

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**



**Foster/Adoptive Parent
INFORMATIONAL BOOKLET**

**Welcome from the
Department of Social Services
Office of Community Services**

Thank you for your interest in the Foster Care and Adoption Programs. The enclosed information will help you understand the programs, the agency and the Foster/Adoption certification process. If you have any questions after reviewing this booklet, please call the local Home Development intake line, or visit our website at www.dss.state.la.us. The phone number for your region is located at the back of this booklet.

Mission Statement

The provision of foster care services is based on the belief that every child has an urgent need and the right to a safe and permanent family of his own. Therefore, the mission of the foster care program is to maintain the child in a safe environment which is supportive of his development and to assist his parents in resuming responsibility and custody or in attaining an alternative permanent placement for the child as soon as possible.

Our Beliefs:

1. Parents/legal caretakers have the right and responsibility to raise their own children unless it is determined that they cannot do so in a manner consistent with the safety of the child.
2. Children have the right to grow and develop in an environment which is free of serious abuse and/or neglect and free of factors that present a substantial risk of serious harm.
3. If a child cannot remain with his family, the substitute living arrangements must be safe, capable of meeting his basic emotional and physical needs, and be time limited.
4. Substitute placements must be in the least restrictive (most family-like), most appropriate setting available, and consistent with the needs of the child.

THE NEED FOR FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION IN LOUISIANA

Children come to the attention of the agency because of concerns from a teacher, police officer, family member, friend, doctor, neighbor, or mandated reporter. Any one can make a referral that they suspect a child has been abused or neglected. Referrals that meet the criteria for a report of child abuse or neglect will be investigated. If the agency finds a family needs help, every effort is made to provide services to help the family resolve their problem and prevent the removal of the children from their home. Only if reasonable efforts fail, will the agency seek authorization from the court to remove children from their family.

FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

What Is Foster Care?

Foster care is a protective service for children and their parents who must live apart because of child abuse, neglect or special family circumstances requiring the need for out-of-home care. Foster care is intended to provide temporary/short-term care for a child. The goal of the foster care program is to maintain the child in a safe and nurturing environment, which is supportive of his development while assisting his parents in resuming responsibility and custody or until an alternative permanent placement for the child is found.

The first goal of foster care is to reunite the child with his or her biological family.

What Is Adoption?

Adoption is the method provided by law to establish the legal and social relationship of parents and children between persons who are not related by birth with the mutual rights and obligations that exist between children and their birth parents. Adoption is one of the case plan goals of the Foster Care system within the Office of Community Services.

What Is Dual Certification?

This certification means that a family is certified to foster and adopt. A family may specify that they only wish to foster or only wish to adopt, but they will still be certified for both. Dual certification is the certification offered by the State of Louisiana.

Who Are The Children Needing Foster and Adoptive homes?

The agency receives custody of children ranging in age from infants to teenagers. They may have an emotional or physical illness, have been neglected, abused, or abandoned, or have experienced a breakdown in the family, or the death of a parent.

The children are of different races and religions. They identify with their own cultures and need help with maintaining their identities, staying connected to their birth families, and learning how to feel lovable, capable, worthwhile and responsible.

Some of the children waiting for a permanent home are older, have medical, emotional or intellectual problems, or are part of a sibling group that needs to be placed together. The important thing to remember is that all children deserve a family.

What Do Foster/Adoptive Parents Do?

Foster/Adoptive Parents do everything that birth parents do, and sometimes more. They open their hearts and homes to children who have been abused or neglected, nurture these children and provide support and stability in their lives. Foster/Adoptive Parents are responsible for advocating for the child, meeting with teachers, attending school conferences, scheduling and transporting the child to all doctor, therapy and other appointments, and to visits with the child's parents and siblings. Because of their unique role, involvement, and direct care of the child, it is also critical that they attend and participate in case planning meetings and court hearings. Foster/Adoptive Parents must also work with the agency by being available to meet with the child's worker at least once a month to discuss all issues regarding the child.

Once a child has been adopted, the Adoptive Parent is considered the child's legal parent and possesses all the same rights and responsibilities as any parent. It is a relationship that lasts a lifetime. Once the child is adopted, the agency is no longer involved and the Adoptive Parents make all decisions for the child.

What Are The Requirements to Become a Foster/Adoptive Parent?

Anyone interested in being a Foster/Adoptive Parent is welcome to call for more information and to attend an orientation session. Applicants must be at least 21 years of age, have sufficient income to meet their own basic needs, and be in good physical, emotional and mental health. A Foster/Adoptive Parent can be single, married, divorced, or widowed.

Foster/Adoptive Parent applicants must be committed to provide the child with positive forms of discipline and cannot use physical punishment of any kind.

