

Becoming a foster parent to unaccompanied migrant children

Answers to your
big questions



Do I have what it takes?

When unaccompanied migrant children flee violence in their home countries, their world feels dangerous and out of control. When you become a foster parent, you give these children a loving home where they know they are safe as they wait to be reunified with family.

You may have questions, doubts, or even fears about the prospect of becoming a foster parent—and that's normal. Being cautious before you jump in means you appreciate the weight and responsibility of this role.

Foster parents sometimes set an unrealistic expectation that *they alone* are responsible to make everything right for a child. But you'll be part of a team, working together with Bethany staff to serve a child during an incredibly difficult period of their life.

We all have the same goal: reuniting an unaccompanied child with their family. And we'll be there to provide support every step of the way.

FOSTER CARE REQUIREMENTS

Age	21+
Marital status	Any! Married, single, or partnered
Residential status	Own or rent a home

*Inquire with your local office to learn more about the requirements in your state: [Bethany.org/Locations](https://bethany.org/locations)



Is foster parenting hard?

Yes.

What type of person makes a good foster parent?

Nearly anyone!

You might assume a certain type of person makes an “ideal” foster parent—but that’s not true. We’ve worked with single dads, seasoned grandmothers, first-time parents, and parents who both work full time. People from all walks of life can be foster parents.

Those who do it well share certain qualities, like these:

1. They go with the flow
2. They have a sense of humor
3. They celebrate small victories
4. They don’t expect their home, the kids, or themselves to be perfect
5. They ask for help when they need it
6. They’re curious and open to learning about someone else’s culture
7. They care deeply for kids and their families

There will be times when you’re not sure you’re doing this right. There will be times when you’ll feel you’re not in control. But you’ll have a partner in Bethany—you won’t be alone.

**SO ASK YOUR BIG QUESTIONS.
WE’RE HERE TO HELP YOU
THINK THIS THROUGH.**

WHERE ARE CHILDREN COMING FROM?

Answers to your big questions

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WHERE ARE CHILDREN COMING FROM?

Children in short-term immigrant foster care are fleeing community violence and unsafe conditions in their home countries. The legal term for them is “unaccompanied children,” but sometimes they’re referred to as “unaccompanied migrant children” in the media. This guide will use both of those terms, but they mean the same thing. Most are from Central America, but we also serve unaccompanied children from other parts of the world, including the Middle East. Typically, children in foster care are reunited with family or other safe adult sponsors in the U.S. within 1-2 months.

KIDS AND TRAUMA

Every child in short-term immigrant foster care has suffered some degree of trauma. Many have directly experienced violence and extreme poverty, but just being apart from their families is scary for kids when everything is unfamiliar, they don’t know where they’re going, and they don’t know how long they’ll be apart.

Research shows that living at a high stress level for an extended period affects a child’s brain development.¹ When they’re feeling scared or overwhelmed, they don’t always know how to appropriately express their



emotions, so their emotions often come out in their behavior. It shouldn’t come as a surprise that a child in this situation may snap at you and experience moodiness or emotional outbursts. If you think about it, we adults are prone to snap when we get stressed too. We’ve simply learned healthier ways to manage our emotions most of the time. Unaccompanied migrant children need a safe, stable home with foster parents who are patient and flexible and have a good sense of humor.

“Nine times out of 10, the story behind the misbehavior won’t make you angry; it will break your heart.”

—ANNETTE BREAUX



You won't be alone

Parenting isn't easy, and it gets more complicated when you're parenting children who have experienced trauma. Unaccompanied children in foster care are also adjusting to a culture that is often very different than their home.

That's why we provide the tools and support foster parents need to help children thrive. You'll have a team behind you, supporting you and the child in your care. We'll equip you to understand typical child

development and train you how to respond to trauma-related behavior.

Your team will include interpreters and cultural specialists to help you bridge cultural and language barriers between you and the children in your home.

During weekdays, children in foster care attend special schools, staffed by bilingual specialists who have experience working with unaccompanied migrant children and are dedicated to their well-being.



Small stay, huge difference

“I often think about family members who are worried about this child, and they’re hoping that the child is in a good home. What would I want my kids to experience if they had to be in a similar situation? What sort of home would I hope they would land in? We try to create that kind of environment for these kids. They’re coming to your home during a very vulnerable, very difficult time in their life. Even a few weeks can make a huge difference in how that child transitions to whatever is facing them going forward.”

—ANGIE, FOSTER PARENT

WILL I FIND SUPPORT IN MY COMMUNITY?



WILL I FIND SUPPORT IN MY COMMUNITY?

Whether you're married or single, there are groups of people and places foster parents can turn to for support.

FOSTER FAMILIES SUPPORT EACH OTHER

Your Bethany caseworker will help you connect to other short-term immigrant foster families in your area, who can provide support, encouragement, and connection during your foster care journey.

LOCAL CHURCHES OFTEN SUPPORT FOSTER FAMILIES

While some churches are more involved in foster care than others, you'll likely find support from your local church or churches in your community. Some host children's clothing drives to help foster parents acquire the supplies they need. Some have groups of volunteers who deliver meals to foster families or commit to pray for families. Others offer foster parent support groups. Your caseworker can help connect you with local resources.



