

# Refugee & immigrant foster care

Answers to your big questions

# Do I have what it takes?

When children and adolescents flee violence in their home countries, their world feels dangerous and out of control. When you become a refugee foster parent, you give these children a loving home and help them transition into the next phase of their life.

You may have questions, doubts, or even fears about the prospect of becoming a refugee 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 you'll be part of a team, working together with Bethany staff to serve a child or teen during an incredibly difficult period of their life.

We all have the same goal: helping a refugee minor feel safe and loved. And we'll be there to provide support every step of the way.

## FOSTER CARE REQUIREMENTS

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<b>Age</b>	21+
<b>Marital status</b>	Any! Married, single, or partnered
<b>Residential status</b>	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.

## What type of person makes a good foster parent?

Nearly anyone!

**You might assume a certain type of person makes an “ideal” refugee foster parent—but that’s not true. We’ve worked with single dads, seasoned grandmothers, first-time parents, and couples who both work full time. People from all walks of life can be refugee 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 and teens in long-term refugee foster care are fleeing violence, instability, poverty, and chaos in their home countries. They come from nearly every part of the world, from Syria to Congo to El Salvador. Most enter foster care in the U.S. between the ages of 13-17.

Some enter the U.S. through the federal Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) program. This program serves children and teens from around the world who have not only been forced to flee their homes, but also have lost connection with their families. Many of these children and adolescents have spent years in refugee camps from around the world before being vetted by the Department of State and resettled in the U.S. In most cases, they stay



in refugee foster care until they transition into independent adulthood in the United States.

Other children and teens in refugee foster care entered the U.S. by seeking asylum at one of our borders. If they were unaccompanied by a parent or adult caregiver, the Office of Refugee Resettlement finds them a home until they are either reunified with family or transition to independent adulthood.

These children have been through complicated circumstances and are caught up in a complicated U.S. immigration system. But their basic needs are all the same: A safe, loving, supportive home to help them heal and transition to whatever comes next in their lives.



## Kids & trauma

Every child in refugee and 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 overwhelming. 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, even into the teen years.<sup>1</sup> 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. Refugee and immigrant children in foster care need a safe, stable home with foster parents who are patient and flexible and have a good sense of humor.

<sup>1</sup> [www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/resilience/Pages/ACEs-and-Toxic-Stress.aspx](http://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/resilience/Pages/ACEs-and-Toxic-Stress.aspx)



## You won't be alone

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

That's why we provide refugee foster parents with the tools and support they need to help their foster children and

teens 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.



## Everyone deserves a family

Everyone deserves a family. The refugee kids we've cared for have families; but they were forced to leave their families because of political, economic, or unsafe situations. It was never that they didn't want a family—they wake up at night thinking about their moms and dads and the homes they left behind.

I know what that's like. I came to the U.S. as a refugee teen, and Bethany found a foster family for me. Over the years, I wanted to find a way to give back. We enjoy having these teens be part of our family. It's a lot of work, but it feels good to know we're making a difference in their lives when they need it most.

