



CORNERSTONES  
OF CARE



# BECOMING A FOSTER PARENT

# Children in Your Community Need Your Support



**We believe that every child deserves to be safe and healthy, and deserves to live in a loving home in a supportive community.**

A safe place to sleep is the first step to health and healing. Children enter foster care through no fault of their own. They have experienced trauma and may need help learning to process their emotions. Their parents may have high levels of stress or limited resources, and may lack a support system. These families need assistance and support in a number of ways.

*As a foster parent, you have the opportunity to help by providing a safe and nurturing home for the children, providing support and guidance for the parents and being part of a team that helps families heal.*

**We're looking to partner with foster parents to help children heal and prepare for the future.**

Adverse childhood experiences, such as physical, mental and emotional trauma can affect children in many ways. It's common for children to lack the coping skills and life experiences to handle trauma. They frequently reveal their fears and frustrations through inappropriate words and behaviors.

These children have elevated needs, and require more from their foster/adoptive families ... more patience, more understanding, more structure, more positive reinforcement ... more. It can seem overwhelming, but with the right support, these children can work through their past traumas and look forward to a bright future.

Keep in mind that ALL children, even those not in state custody, experience difficulties, and challenges. That's when they need us the most.

**Do you know the different levels of foster care based on a child's unique needs?**

**Traditional Foster Care** is for those who are willing to care for a child or sibling group in state custody for an undetermined amount of time.

**Emergency Placements** are a 30-day maximum placement that provides case managers an opportunity to identify a long-term home.

**Respite Care** is a temporary, short-term care that gives foster parents a break from foster care responsibilities. This may be one night, a weekend, or a week.

**Medical Foster Care** is for children who require extra support due to significant developmental delays and/or medical conditions that require specialized care to meet the child's needs.

**Elevated Needs Foster Care** (Levels A and B) is for children with moderate to severe behavioral/emotional needs due to trauma.

**Treatment Foster Care** is the highest level of care for children with severe behavioral/emotional needs. It requires both strength and patience to care for youth who have experienced extreme trauma.

*Treatment foster care homes are our greatest need right now.*

# Our Greatest Needs

You can have the biggest impact on children by understanding and supporting the most critical needs.

## Homes For Siblings



Every day, we strive to keep siblings together ... but it's difficult. There just aren't enough foster homes able to accommodate two, three, four, even five or more children at a time.

One of our goals is to increase the number of foster homes so siblings can stay together.

## Homes for Older Youth



Every year, thousands of youth in state care age out of the system when they turn 18. They are on their own without ever knowing the connection, security and belonging of a long-term family.

Data shows that children who enter foster care as a teenager have slim chances of adoption. The Multi-Site Accelerated Permanency Project Technical Report stated, "The odds of achieving permanency decrease by 12% for every additional year of a youth's age at the time of their first placement." These youth are also at higher risk of being undereducated, unemployed, homeless, incarcerated and substance abusers.

*"I need someone to teach me basic life skills like how to shave and drive." —youth in foster care*

By providing older youths with permanency—through adoption, guardianship or long-term placement—you can help eliminate negative impacts and help youth grow into strong, independent and healthy adults.

## Treatment Foster Care Homes



As the highest level of care, treatment foster care (TFC) requires both strength and patience for children and youth who have experienced extreme trauma.

Our trauma-informed team partners with you to provide an enhanced and individualized level of support to help children heal and prepare for the future. You will receive:

- 24/7 access to support.
- Specialized foster parent trainings and support groups.
- Regular communication to check on the child's behavior and your emotional well-being.

*"In all my years of fostering, I have never felt so supported as I have with the TFC program. I use what I have learned through TFC with all my own children and other foster kids. The program has made me a better parent." —L.P., treatment foster care parent*

It is our priority to support you in becoming a successful treatment foster parent.

# The Road to Becoming a Foster/Adoptive Family

## 1. Getting Started

Your path to becoming a foster or adoptive parent begins with an online orientation, fingerprinting for background check, and the submission of the following paperwork:

- Copy of orientation quiz results
- Worker registration forms (including copies of driver's licenses and Social Security cards)
- Home requirements checklist

There is not a set timeline from start to finish when applying to become a foster parent because there are many variables that can shorten or lengthen this time frame.