IS IT OK TO ASK FOR HELP?



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IS IT OK TO ASK FOR HELP?

“Will I be able to meet the child’s needs?”

“What if we struggle to communicate with each other?”

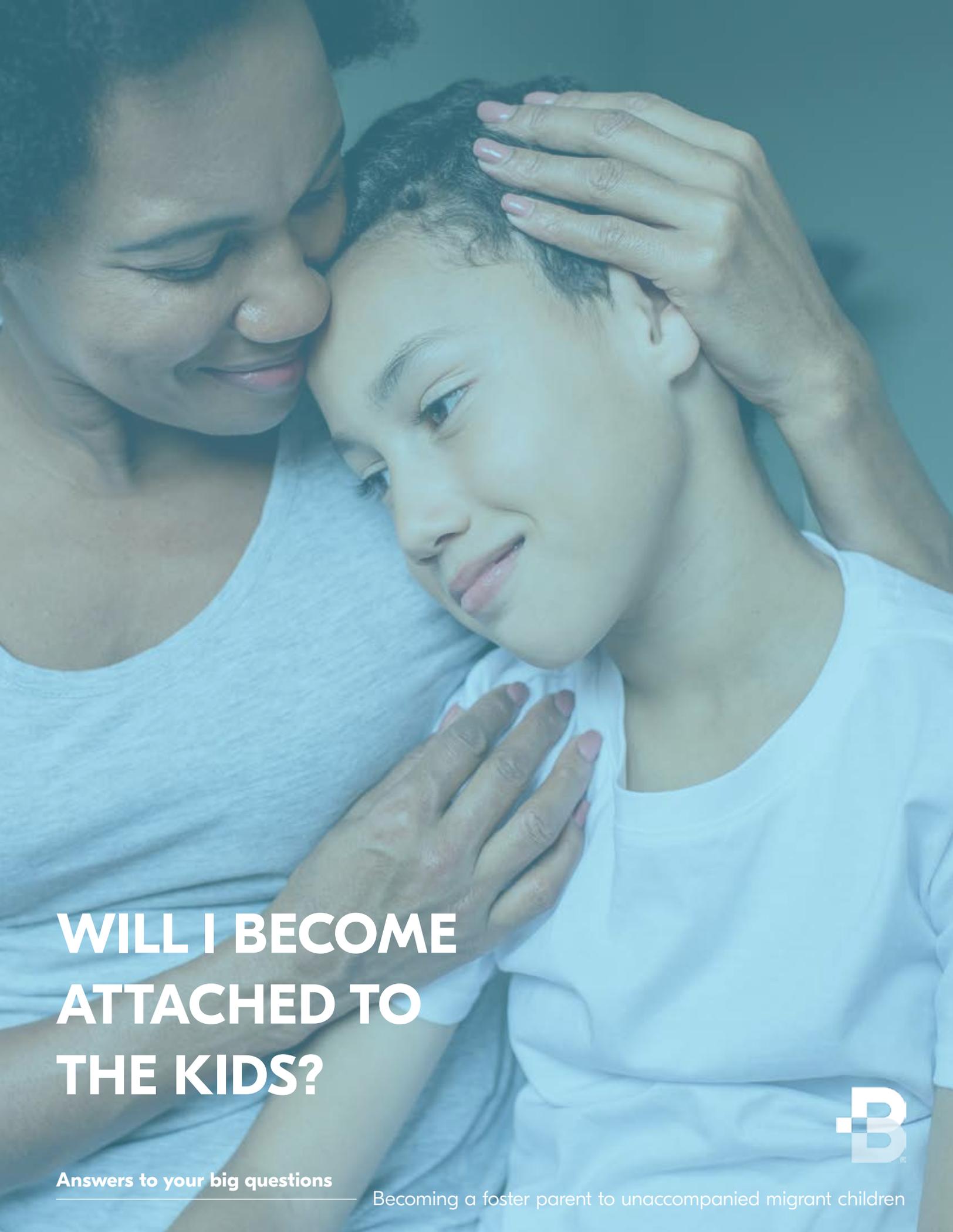
“What if they don’t like any of the foods we eat?”

“What if they don’t connect with my other kids?”

These questions are completely normal and natural when you’re thinking about welcoming an unaccompanied migrant child into your home.

NEVER, EVER, BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP.

It’s your caseworker’s job to help you meet the child’s needs. They understand you may be new to this, and they expect you’ll have a lot of questions. Your caseworker would rather have too much information about what questions you’re asking and what you’re experiencing at home than not enough. The more they know, the sooner they can help you when challenges arise. It’s OK—and expected—that you won’t know it all. Your caseworker can help you determine what is age-appropriate behavior and what behavior is trauma-related. And they can help you bridge the cultural and language gaps between your family and the children you serve.

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair and a white tank top hugging a young girl with dark hair and a white t-shirt. The woman is smiling and has her hands on the girl's head and shoulders. The girl is looking down and smiling slightly. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

WILL I BECOME ATTACHED TO THE KIDS?

