



1-888-2FOSTER

## Welcome

Thank you for coming to NewFound Families Virginia for your foster parenting questions.

Foster care is a service provided to children to ensure they have a temporary home where they can be safe and nurtured while decisions are made by the child welfare system and courts about their birth parents' ability to care for them.

Foster parents are vital members of the service team put together to keep children safe and help them heal from the impact of abuse, neglect, abandonment, or removal from their family home. At times, their experience can be complicated and full of surprises. They face a daunting variety of physical and emotional special needs all at once; and frequently do not know where to turn for support.

There are times when foster parents are asked to provide a more permanent home for older youth when adoption is not an option. This may be because the youth wants to retain a lifelong connection with birth family member or an adoptive family has not been able to be approved for the youth.

Navigating the path of any foster care placement is not always clear, and frequently seems uncharted. Foster parents find themselves wanting answers, and sometimes do not know the questions to ask. NewFound Families has created this packet to provide prospective and current foster parents with support and resources to find answers to their questions, as well as strengthen their families, and overcome the challenges of being a foster family.

Please contact us with any questions or concerns that are not addressed through the resources and support provided in this packet. Contact can be made by email at [info@newfoundva.org](mailto:info@newfoundva.org) or calling 1-888-2FOSTER.

NewFound Families

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## How to Become a Foster Parent?

### 1. Getting Started

When you've decided you may be ready to become a foster parent, the first thing to do is find the available agencies in your area.

This can be done by contacting the [local department of social services](#) or private licensed providers in your city or county. In Virginia, foster homes are approved not licensed. The local departments and private child-placing agencies are authorized to approve the homes they use for foster care placements.

### 2. Orientation

An orientation meeting is your next step to become a foster parent. At this meeting you'll learn things that will clarify questions you may have about being a foster parent. You will hear about the types of children who need a temporary home and what strengths and challenges they might have. You will also learn what will be expected of you when you become a foster parent. The exact process and steps to become a foster parent will be explained to you in detail. Make sure that you take plenty of notes and feel free to ask any questions you might have during the orientation meeting.

### 3. Foster Parent Training

Your foster parent training classes are where the real work begins in your journey to become a foster parent. Depending on the foster care agency you are working with, you may be required to take from 4 to 10 separate classes, often lasting 1 1/2 to 4 hours, each. These classes will present questions that will help you consider why you want to become a foster parent. They will also prepare you for the challenges you will face. This will be the time when you get to ask questions as they come to mind and learn some basic foster parenting techniques and coping strategies that will help you and the children who will be in your home. Your training begins the partnership between you and your foster care agency. It will help you and the agency come to a mutually agreeable decision about how to proceed in the journey of helping children and youth in foster care.

### 4. Applying to Become a Foster Parent

Your foster parent application will generally be completed during your training classes. In order to become a foster parent, you will need to complete questionnaires about employment, residency, health status, legal issues, financial and credit status and provide references to your mutual assessment worker. You will also be required to go through a criminal background check including fingerprinting. It's important to be honest and careful when completing your applications so that questions don't come up that might delay or prevent your goal of becoming a foster parent. All of this as well as the home study described in the next step are necessary for documenting that the agency has fully considered your home and determined it to be a safe and nurturing home for

children. These agencies are responsible to the courts and others for the safety of children in their custody.

## **5. The Mutual Family Assessment (Home Study Process)**

Before you become a foster parent, your authorizing agency representative will conduct a mutual family assessment. They will take the time to get to know you better by asking about your family history, relationships, support network and the reasons you want to become a foster parent. They will also inspect your home for safety concerns and to determine if you have enough space for foster children. They will discuss with you which types of placements could be in your home. Once the assessment is complete, the agency representative will provide a mutual family assessment report, also known as a home study, containing a narrative of your life experiences and required documentation needed to approve you as a foster parent.

## **6. Waiting through the Approval Process**

As excited as you may be to become a foster parent, try to be patient. It is not uncommon for the approval process to take several weeks or months. Take this time to relax and let your training and preparation time settle in. You may also be asked to provide additional documents or information during this time. Don't worry! You have almost completed everything you need to become a foster parent.

## **7. Approval and Placement**

You made it! Your approval to become a foster parent has finally happened! This is the moment for which you've worked and waited so long. You and your agency will work together to create the best match of a child or even a group of siblings for placement in your home. Enjoy this time. Remember that despite all the training and preparation no placement or child is ever perfect, and you will never be a perfect foster parent for every child; but, you can become the foster parent for which so many foster children are waiting.