*It typically takes 4–6 months after starting the NTDC training to be fully licensed and ready for placement.*



## 2. Initial Visit

Once we have received your paperwork, a staff member will call you to schedule an initial visit. During that visit, the family development specialist tours your home and gets you started on additional paperwork. The visit can last up to two hours.

The family development specialist needs to become familiar with your family and household, so the more family members available, the better.

### Who Is Required to Be There?

- You and your spouse/partner (both required)

### Who Can Be There?

- Your children
- Other people living in your home (e.g., parents)
- Pets

## 3. Paperwork

Be prepared. On the path to becoming a foster/adoptive parent, you encounter a mountain of paperwork. Items you need to compile include (but are not limited to):

- Physicals on all family members
- Birth certificates
- Marriage licenses
- Divorce decrees
- Auto insurance policies
- Driving records

## 4. Training(s)

Trainings are an important aspect of becoming a foster parent or adoptive parent.

### Become a Licensed Foster Parent in Missouri:

- 30 hours of NTDC (National Training and Development Curriculum): Provides potential foster/adoptive parents with the tools to parent a child who has experienced trauma, separation or loss. It also provides resources to continue building skills once a child is in the home.
- CPR, first aid and disaster preparedness courses.

### Parents Seeking Adoption of a Child in Missouri State Custody:

- 30 hours of NTDC (description above).
- CPR, first aid and disaster preparedness courses.

*We'll help ensure you are well prepared to accept one of our children into your home.*

# The Road to Becoming a Foster/Adoptive Family

## 5. Home Study

Be ready to open up and talk about yourself ... a lot. A home study is all about you. It's an assessment of your past and current history, marriage, family life, motivation for wanting to foster/adopt, type of children you are willing to take into your home, and much more.

During the home study, both you and your family development specialist are assessing whether being a foster/adoptive parent is right for you and your family. **All members of your household must be present for the home study and be interviewed.** You decide together if caring for children in state custody is a good fit. Your answers help your family development specialist become familiar with you and your family. The home study is used by the child's professional team to find matches that are good for both the child and your family.

## 6. Background and Health Checks

Cornerstones of Care runs a criminal background check on all members of your household ages 17 and older. We also require that everyone in your household receive a physical exam. This is to ensure the safety and health of entering your home.

## 7. License

You are considered fully licensed once the following is accomplished:

- All paperwork is submitted and your home study and training are completed.
- You have been approved by Cornerstones of Care to be a foster/adoptive parent.
- You receive your vendor number and contract from the state.

*And, finally* >>>



## 8. Placement

Once you are licensed, your name is added to a list of families that can care for children in state custody. A case manager will contact you when we have a child(ren) that is a good fit for your home. The wider your parameters (e.g., age, sex, race, behavior) of the children you are willing to care for, the more quickly a child can be placed with you.

# Frequently Asked Questions

# Foster Care

## Can I transfer my license from another state?

No. Completed trainings may be compatible with other state requirements and we can often accept the home study, but the license is state-specific.

## How often do I need to renew the license?

Your license is valid for only two years and then it must be renewed. In addition to completing the in-service training, the renewal process includes:

- A home study update.
- Interviews with all family members.
- Interviews with case managers with whom you've worked.
- New physical exams.
- New background checks.

## If I'm single, can I foster or adopt?

Most definitely! We have some wonderful foster/adoptive parents who are single.

## I'm in a same-sex relationship and my partner and I have lived together for years. Are we eligible to foster or adopt?

That's a resounding Yes! Times and attitudes have changed ... and for the better. We're looking for safe, stable, nurturing homes for children who have been traumatized. If you can provide that, we want you to join us.

## Do I have to live in a big house to be a foster/adoptive parent?

Not at all. The size requirements are as follows:

- There must be enough room for all children to have their own bed (at least twin-sized).
- Children ages two and older cannot sleep in the same room as you; therefore, you need to have a sufficient number of bedrooms.
- Your licensing worker will provide additional home requirements.