Is There Financial Help To Foster and Adopt?

A daily board rate is paid to certified Foster/Adoptive Parents to assist with the child's monthly expenses. The board rate is intended to help with clothing, food, personal hygiene products, a personal allowance for the child and gifts for the child for occasions like birthdays. **Foster/Adoptive Parents are not paid.** The board rate is for the child's needs. The agency provides for the medical needs of each child, therapy expenses, and evaluations. The child's worker or supervisor is available to address problems 24 hours a day.

Financial assistance may be available for families adopting children with special needs because of age, race, handicap, intellectual, emotional or medical problems, or for members of a sibling group who are adopted together.

Several support services are available to Foster/Adoptive Parents, because we know that parenting our children can be demanding and different from other parenting experiences due to the special needs and histories of each child in the foster care system. A few support services include in-service training, frequent contacts from the Home Development Worker, reimbursement for mileage to required activities, and membership in a local Foster/Adoptive Association.

What Is The Next Step To Foster/Adopt?

If you are interested in becoming a Foster/Adoptive Parent you can attend an orientation session where more information is given about the program, becoming certified, the children available for placement, and the training and home study process. If you like what you hear and are ready to proceed with certification, you will be invited to the pre-service training.



(Family laughing)

Am I Ready To Become A Foster/Adoptive Parent?

This questionnaire will help you to determine if you are eligible to become a Foster/Adoptive Parent. Circle "T" for true or "F" for false, for each statement below.

1. T/F I have enough room in my home for a Foster/Adoptive child.

You must have adequate bedroom space for a foster/adoptive child. A foster/adoptive child may share a bedroom with another child of the same sex but the child cannot share a bedroom with anyone over the age of 18 years old except in approved circumstances. You cannot move out of your bedroom and sleep on the sofa to make room for the child. The child must have his/her own bed. The room must have at least 75sq.ft. for one child and an additional 55sq.ft. for each additional child. However, some exceptions are possible.

2. T/F I am ready to have a safety inspection of my home done now.

It is important that your home is safe and free of hazards. During the home study process, your Home Development Worker will conduct a safety inspection of your home. You must have working smoke detectors and a fire extinguisher.

3. T/F I am in good physical, emotional and mental health.

Being a parent can sometimes be demanding. You must be healthy and emotionally stable to care for foster/adoptive children. Everyone in your home must provide a medical statement completed by a physician indicating they are free of communicable diseases. All household members will be interviewed by the Home Development Worker.

4. T/F I have never had a valid case with an agency due to abuse or neglect.

If you have had a valid Child Protection case, you may not be able to become a Foster/Adoptive Parent. This includes validated cases of abuse or neglect or if your own child was placed in foster care or adopted. We will review our records as well as records in any other state where the applicant(s) resided.

5. T/F I have adequate income to meet my current family's needs.

You do not have to be rich to become a Foster/Adoptive Parent; however, you must have enough income to meet your own family's needs. During the home study process, you will be asked to provide proof of income and to review family expenses.

6. T/F I am legally married or legally single.

Foster/Adoptive Parents can be single, married, divorced or widowed.

7. T/F No adult in my home has ever been convicted of a crime.

If you or any adult residing in your home has been convicted of certain criminal offenses, you cannot become a Foster/Adoptive Parent. Each adult member in your household over the age 18 will be fingerprinted. If you have specific questions regarding which crimes are prohibited, please call the Home Development Unit.

8. T/F I am ready to begin the home study process now!

You are ready to begin the home study process if your life and home are stable. "Stable" means that you are not about to move and are not having financial, marital or emotional difficulties or making any major life changes in the near future.

IF YOU ANSWERED "TRUE" TO ALL OF THE STATEMENTS, YOU ARE READY TO BEGIN THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A FOSTER/ADOPTIVE PARENT!

IF YOU ANSWERED "FALSE" TO ANY STATEMENT, PLEASE CALL THE HOME DEVELOPMENT STAFF FOR MORE INFORMATION



(Family enjoying outdoors with their dog)

Can Relatives and Friends Do This Too?

1. If I am a relative of a child who needs care, can I apply to be their Foster Parent?

YES. If the child is in the custody of the State of Louisiana, you may make an application to foster/adopt the child.

2. Since I am a relative, do I have to meet all of the qualifications to become a Foster/Adoptive Parent?

YES. Anyone becoming a Foster/Adoptive Parent must meet the same eligibility requirements as non relative Foster/Adoptive Parents. The pre-service training hours required may vary.

3. Can I adopt a relative's child?

YES. If the child is in foster care and the birth parents' rights have been terminated by the court or the parents have surrendered their rights, you may make application to the agency to adopt the child. You must meet all of the requirements for adoption as specified by the Office of Community Services (OCS).

