



Preparing to Foster

Helping a child grow into a happy and contributing adult may be the most satisfying experience of your life. In Illinois, hundreds of children are waiting for caring families who can foster them and give them the stability and nurturing that are so important to their development. Can you be one of those families?

In Illinois, families need to receive a license before they can provide foster care. Licensing ensures that children are placed with nurturing families in homes that meet standards set by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

Do I have the qualifications to become a licensed foster parent?

Most people who can provide an adequate and loving home are eligible. A foster parent...

- may be single or married;
- may or may not have children;
- may work in the home or outside the home;
- must be at least 21 years of age;
- may be from various cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds;
- must be financially stable (Foster parents will receive reimbursements for food, shelter, clothing, and an allowance for each foster child. Medical costs are paid by the state.);
- may be homeowners or renters;
- must pass a criminal background check.

Foster parents are probably a lot like you. They...

- like kids and feel good about being parents;
- are willing to provide a child with a safe and nurturing environment;
- are flexible in finding ways to adjust to new situations and changes;
- can show affection in healthy ways for a child who has been abused or neglected;
- are comfortable with setting firm limits and specific rules for the child when necessary and willing to use nonphysical forms of discipline;
- do not need or expect to satisfy their own needs through their children;
- can find pleasure and take pride in the small gains children make ;
- are willing to use community supports (schools, medical, mental health, recreational resources) to meet the children's needs.

What are some of the general requirements for licensing my home?

Before issuing a foster care license, a child welfare agency will make sure that your home is a safe place for children. Your agency will provide specific details about the standards for licensing, but generally, a foster home shall...

- be clean, well ventilated (foster parents cannot smoke in the home when they have foster children in the home and foster parent cannot smoke in the car if a foster child is present), properly lighted and heated, and free of fire hazards;
- have a safe water supply;
- provide protection from poisoning and injury;
- have room for a child;
- have an operating telephone or approval for quick access to a telephone.

As you go through the process of becoming licensed, DCFS and private agencies are available and waiting to assist you. DCFS has developed the Foster Pride training program designed to help prepare parents for fostering. Some private agencies use additional training models to facilitate the preparation process.

What does the Foster Pride training program involve?

The Foster Pride training program consists of several sessions that provide information about:

- DCFS, the licensing process, and the needs of children waiting to be fostered.
- birth family issues – knowing how to talk with children about their families and being able to support their family relationships.
- how abuse, neglect and trauma impact a child's attachments, development and behavior.
- the types of losses children have before they enter foster care and how placement can deepen the child's sense of loss.
- how families instill identity, cultural heritage and self-esteem in children.
- the challenges of discipline and the differences between discipline and punishment.
- the different strategies for managing the behavior of children who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma.
- permanency time frames and the importance of the "child's clock" in making permanency decisions.
- cultural issues in permanency planning, the impact of transcultural placements on children, and ways to support children's developing identity when they are in transcultural placements.
- what to expect during the first hours, days and weeks of a child's placement in a home.
- the firsthand experiences of birth parents, foster parents, workers and other members of the child welfare team.

Once you have completed the Foster PRIDE training and received your foster care license, you will be eligible to have a child placed in your home.

The decision to foster a child means a new experience for you and that child. A family and family life are important to all of us, especially to a child in the child welfare system. Bringing a child into your family may be the most satisfying experience of your life.