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WILL I BECOME ATTACHED TO THE KIDS?

Foster parents do become attached to the children in their care—but that's a good thing.

Most of us can't imagine the difficulties these children have faced, and foster parents simply can't meet their emotional needs while remaining at a guarded distance. When a child leaves your home, allow yourself time to grieve. Whether that means waiting between your next placement or welcoming another child quickly, do what's right for your family. Foster care is a tangible way to minister to children in a time of significant need.

“We say goodbye and we know they're going to a great home. They're going back to their family. They want to be with their family. There are almost always some tears when we say goodbye, no matter how long they were with us. But it's good for them to be reunited. If we care when they leave, that means we've loved them well.”

— ANGIE, FOSTER PARENT

HOW MUCH DOES FOSTER CARE COST?



Answers to your big questions

— Becoming a foster parent to unaccompanied migrant children



HOW MUCH DOES FOSTER CARE COST?

Parenting children can be expensive, but you don't need us to tell you that. You'll receive a monthly stipend that will help cover your costs.

Bethany provides for many of your foster child's needs, including medical care, education, legal services, and psychological therapy. But foster parents need to be ready to provide for most of the child's daily, tangible needs. Your Bethany office can help you find local resources to alleviate these costs.

HOW MUCH WILL I BE PAID TO DO FOSTER CARE?

Chances are, you've heard that foster parents get paid, and you're wondering exactly how much. Short-term immigrant foster parents receive a monthly stipend that isn't considered taxable income. This reimbursement varies by state, but most foster parents report it is enough to cover necessary expenses. You will still encounter additional out-of-pocket costs, which is why we recommend you seek community resources and family support.



WHAT ABOUT COSTS BEYOND MATERIAL NEEDS?

As you consider becoming a foster parent, be prepared to make personal sacrifices. It's worth having an honest conversation about how each member within your support system might assist with additional tasks.

WHAT TYPES OF EXPENSES CAN THE FOSTER CARE STIPEND BE USED FOR?

1. Food
2. Housing
3. Clothing
4. Day care
5. School supplies
6. Daily living expenses

WHAT QUALITIES WOULD MAKE ME A GOOD FOSTER PARENT?



WHAT QUALITIES WOULD MAKE ME A GOOD FOSTER PARENT?

Four qualities of a successful foster parent

1. Be flexible

You won't always know how a child will respond to you when they enter your home, or how they'll interact with children already in your home. And you won't be able to predict when they may be reunited with their families, though you would certainly receive communication from your Bethany caseworker in advance.

2. Relearn your parenting style

If you've already raised children, it can be tough to realize that what worked with those children may not work for a child from another culture in foster care. You'll likely need to use different incentives and disciplinary techniques. For example, a family rule where everyone sits at the table for dinner may need to be modified for a child who feels afraid and doesn't trust you yet. Fostering involves making adjustments.

3. Know your limits and ask for help

It's OK to contact your caseworker with questions or ask them for help. It's OK to take a break before fostering another child. It's OK (and encouraged) to seek additional training to better understand trauma-related behavior.

4. Be open to new cultures

Unaccompanied migrant children in foster care often speak a different language than their foster parents. They usually come from very different cultures. But one of the most beautiful parts of foster care is learning how to transcend these differences. Maybe it will mean watching Netflix in a different language. Or cooking foods you've never tried. The key is flexibility—and prioritizing the children's needs. Successful foster parents will step out of their comfort zones to connect and communicate with foster children in a new way.

WHAT IF I'M READY BUT MY SPOUSE ISN'T?



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WHAT IF I'M READY BUT MY SPOUSE ISN'T?

If you're married or living with a domestic partner, your spouse or partner will be your first line of support.

When you first start talking about foster care, you may find you're not in the same place at the same time. That's OK! Often, one partner approaches foster care emotionally (We must help the children!) and the other approaches it logistically (What does this commitment involve? Are we prepared?). Both perspectives are good and will inform your decision. Keep the dialogue open. Talk together about this big step. Do some research—read books and blogs and attend information sessions—as you explore your options.



FOSTER CARE IS SELFLESS LOVE

Short-term immigrant foster care requires selfless love that can empathize with a child's pain and step up to be that child's advocate.

We're looking for people who will open their hearts to unaccompanied children who need the essential safety of a loving home.



ARE YOU READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP?

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about becoming a foster parent. We hope this guide answers some of your big questions, but we know you'll think of many more as you consider this important role.

Whether you're simply curious about fostering unaccompanied migrant children or you're ready to get licensed, we're here for you. Consider taking one or more of the following steps to connect with Bethany.

1. Let us know you're interested in foster care by submitting your contact information

[Bethany.org/ContactUs](https://bethany.org/contact-us)

2. Attend a local informational meeting for more detailed information and ask questions in person.

3. Find a Bethany office near you at **[Bethany.org/Locations](https://bethany.org/locations)**

4. Are you already licensed for foster care? Talk with your licensing specialist about how to get involved with short-term immigrant foster care.

5. Follow us on social media to keep learning more about foster care.



**Together we can
change the world
through family**



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