

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What are the requirements for becoming a foster/adoptive parent?**

Requirements differ depending on the agency (CPA), but generally include the following:

- At least 21 years old
- Financially stable
- 1 bed and 40 sq. ft. per child in the home
- No more than 6 children in the home, including biological, adoptive, foster, and children for whom you provide childcare (exceptions may apply)
- Vaccinated pets
- Agency application: references, home study, fire safety inspections, CPR/First Aid certification, TB testing, background checks and fingerprinting for household members 14 years+
- Annual training hours
- Non-physical discipline agreement (no spanking)

## **How long does it take to become a licensed foster home?**

The process could take a few months or up to an entire year, depending upon how quickly you move through the training and documentation. However, some training is required annually, so it makes sense to try and complete the entire process within one year.

## **What is a child placing agency (CPA)?**

If the court deems it necessary, children are removed from their homes and placed under the care of the Department of Family & Protective Services (DFPS or CPS), which then works alongside private child placing agencies (CPAs) to find temporary foster/kinship homes. CPAs contract with DFPS to provide safe, nurturing foster homes. There is no cost to getting trained and licensed through a CPA.

## **Why are children placed in foster care?**

Children are placed in foster care in response to allegations of severe neglect, physical/emotional abuse, and/or sexual abuse. Children may be placed with relatives (kinship) or emergency placements while an investigation is pending. Others are placed in foster homes. Unfortunately, due to a shortage of licensed foster homes, older children may temporarily stay at CPS offices or get admitted to residential treatment centers (RTCs) or group homes in the area.

## **What is the legal process for children in foster care?**

Having placed a child in foster care, DFPS will continue to assess what is in the best interest of the child. Children may be reunited with their biological families (usually following a “service plan,” whereby the biological parents demonstrate the ability to provide safe and nurturing care). Alternatively, an extended family member or close friend may be willing to assume responsibility for the child (kinship care). Otherwise, the child will remain in foster care, becoming adoptable if/when the court terminates biological parental rights. Typically, a child’s case will last 15-18 months, but any number of factors may prolong or abbreviate the process.

## **Do I have any control over which children are placed within my home?**

During the licensing process, prospective foster parents are permitted to submit

preferences with regard to age, gender, ethnicity, and level of care (basic, moderate, or specialized). Once licensed, your agency will match children based on your preferences. And ultimately, the foster home makes the final decision before each and every placement.

**Do I have to be married or a stay-at-home parent to foster?**

No. There is no requirement that a foster parent be married or stay-at-home. However, as with any other parenting circumstance, arrangements must be made for taking children to daycare, school, medical/dental appointments, etc.

**Do I have to own a home to become a foster/adoptive parent?**

No. There is no requirement that foster parents own a home. However, moving to a new home while fostering requires an update to your home study. Foster children must have adequate living space as required by the DFPS Minimum Standards.

**How much does it cost to foster?**

Aside from miscellaneous costs during the licensing process (background checks, fingerprinting, TB testing, fire inspection, CPR certification, etc), foster care is inexpensive. Licensed foster families are given a [monthly stipend](#) to assist with costs of caring for the child. This stipend is based on their foster child's level of care. Children are also provided with medical and dental insurance through Medicaid and qualify for nutritional assistance through [WIC](#). Additional resources may be available depending upon the needs of the foster family (i.e. day care, transportation, etc).

**How much does it cost to adopt through foster care?**

The cost to adopt through foster care is minimal. In many (but not all) cases, the adoptive family will qualify for [State subsidy](#), which covers all legal fees, grants health care coverage, and offers an ongoing monthly stipend.

**What is the likelihood that I will be able to adopt through the foster care system?**

The primary goal for children in foster care is family preservation and reunification. When reuniting with biological family is no longer an option, there may be an opportunity to adopt a child through the foster care system. If you are considering foster care *primarily* as a means of growing your family through adoption, we gently recommend examining your motivations (see Appendix A). Children in foster care need loving families who will support them and put their needs first, even if it means reunification with biological family. In other words, foster families are called upon to assume a degree of unpredictability, and there is no guarantee that you will be able to adopt your foster child.

That said, at any given moment, there are hundreds of children in Houston's foster system who are awaiting adoption.

**What are the responsibilities of a foster parent?**

Foster parents are expected to provide daily care, nurture, and support to children in your home. This includes advocating for children in their schools and communities, acting as a positive role model, and helping children to learn the life skills necessary to thrive in adulthood.

Foster parents are required to keep up-to-date documentation for the children placed in their home, informing caseworkers of progress, adjustments, and any problems that may arise, including illnesses, accidents, or the need for some sort of

therapy.

In addition, we encourage foster parents to pursue relationship with biological family members (if/when wise and appropriate) and work with caseworkers to see families preserved and children reunited with their biological parents.

**What ongoing support or training is available for foster/adoptive parents?**

Most CPAs provide ongoing support and training for their foster families. In addition, some nonprofits and faith-based communities in Houston are committed to making sure families are well-supported and thriving. There are a growing number of support groups, parents' night outs, resource closets, Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) training, and other helpful resources. Email us, and we'd be happy to get you connected to resources in your area.