4. If I have Legal Custody, can I become the child's foster parent?

NO. Legal custody means that you have been given custody of the child and OCS is no longer legally responsible for the care of the child. However, you may be eligible to receive various forms of help through the Office of Family Support (OFS), and Department of Health & Hospitals (DHH). These options may include: Louisiana Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Kinship Care Subsidy Program (KCSP), Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program (FITAP), a Medicaid Card or financial assistance from the Social Security Administration. To apply, you must contact each agency and complete their application process.

5. I now have legal custody of a child but want to become their foster parent instead. Will the agency take custody back?

NO. OCS will not assume custody of the child. In rare cases, an individual can petition the court who may determine that a high risk or hardship situation exists and may grant custody to OCS.

6. I am caring for a relative's child and in the process of becoming a Foster/Adoptive Parent. Can I get financial assistance now?

YES. You may receive financial assistance and a Medicaid card by applying for Louisiana Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or Kinship Care Subsidy Program (KCSP) from the Office of Family Support (OFS).

7. If I foster one child, can I foster another?

YES. Often individuals who become foster parents for a specific child find the experience rewarding and open their home to other children. This can be done by talking with your Home Development Worker so that your home may be assessed for other foster children.

8. I am a relative with legal custody, can I adopt the child?

YES. You need to contact your local court system to proceed with the process.

Steps To Foster Care/Adoption Certification

1. Orientation- Informational meeting to provide an overview of the agency and the foster/adoption programs.
2. Application- The application is the beginning of the certification process and is required to proceed through the process.
3. Fingerprinting – Every applicant and adult (over the age of 18) in the home will be fingerprinted.
4. Pre-Service Training - Training generally consists of 7 sessions- 3 hours each. **All spouses must complete pre-service training to be certified. CHILDREN ARE NOT ALLOWED AT TRAINING.**
5. Home Study – This process occurs while you are completing your training. This includes a series of interviews, home visits, a safety and fire inspection, and additional paperwork. During this process you will become familiar with the Home Development Worker.
6. Placement- After you are certified, a child or children will be placed in your home. This may happen immediately or may take longer, depending on what age and type of child you are able to care for. The agency will try to place children with you that match your strengths and preferences. You can always refuse any placement you are offered. During the certification process you will explore what age(s), gender(s), race(s), number and type(s) of child(ren) you are able to care for and you will be certified accordingly.

**For more information on foster care and adoption,
call the statewide toll free number
(866) 249-0559**

or call the

Office of Community Services in your area:

Alexandria Region: local (318) 487-5921
Toll Free (800) 814-1585

Baton Rouge Region: local (225) 922-2929
Toll Free (866) 886-1001

Covington Region: local (985) 893-6363
Toll Free (800) 256-1918

Jefferson Region: local (504) 736-7171
Toll Free (888) 733-7171

Lafayette Region: local (337) 262-5970
Toll Free (800) 256-8611

Lake Charles Region: local (337) 475-3030
Toll Free (800) 814-1584

Monroe Region: local (318) 362-3362
Toll Free (800) 256-8654

Orleans Region: local (504) 568-7448
Toll Free (888) 617-3298

Shreveport Region: local (318) 676-7248
Toll Free (800) 676-5048

Thibodaux Region: local (985) 449-5055
Toll Free (800)748-7755 or (800) 431-6801

 Region 1 Orleans	(Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard Parishes)
 Region 2 Baton Rouge	(Pointe Coupee, West Feliciana, East Feliciana, West Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge, and Iberville Parishes)
 Region 3 Covington	(St. Helena, Tangipahoa, Washington, St. Tammany and Livingston Parishes)
 Region 4 Thibodaux	(Ascension, Assumption, St. James, St. John, St. Charles, Terrebonne, and Lafourche Parishes)
 Region 5 Lafayette	(Evangeline, St. Landry, Acadia, Lafayette, St. Martin, Vermilion, Iberia, and St. Mary Parishes)
 Region 6 Lake Charles	(Beauregard, Allen, Calcasieu, Jefferson Davis, and Cameron Parishes)
 Region 7 Alexandria	(Winn, Grant, La Salle, Catahoula, Concordia, Vernon, Rapides, and Avoyelles Parishes)
 Region 8 Shreveport	(Caddo, Bossier, Webster, Claiborne, De Soto, Red River, Bienville, Jackson, Sabine, and Natchitoches Parishes)
 Region 9 Monroe	(Union, Morehouse, West Carroll, East Carroll, Lincoln, Ouachita, Richland, Madison, Caldwell, Franklin, Tensas Parishes)



(Map of Louisiana showing Regions/Parishes)