## **8. Continuing Education**

After you become a foster parent, your foster care agency may require you to maintain your approval by taking additional classes each year. This training will increase your knowledge on how to meet the needs of the children placed in your home. NewFound Families: Adoption, Foster, and Kinship Association can recommend resources for training to meet your needs.

Support groups/networks are also a great way to keep energized and informed. NewFound Families provides a list of [support groups](#) across Virginia to help families connect with one in their area.

## **Am I Ready to be a Foster Parent?**

The following FAQ questionnaire serves only as a guide for helping to determine if you may be ready to become a foster parent.

### **Do You Have Enough Room in Your Home to Temporarily House A Child?**

You must have enough bedroom space to foster a child. Also, you must be able to provide the child with his or her own bed. A child in care may share a bedroom with your child or another child in care. However, the child may not share a bedroom with any individual over age 18. Also, adults cannot move out of their bedroom and sleep on the couch to make room for the child.

### **Can Your Home Pass A Safety Inspection?**

It is important that children live in a safe and clean environment. During the mutual family assessment process, a representative will conduct a safety and fire inspection of your house or apartment. Your home must be free of danger and garbage. You must have working smoke detectors and a fire extinguisher. You must pass this inspection to be eligible to be a foster parent.

### **Are You Physically and Emotionally Capable of Caring for Children?**

Being a foster parent can be demanding. You must be physically and emotionally healthy to care for foster children. You will be interviewed by an agency representative during the mutual family assessment about your own childhood experiences and your family relations. The information you share in this interview will help the agency representative determine you are emotionally capable of caring for a foster child.

### **Do You Have A History or Record of Abuse or Neglect?**

If you have been investigated by Child Protective Services (CPS) in the past, you *may* not be eligible to become a foster parent. This includes substantiated cases of abuse and neglect or if your own child had to be placed in foster care.

### **Has an Adult in Your Home Ever Been Convicted of a Crime?**

If you or any adult residing in your home has been convicted of certain criminal offenses, you cannot be a foster parent. Each adult member of your household will complete a background check and be fingerprinted.



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### **Do You Have an Adequate Income to Meet Your Own Family's Current Needs?**

While you don't have to be rich to be a foster parent, you must have enough income to meet your own family's needs. During the mutual family assessment, you will be asked to provide proof of income. You should keep in mind that foster parents only receive funding to help offset the cost of raising a child--it is often not enough to fully offset the expenses.

### **Is Your Current Relationship and Home Stable?**

Foster parents can be single, married, divorced or separated, but the home and family must be stable.

### **Are You Ready to Begin the Mutual Family Assessment (Home Study Process)?**

You are ready to begin if your life and home are stable. "Stable" means that you are not about to move out of state and are not having financial, marital or emotional difficulties. If you rent, you will need your landlord's approval. Also, your home must be in good repair. Overall, you must have given serious thought to the decision to become a foster parent.

There are many other considerations that affect the decision to become a foster parent. We hope that this helps to answer some of your initial questions.

If you remain interested in becoming a foster parent, please contact your [local department of social services](#) or private child placing agencies serving your area.

## 10 Financial Considerations

### 1. Standard Maintenance Payments

Foster parents receive a payment to cover some of the costs associated with caring for children from the foster care system. If the child is IV-e eligible, then the payment is comprised of state and federal funds. If the child is not IV-e eligible, then the payment is comprised of state and local funds. Regardless, of the funding source the following basic maintenance rate applies:

#### Maintenance Payment Rates

Age of Child	Room and Board	Clothing	Personal care Recreation, Reading	Monthly Allowance	Total Payment
0 thru 4	\$332	\$61	\$93	\$0	\$486
5 thru 12	\$380	\$78	\$100	\$10	\$568
13 and older	\$461	\$122	\$107	\$31	\$721
<b>Independent</b>					\$644
<b>Living Supplemental Clothing Allowance</b>					
<b>Age 0 thru 4</b>					\$324
<b>Age 5 thru 12</b>					\$406
<b>Age 13 and over</b>					\$487

Maintenance payments are expected to cover some costs for caring for children in your home. NewFound Families encourages families to be certain they can meet their own financial obligations prior to deciding to care for children. Fostering is a volunteer effort and the reimbursement does not meet all the costs associated with caring for a child. Fostering should never be considered as a means of income for financing your household.

### 2. Enhanced Maintenance Payments

Foster parents are entitled to basic monthly maintenance reimbursement. A public or private agency may **also** determine that a child's needs require additional daily supervision by foster parents or a

foster parent may request an agency evaluation of the need for additional daily supervision payments. Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) **may** utilize the Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool (VEMAT) to decide the rate for any additional reimbursement payments to foster parents. Licensed Child Placing Agencies (LCPA) are **required** to use the VEMAT before making any additional reimbursement payment to foster parents.

