sometimes more. They open their hearts and homes to children who have been abused or neglected, nurture these children and provide support and stability in their lives. Foster/Adoptive Parents are responsible for advocating for the child, meeting with teachers, attending school conferences, scheduling and transporting the child to all doctor, therapy and other appointments, and to visits with the child's parents and siblings. Because of their unique role, involvement, and direct care of the child, it is also critical that they attend and participate in case planning meetings and court hearings. Foster/Adoptive Parents must also work with the agency by being available to meet with the child's worker at least once a month to discuss all issues regarding the child.

Once a child has been adopted, the Adoptive Parent is considered the child's legal parent and possesses all the same rights and responsibilities as any parent. It is a relationship that lasts a lifetime. Once the child is adopted, the agency is no longer involved and the Adoptive Parents make all decisions for the child.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS TO BECOME A FOSTER/ADOPTIVE PARENT?

Anyone interested in being a Foster/Adoptive Parent is welcome to call for more information and to attend an orientation session. Applicants must be at least 21 years of age, have sufficient income to meet their own basic needs, and be in good physical, emotional and mental health. A Foster/Adoptive Parent can be single, married, divorced, or widowed.

Foster/Adoptive Parent applicants must be committed to provide the child with positive forms of discipline and cannot use physical punishment of any kind.

IS THERE FINANCIAL HELP TO FOSTER AND ADOPT?

A daily board rate is paid to certified Foster/Adoptive Parents to assist with the child's monthly expenses. The board rate is intended to help with clothing, food, personal hygiene products, a personal allowance for the child and gifts for the child for occasions like birthdays. **Foster/Adoptive Parents are not paid.** The board rate is for the child's needs. The agency provides for the medical needs of each child, therapy expenses, and evaluations. The child's worker or supervisor is available to address problems 24 hours a day.

Financial assistance may be available for families adopting children with special needs because of age, race, handicap, intellectual, emotional or medical problems, or for members of a sibling group who are adopted together.

Several support services are available to Foster/Adoptive Parents, because we know that parenting our children can be demanding and different from other parenting experiences due to the special needs and histories of each child in the foster care system. A few support services include in-service training, frequent contacts from the Home Development Worker, reimbursement for mileage to required activities, and membership in a local Foster/Adoptive Association.

WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP TO FOSTER/ADOPT?

If you are interested in becoming a Foster/Adoptive Parent you can attend an orientation session where more information is given about the program, becoming certified, the children available for placement, and the training and home study process. If you like what you hear and are ready to proceed with certification, you will be invited to the pre-service training.

CAN RELATIVES AND FRIENDS DO THIS TOO?

1. If I am a relative of a child who needs care, can I apply to be their Foster Parent?

YES. If the child is in the custody of the State of Louisiana, you may make an application to foster/adopt the child.

2. Since I am a relative, do I have to meet all of the qualifications to become a Foster/Adoptive Parent?

YES. Anyone becoming a Foster/Adoptive Parent must meet the same eligibility requirements as non relative Foster/Adoptive Parents. The pre-service training hours required may vary.

3. Can I adopt a relative's child?

YES. If the child is in foster care and the birth parents' rights have been terminated by the court or the parents have surrendered their rights, you may make application to the agency to adopt the child. You must meet all of the requirements for adoption as specified by the Office of Community Services (OCS).

4. If I have legal custody, can I become the child's foster parent?

NO. Legal custody means that you have been given custody of the child and OCS is no longer legally responsible for the care of the child. However, you may be eligible to receive various forms of help through the Office of Family Support (OFS), and Department of Health & Hospitals (DHH). These options may include: Louisiana Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Kinship Care Subsidy Program (KCSP), Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program (FITAP), a Medicaid Card or financial assistance from the Social Security Administration. To apply, you must contact each agency and complete their application process.

5. I now have legal custody of a child but want to become their foster parent instead. Will the agency take custody back?

NO. OCS will not assume custody of the child. In rare cases, an individual can petition the court who may determine that a high risk or hardship situation exists and may grant custody to OCS.

6. I am caring for a relative's child and in the process of becoming a Foster/Adoptive Parent. Can I get financial assistance now?

YES. You may receive financial assistance and a Medicaid card by applying for Louisiana Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or Kinship Care Subsidy Program (KCSP) from the Office of Family Support (OFS).

7. If I foster one child, can I foster another?

YES. Often individuals who become foster parents for a specific child find the experience rewarding and open their home to other children. This can be done by talking with your Home Development Worker so that your home may be assessed for other foster children.

8. I am a relative with legal custody, can I adopt the child?

YES. You need to contact your local court system to proceed with the process.