

Becoming a foster parent

Answers to your big questions



Do I have what it takes?

When a child is removed from their home, their world feels out of control. They need to know they're safe during this vulnerable time. When you become a foster parent, you give a child a loving home and the stability they need as their family works toward reunification.

You may have questions, doubts, or even fears about the prospect of becoming a foster parent—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 they're part of a team working together with the child's parents and agency staff.

We all have the same goal: keeping a vulnerable family together. And we'll be there to provide support—every step of the way.

FOSTER CARE REQUIREMENTS

Age	21+
Marital status	Married or single individuals
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://www.bethany.org/locations)



Is foster parenting hard?

Yes.

Will people think you're crazy?

Possibly.

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 ask for help
4. They're open to new parenting techniques
5. They celebrate small victories
6. They have a fierce love for kids

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.**

ARE CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE “BAD” KIDS?

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ARE CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE “BAD” KIDS?

This is a common misconception—the truth is, these are good kids caught in bad situations.



It's easy to find stories about children in foster care exhibiting difficult behaviors and expressing big emotions. But kids aren't disruptive without cause. Once you begin developing trust and communication with the child in your care, you'll often find something else is going on under the surface.

KIDS AND TRAUMA

Every child in foster care has suffered some degree of trauma. Many have directly experienced neglect or abuse, but just being apart from their families is scary for kids when they don't know where they're going, for how long, or if they'll get to come back home.

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 foster care would snap at you and experience temper tantrums 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.

Children in foster care 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 with a trauma background. That's why we provide foster parents with the tools and support they 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 child development, and we'll train you how to respond to trauma-related behavior. Your team might include foster care specialists, foster care supervisors, licensing specialists, doctors, therapists, and other service providers—professionals who know how to connect you to specific resources to meet the child's individual needs.





How one dad sets expectations

“We had a 14-year-old boy in our home who never had a dad. He was used to the freedom to run around in his old community whenever he wanted. He went to school whenever he wanted. Basically, he had been unsupervised for years. Our house rules, posted on the refrigerator, were quite a change for him. We communicated our expectations, told him we had to know where he was, and talked about why his decision-making wasn’t safe. The conversation was both the what and the why. We told him what he could expect from us, and we followed through.”

—JULIAN, FOSTER PARENT

Julian’s house rules

Everyone in our home is valued and will be treated with value.

Treat others how you want to be treated.

You will try hard in everything you choose to do.



WILL I FIND SUPPORT IN MY COMMUNITY?

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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.

YOUR EXTENDED FAMILY MAY BE ONE OF THESE GROUPS

Family members often help run errands or provide child care and transportation for foster families. This can be as simple as picking a child up from swim practice or bringing some groceries by the house.

LOCAL CHURCHES OFTEN SUPPORT FOSTER FAMILIES

While some churches are more involved in orphan care than others, you'll likely find some degree of 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 licensing specialist can help you get connected to other local resources.



A photograph of a woman with curly hair, wearing a light blue blazer over a blue top, looking down with a thoughtful expression. Another person's hand is gently touching her hair. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting with large windows. The entire image has a light blue tint.

IS IT OK TO ASK FOR HELP?

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IS IT OK TO ASK FOR HELP?

**“I don’t want to be *that* foster parent, calling all the time.
“I don’t want my licensing specialist to think I’m weak or that I can’t handle this.”**

When foster parents encounter a new situation or have a lot of questions, they often worry there’s something wrong with them.

There’s nothing wrong with you.

New parents with biological children often need extra support. This is also true for foster parents, and it will be true each time a new child enters your home.

NEVER, EVER, BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP.

It’s your specialist’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 specialist would rather have too much information about 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 specialist can help you determine what is age-appropriate behavior and what behavior is trauma-related. And they can help you de-escalate the situation if the child is having a meltdown.

A photograph of a family of three outdoors. A woman with a long braid is crouching on the left, smiling at a young child. The child is standing in the center, blowing a bubble with a green wand. A man with a beard and a black cap is standing behind the child, looking on. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting. The entire image has a light blue overlay.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CHILD'S PARENTS?