If a LDSS has opted to NOT use the VEMAT in their agency, they may have other methods for determining the enhanced maintenance rate for meeting the needs of the child. Foster parents may ask for consideration of supplemental payments beyond the basic maintenance rates and are encouraged to document the behaviors or conditions which relate to the need for increased support of the child.

These additional maintenance payments are intended to compensate families for the additional time needed to care for the child in their home. Foster parents are NOT required to provide documentation on how these funds are spent by the family.

### **3. Clothing Allowance**

Each child is provided an annual clothing allowance of approximately \$324 for children through 4 years; \$406 for 5-12; and \$487 for children over 13. Foster parents request these funds through the LDSS or the child's LCPA.

### **4. Medicaid**

All children in foster care are automatically eligible for Medicaid, regardless of their placement agency or the financial status of the birth or foster family.

### **5. Contingency Fund for Property Damage**

The Virginia Department of Social Services manages a fund for covering major property damage done by children in foster homes. This process has multiple levels for approval and requires information from and about the family's own insurance coverage. Families can learn more about the [contingency fund protocols](#).

### **6. Transportation Reimbursement**

All Medicaid clients, including children in foster care, are eligible for transportation or mileage reimbursement for travel to Medicaid eligible appointments. It is imperative for parents to register Medicaid clients in their home with the transportation vendor, Logisticare. This company will provide that parent with a case number. All appointments must be pre-authorized by Logisticare or reimbursement will not be provided. To learn more about accessing this mileage reimbursement, please visit this site: [http://www.dmas.virginia.gov/Content\\_pgs/trn-home.aspx](http://www.dmas.virginia.gov/Content_pgs/trn-home.aspx). If you are able to

provide the transportation yourself for the child, you simply let the Logisticare representative know that you are requesting mileage reimbursement and not their transport.

## **7. Respite Care for Foster Parents**

Respite care is a support to foster families, in which another approved provider cares for the child for a temporary, short-term period of time. Respite care is used for these purposes:

- to ensure that siblings who are placed separately have time together,
- to maintain children's connections with their extended birth family or ties to their home community,
- to give resource parents and children a "break" from each other when necessary to preserve the relationship/placement,
- to provide foster youth in group care with family experiences, and
- to explore the parent/child fit in a potential placement change (for example, with a pre-adoptive family)

Foster parents can request respite through their agency social worker. Please note that respite care funded through the foster care system must be with an agency-approved provider/family. Social events and outings that are a part of the child's normal developmental experience – for example, a sleepover at a friend's house or a church day-trip – are not considered to be formal respite care. Families should check with the child's worker to see if there are any local requirements.

## **8. Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**

All children in foster care are automatically eligible for services from the WIC program, if they meet the age requirements of 0-5 years of age.

## **9. FREE Lunch**

Children in foster care are eligible for free lunches at their public school. Each local school district manages the applications and approvals, so contact your local school for more information. Chances are the children will also be eligible for free breakfast, if it is available at your school.

## **10. Services and Supports**

Children in foster care often need more services and supports than can be reasonably expected to be covered by the maintenance or enhanced supervision rates. If a child in your home needs additional services and supports in order to remain safely in your home or to assist them in their

developmental and emotional growth, you should contact your worker or the child's worker to ask for more assistance.

When contacting the worker for additional supports and services be sure to have documentation such as a journal or clinical reports or assessments that indicate the issues facing the child. The worker may decide that the additional supports and services are necessary but cannot be funded without additional input. In this case, they may contact their local [Comprehensive Services Act \(CSA\) coordinator](#). This person will help the worker navigate the process of securing the additional services and supports needed by the child in your care. In order to get approval for any additional supports and services through CSA, the local Family Assessment Planning Team (FAPT) will meet with you to discuss the needs and the most efficient method for meeting those needs. You should be invited to participate in this process.

The child's worker may, however, want to explore other avenues with you prior to working with the CSA Coordinator.

## Selecting Your Foster Care Agency

Virginia has 120 local departments of social services (LDSS) and over 300 private child-placing agencies. As a foster parent you are not bound to any particular locality or private agency until you have signed an agreement with that agency. Once you have signed an agreement you may be required by that agency to not serve any other agency and you may not be permitted to change agencies for a specified time as well. Be sure to read your agreement. Here are some considerations for selecting an agency.