—PHILLIP, REFUGEE FOSTER PARENT  
AND FORMER UNACCOMPANIED  
REFUGEE MINOR

# WILL I FIND SUPPORT IN MY COMMUNITY?



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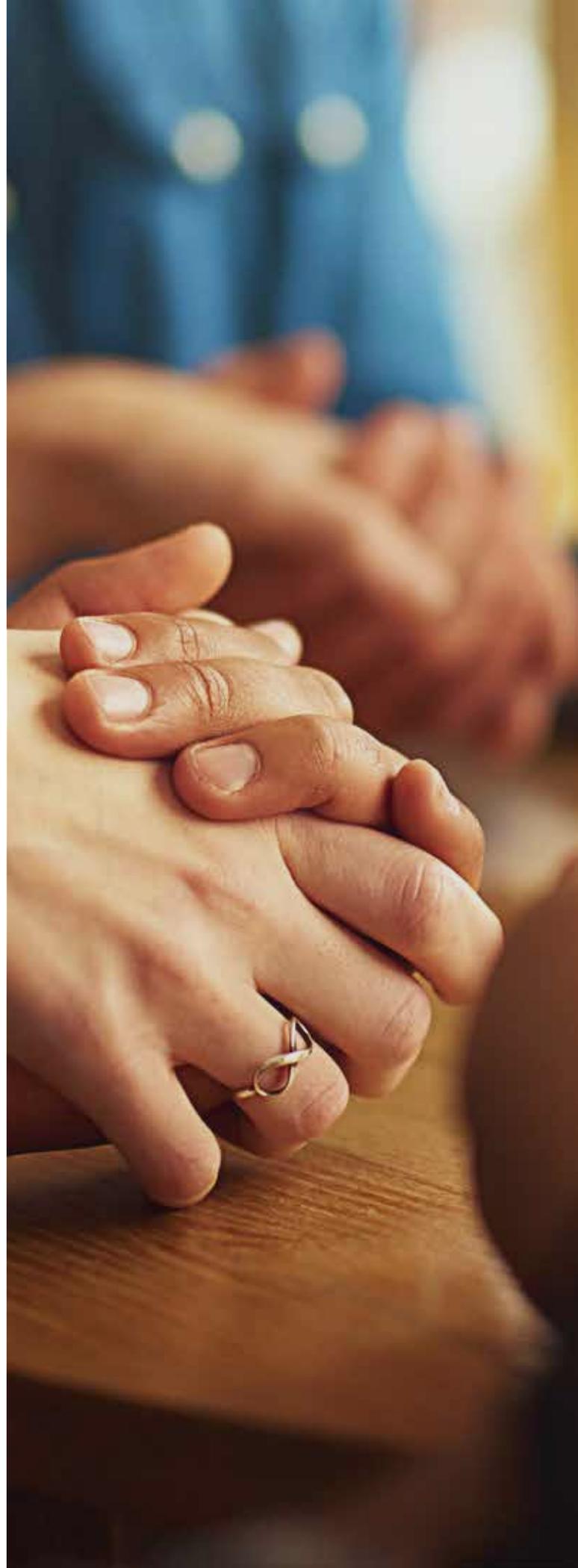
Whether you're married or single, there are groups of people and places foster parents can turn to for support.

## FOSTER FAMILIES SUPPORT EACH OTHER

Your Bethany caseworker will help you connect to other refugee 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 other local resources.





# IS IT OK TO ASK FOR HELP?

Answers to your big questions



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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 a refugee minor 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 and adolescents you serve.

A photograph of two women sitting on a concrete ledge outdoors. The woman on the left is smiling and looking towards the woman on the right. They are both dressed in casual attire. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with greenery and a white wall.

# WILL I BECOME ATTACHED TO THE KIDS?

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## WILL I BECOME ATTACHED TO THE KIDS?

**Refugee foster parents do become attached to the children in their care—and that’s a good thing.**

Most of us can’t imagine the difficulties these children have faced, and refugee foster parents simply can’t meet their emotional needs while remaining at a guarded distance.

Emotional attachment is a natural and healthy part of welcoming these children and teens into your home. Whether they leave your home to be reunified with parents, or when they are ready to enter independent adulthood, it will be difficult to say goodbye. But many refugee foster parents maintain connections with foster children even after they have left their homes, offering guidance, support, and love as they move into the next phase of their lives.

“At 14, I didn’t know what was going to happen to me. But Lois [my foster parent] welcomed me as part of her family. It was hard being so far away from home, where nothing around me was familiar. Just learning to communicate with my foster mom was a big challenge. She didn’t speak Spanish, and I didn’t speak English. But I learned over time. I spent the next several years learning a new culture, going to school, making new friends, and missing my family every day. And that whole time, Lois took care of me. She gave me hope.”

— JOSE, FORMER UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINOR

# HOW MUCH DOES FOSTER CARE COST?



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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 refugee 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. Refugee 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. Also, plan to dedicate time and resources to getting your foster children the help they need in healing from their traumatic past.

## 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.

### 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.

### 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 refugee foster care. You'll likely need to use different incentives and techniques to deal with trauma-based behaviors. 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.

### 4. Be open to new cultures

You'll likely need to use different incentives and techniques to deal with trauma-based behaviors. 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.

A man and a woman are shown in profile, looking at a laptop screen. The man is on the left, wearing a plaid shirt over a white t-shirt. The woman is on the right, wearing a white blazer. The image has a light blue tint.

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

Answers to your big questions



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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

Refugee 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 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 refugee 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 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 refugee 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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