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WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CHILD'S PARENTS?

The primary goal in foster care is to prepare children to reunite with their parents.

A foster parent's role is to provide a caring environment for children until their parents can provide a safe home and meet their family's daily needs. But fostering is a big step, and it's understandable that you'd be cautious about the unknowns.

Your first interactions with a child's parents might be uncomfortable. You're meeting them at their most vulnerable; their kids have been removed from

their care, and what feels like an impersonal system is telling them a stranger is a better parent than they are. Experience and empathy will help you develop a working relationship with the child's parents and better understand where they're coming from.

Many of the parents we work with have experienced generational abuse, neglect, or trauma, and they may be repeating cycles they learned from their parents. Others struggle with substance misuse or stable housing.

Many parents feel isolated, without a network of support. Although they've made mistakes that led to foster care, we've never met a parent who hasn't loved their child. Foster parents often form supportive connections with parents, cheering them on while they work to bring their family back together.



UNDERSTANDING THE BIG EMOTIONS

Thoughts and emotions can dovetail between parents and foster parents while a child is in foster care.

These quotes were featured in a 2017 art installation called "Interlaced." Shaped like a gym shoe, the work showed a glimpse of what it means for parents and foster parents to walk the path of reunification together.

PARENT

FOSTER PARENT

Kids are placed in foster care

Having my children placed in foster care was the worst day of my life.

I was excited to have kids in our home, but I worried if we could handle it.

First court hearing

I cried. I needed to hear that everyone was concerned, not just for the kids but also for me.

I was nervous and felt like I was invading their space, but it actually helped me understand how to help the parents and kids more.

First parent meeting

I was scared and unsure if I wanted to meet the foster parents. I wasn't sure how they would treat me or my kids.

I was nervous about what the family would think of us and if they would believe we were capable of caring for their kids.

Court recommends return home

I was excited that the court was giving me a chance to have my kids home again. I knew I needed to do things right this time.

I was excited for them and confident that they could do it, even though it would be a huge change for everyone.

Increased parenting time

I loved reunification time. It was great to keep communication going with the foster parents. Their continued support meant a lot.

I was excited to see the kids spending more time with their parents. Everything seemed to be going well.

Returning home

I was so happy the kids were coming home but worried about how things would go. We wondered if someone would come take them again.

Even though we were sad to see the kids go, we knew they needed to be with their parents. It was great to see their family back together.

A woman with curly hair, wearing a green jacket, is sitting on a bed and reading a book to a young girl. The girl is wearing a yellow dress and is looking at the book. The scene is set in a room with a window in the background. The image has a blue tint.

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.

Children in foster care have experienced some form of neglect or abuse. They need adults who will model healthy attachment and invest in their lives. Most of us can't imagine the difficulties they've 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.

If this is something you feel God's calling you to do, He'll help you through it. And we're here for you too.



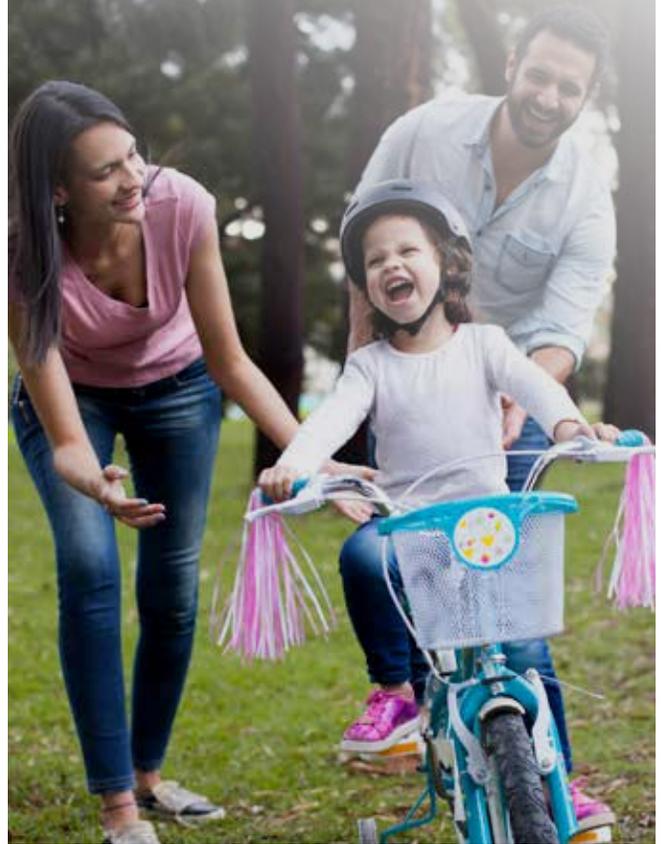
HOW MUCH DOES FOSTER CARE COST?