### 1. What type of foster care do you want to offer?

Are you limited to an age range? Are you able to care for a child with special needs? LDSS will have a range of children from low intensity to high intensity of need. Private agencies will be more focused on children with more intense needs.

### 2. Have you talked with other foster parents?

NewFound Families can help you find other parents working with agencies you are considering, so you can learn from their experiences. First-hand experiences are key to selecting which best meets your needs **PLEASE NOTE:** Foster families repeatedly report that the most important factor in staying with an agency is the support they receive from the agency; such as, returning phone calls, scheduling visits which respect the family schedule; timely reimbursement of expenses; and timely assistance in securing services for children.

### **3. Do you know where to find LDSS and private child-place agencies serving your area?**

Research your options before selecting an agency. View the list of [LDSS](#) agencies. View the contact information for over 300 private child placing agencies.

### **4. How far you are willing to drive to help support the needs of a child?**

Children will need transportation to their local schools, various appointments, and visitation with their families. The more flexible you are with transporting children the more options you will have when selecting an agency. There are some non-emergency transportation vendors, such as Logisticare, who provide gas reimbursements and can transport children to Medicaid eligible appointments available to foster families. To learn more about accessing this mileage reimbursement, please visit this site: [http://www.dmas.virginia.gov/Content\\_pgs/trn-home.aspx](http://www.dmas.virginia.gov/Content_pgs/trn-home.aspx).

### **5. How many children are on the caseload of workers at the agency?**

The higher a worker's caseload the less time they have to support your family. Caseloads of 15-20 are considered optimum, however most workers will have caseloads higher than this. Keep in mind that workers have many more responsibilities than just visiting with the children on their caseload.

## **Welcoming Your Foster Child**

Welcoming your foster child into your home isn't going to be as easy as simply opening your door. You need to treat him like any other child but also consider the trauma he's experienced. Your foster child may immediately embrace you. It may take time for him to warm up or he may never show how he feels at all. Every foster child's reaction is going to be different. What may seem like a warm welcome to you could be a stressful situation to him. There are going to be times when it feels like making your foster child feel at home is a delicate balancing act. You need to step back, view it from his perspective and try to be flexible and understanding.

Your foster child's first impression of his new home will likely form a lasting memory, so it's important that you have as much as possible ready for his arrival. Even if it is an emergency placement, there are simple things you can do to make the transition easier for him. While making your foster child feel at home may seem like a daunting task, it is the little things you do that can make all the difference.

### **Making Your Foster Child Feel at Home**

**The Initial Meeting:** When he arrives at your house, come out smiling and be one of the first welcoming faces he sees that day. Kneeling down to his eye level before introducing yourself will make you seem less intimidating and may ease some of the tension. Don't insist on him calling you "mom" or "dad." Instead, give him a few options to call you. Next, introduce the rest of your family. When walking him to your home, see if he's open to you holding his hand if he's younger, or placing

your hand on his shoulder if he's older, to start forming a bond and provide some much needed reassurance. He may not welcome your touch, especially if he's been exposed to physical or sexual abuse, in which case you need to respect his space. If you notice that he seems hesitant or anxious, err on the side of caution and avoid making this day any more uncomfortable for him.

**The Tour:** Show him around the house. If you have other children, let them join you on the tour to help them start bonding. Explain to him that he should not feel uncomfortable using different things around the house, such as the TV or computer, because he's now part of your family. Doing so will give him a sense of belonging, which may be a first for him.

**The Room:** End the tour of the house with his room. If you have enough notice, you can ask his caseworker what your foster child likes so you can have it waiting for him, such as a poster of his favorite football team or a book he enjoys. You may also want to have a few new toys for him to play with. If he's younger, consider having a nightlight plugged in to make the room feel safer. Let him know that you can help him rearrange his room if he would like. Be sure to give him plenty of time to check it out and get comfortable with his new surroundings.

**The Book:** Making a welcome book for him can help ease his transition into your family. Personalize the outside of a binder with different things he may be interested in to make it look friendlier. Inside you can place pictures of everyone in the family along with their names and the names of any pets. Also, include pictures and names of each room. In the book, include a list of general house rules. List your family's favorite hobbies, activities and traditions. Leave space for him to add his own. FAFS offers a similar pre-composed book called a [Life Book](#) to licensed resource parents in New Jersey at no cost. These books contain areas to write your foster child's family history, sections to fill in with life and school memories and room to attach pictures. These books can help your foster child hold on to positive memories.