## How many children can I care for at once?

As a rule, you can have no more than six children in your home, consisting of any combination of biological and foster/adoptive children.

An exception to the rule concerns siblings; siblings are treated as one child in foster care. For example, if you have four biological children living with you, you could accept one foster child or one sibling group (and that group would consist of two or more children). We make this exception because keeping siblings together is a priority.

## I don't think I'm cut out to be a foster parent. Are there other things I can do to help?

Of course! Foster parenting isn't for everyone, but don't let that stop you from getting involved. Consider providing respite care (i.e., caring for foster children for a short period of time, such as over a weekend). You can also volunteer or be a mentor or provide space for meetings and training ... there are numerous ways you can help.

1. Visit [cornerstonesofcare.org](https://cornerstonesofcare.org) to sign up for our monthly e-newsletter.
2. Consider becoming a mentor or volunteer. Learn more at [cornerstonesofcare.org/volunteer](https://cornerstonesofcare.org/volunteer).
3. Support our mission by attending an upcoming fundraiser. See the full list of upcoming events at [cornerstonesofcare.org/events](https://cornerstonesofcare.org/events).



Sign up for a virtual

**Real Talk with a  
Real Foster Parent**

Visit [cornerstonesofcare.org/realtalk](https://cornerstonesofcare.org/realtalk)

## What kinds of adoption do you facilitate?

We only facilitate state custody adoptions (cases in which a child has been removed from his or her parents). These adoptions occur within two scenarios:

- Legal risk — In this scenario, the birth parents' rights have not yet been terminated. (The state has recommended termination, but the court has not yet ruled.) The risk is that the court may decide not to terminate the parents' rights, or a family member not previously known may come forward to adopt the child.
- Free for adoption — The birth parent's rights have been terminated and the child is "free for adoption." As soon as the termination is finalized, the child's team meets to identify suitable prospects based on the child's needs.

## How much does an adoption cost?

State custody adoptions involve little to no cost to the adoptive parents. An adoption subsidy is available (but not guaranteed) to help with any adoption costs.

## I'm interested in adoption only. Can I skip the foster care licensing process?

The process is much the same as that of a foster parent—both foster and adoptive parents must complete 30 hours of the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC). You will still need to complete a home study, which will be written for adoption, and you will need to complete a life book. Once these tasks are completed, the matching game begins. We serve as your advocate and represents your family to case managers when adoptive families are sought.

- You can help with the process by looking at adoptive websites (your family development specialist can give you a list of websites). After

reviewing a number of profiles, tell your family development specialist about any children you're interested in. Your family development specialist may also become aware of children who are free for adoption and contact you to share that information.

- Your family development specialist gathers information about the child from the child's case manager.
- After hearing the additional information, if you are still interested, your home study is sent to the caseworker.
- The child's professional team meets to review the home studies of all prospective families (typically three) and determine which family would be the best fit for the child.
- If selected, you receive copies of the child's file to review.
- Visits are held so you and the child can become acquainted and learn about each other. The structure of these visits is individualized based on the child, their situation and your family.

Be patient. Determining the best fit for the child could take a while. However, once you've been selected, the process moves quickly.

## What is an open adoption?

"Open adoption" means that the birth parents and adoptive parents know one another to some degree.

At one end of the spectrum, the birth parents may never meet the adoptive parents or ever have contact with them, but they know who they are.

At the other end of the spectrum, the birth parents meet the adoptive parents, visit their home and have ongoing contact throughout the child's life.

The degree of openness depends upon the comfort level of the adoptive parents. When it's deemed to be in the best interest of the child, we strongly support open adoptions.

## What is a life book?

A life book is a photo album of about 20 pictures that tells the story of you and your family to help the professional team get to know you without your being there. If you plan to adopt, the life book is required.

## What are my chances of adopting an infant?

If you're interested in adopting an infant, you should go through a private adoption agency. Even though infants and toddlers are sometimes available, the majority of children in state custody are school age. Additionally, the goal of Cornerstones of Care is to limit the number of transitions (or homes) a child goes through. To that end, we give preference to foster families that have provided a home to a specific child (including infants) for at least nine months. The vast majority of children who are adopted from foster care are adopted by their foster parent.