Answers to your big questions

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HOW MUCH DOES FOSTER CARE COST?

Raising 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.



Foster parents need to be ready to provide for the child's daily, tangible needs. Your Bethany office can help you find local resources to alleviate these costs.

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. Also, plan to dedicate time and resources to getting your foster children the help they need in dealing with their traumatic past. You may need to seek therapy or special education services to begin building a healthy future for the child. Your specialist will help you identify what services, if any, are needed and locally available.

HOW MUCH WILL I BE PAID TO DO FOSTER CARE?

Chances are, you've heard foster parents get paid, and you're wondering exactly how much. Foster parents receive a monthly stipend that is not considered taxable income. This reimbursement varies by state, but most foster parents report that 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 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?

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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 called to return to their parents, though you would certainly receive communication from your Bethany licensing specialist 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 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 new foster 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 licensing specialist with questions, ask for respite care, or ask a friend or family member for help. It's OK to take a break before fostering another child. It's OK (and encouraged) to seek therapy or other resources to better understand trauma-related behavior.

4. Redefine success

Success is a subjective and sometimes biased term. But parents often measure their parenting success by their children's academic achievement. For children who have experienced abuse, neglect, and educational disadvantages, it may be unrealistic to expect all As on schoolwork. Foster parents often need to set attainable goals of success, which might include attending school every day without unexcused absences or getting through the day without a meltdown.

Single parents play an important role

“It doesn’t require a two-parent household to take care of a child in need. Both my mother and my grandmother were single parents, so I knew it could be done.

A friend who was fostering would say, ‘You have room in your house. You can do this too.’ Seeing her foster and seeing how badly children need loving homes convinced me. It was tough to go from being a single woman with no responsibility but for myself to being available 24/7 for children in my care. But my family is supportive, and my mom, uncle, and brother also build into the children’s lives.

“My biggest piece of advice to other single people is to find a great agency; that’s so important. Bethany showed me what it meant to have a good foundation.”

—CHARLOTTE, FOSTER PARENT



A photograph of a man and a woman sitting together, looking thoughtful. The man is on the left, wearing a checkered shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a white top and blue jeans. They are both looking towards the right side of the frame. The image has a blue tint.

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, your spouse 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 rationally (What does this commitment involve, and are we prepared?).

Both perspectives are good and will inform your decision. Keep the dialogue open, and pray together about this big step. Do some research, read books and blogs, and attend information sessions as you explore your options.



FOSTER CARE IS FIERCE LOVE

At Bethany, we believe foster care is fierce love—the type of selfless love that can empathize with a child’s hurt and need and step up to be that child’s advocate.

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



ARE YOU READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP?

Kudos to you for taking the time to learn more about becoming a foster parent. We hope this e-book 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 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://www.bethany.org/ContactUs)

2. Attend a local foster care info meeting to get more detailed information and ask questions in person

Find a Bethany office near you

[Bethany.org/Locations](https://www.bethany.org/Locations)

3. Join us on social media to keep learning more about foster care



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



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