**The Basket:** Preparing a welcome basket can be a nice surprise for your foster child on what's likely an upsetting and scary day. You can fill the basket with new clothes, a blanket, toys, books and other things that interest him. Not only will a welcome basket show him that you care, but also that he's worth getting a gift.

**The Food:** Put some cookies in the oven to fill your house with a welcoming scent. Once your family has greeted your foster child, put a pizza in the oven for him to eat after the tour. For dinner, find out what his favorite meal is and plan to make that in the future to create a greater sense of home.

**The Ice Breaker:** Once he's had time to eat and get settled, you can gauge his feelings and see if he is open to talking to you. If he is willing to talk, you can start by asking questions to show that you are truly interested in him, like asking if there's anything you can do to make his room more comfortable. Let him know that if he ever has any questions he can feel comfortable coming to you. All of this will work towards building a bond. However, don't think you did something wrong if he does not want to talk. It's likely been a very difficult day for him and he has a lot to process. On top of that, his experiences with adults may have led to him having trust issues. His unwillingness to talk

could also be coming from the fear of being in a stranger's house where he's now expected to live. It's important that you do not force him; let him open up to you on his own terms.

Some of these tips may seem too commonplace to make that much of a difference, but to your foster child, who is coming from a situation that was anything but normal, they will. Do not get discouraged if it does not seem like he appreciates all that you are doing. It may take him a few days, weeks, or even months to warm up to you as he adjusts, but with time and your love, he will start to feel less like an outsider and more like a member of the family. Even if he does not embrace you the way you hoped, know that you laid very important groundwork that's going to stay with him always.

Dudek, Craig. "How To Make A Child Feel At Home." *Foster and Adoptive Family Services Blog* , 20 Jan. 2017, [foster-adoptive-kinship-family-services-nj.org/making-your-foster-child-feel-at-home/](http://foster-adoptive-kinship-family-services-nj.org/making-your-foster-child-feel-at-home/).

## **How to Cope When Foster Children Leave**

It's a question that frequently dwells on the minds of foster parents: how will I cope when it's time for my foster child to leave? As part of your training you will be talked through different coping mechanisms to help you tackle difficult times like these, though in reality, saying goodbye will always be difficult. Here are a few pointers to explain how you can make it go more smoothly.

### **Talk to the child**

Unfortunately, you will not always get a lot of notice when it is time for a child in your care to move on to a new home or be reunited with their biological family or care giver. Sometimes you may only have a few hours to prepare, though it could be a matter of weeks. Whatever the situation, use the time wisely to prepare yourself and your foster child for the change.

It's only natural that you will feel upset at the thought of them moving on but where possible, try and remain positive and supportive when talking to the child. It's likely that your foster child will have mixed feelings about leaving. They may experience some excitement about their future and perhaps anxiety concerning their separation from you. Small children may struggle to understand timeframes regarding their move, so consider writing it on a calendar or chart so they can begin to understand when they will leave your home.

### **Help them pack**

Children often arrive with few belongings, so taking the time and care to pack your child's things properly could help them to feel more secure when they leave you. Ensure they move on with their toys and clothes with them. Packing may be an emotional activity for you both. Focus on packing effectively so that they can find things that will provide comfort quickly once they arrive at their destination. Try to think about the positive impact you have had on the child's life and consider how having the items you are packing with them will help with their transition.

### **Make memories**

It's not always possible to stay in touch with foster children when they leave your care. For younger children who are moving on to other foster placements, going to live with potential adoptive families or returning to their birth family, maintaining contact will be at the discretion of the new care givers or family and on the advice of the agency.

This means that when you say goodbye to a foster child you may not see them again. With this in mind, you may want to arrange some goodbyes for them with people who have become important in their lives while they have been staying with you. For example, arranging a family meal with foster grandparents or fitting in one last fun activity with your own children. It may be possible to give children photographs of your time together, perhaps in a book or box that will travel with them. Other mementos such as the recipe for their favorite tea written down on a piece of card will help them to remember that you care for them.

### **Practice self care**

When you are told a foster child is leaving you it can hit really hard. Ensure you have someone to talk to at this time – your agency and other foster parents should be able to offer a friendly ear and support you with this transition. Losing a foster child is likely to provoke feelings of grief, so give yourself time to recover and also to celebrate the journey you have had together. This may mean taking a short break before you start your next foster placement. You may also want to think about taking time to do some activities you enjoy. When a foster child leaves, many foster parents choose to busy themselves with activities they find relaxing.

"How To Cope When Foster Children Leave". NFA, 2016, <https://www.nfa.co.uk/blog/how-to-cope-when-foster-children-leave>. Accessed 31 May 2018.