

Indiana Department of Child Services

Facts for Foster Parents



Foster Care: A National Snapshot

There are more than 500,000 American youth and young adults in foster care, according to a 2005 report by Casey Family Programs.

Although there is no “typical” foster child, trends and statistics help assess the state of foster care across the United States. The Child Welfare League of America, the nation’s oldest and largest child welfare organization released its most recent national statistics in 2004. This snapshot of U.S. foster care provided the following facts:

Children in Care

On September 30, 2004, 518,000 children were in the U.S. foster care system.

Age of Children in Foster Care

The average age for children in foster care is 10.1 years.

Only five percent of foster children are less than one year old. One of out four foster children are between the ages of one and five, and 20 percent of kids in foster care are ages 6-10. However, nearly half of foster children (49 percent) are teens and pre-teens in search of permanency.

Gender

Of the children in foster care nationally, 53 percent are male and 47 percent are female.

Length of Stay (Nationally)

For children in foster care on September 30, 2004, the average foster care stay was 30 months. Twenty-nine percent of children leaving care in 2004 had been away from home for a year or longer. More than half of the young people leaving the system (53 percent) were reunified with their birth parents or primary caregivers.

Foster Homes

In 2002, there were 170,000 licensed relative and non-relative foster homes nationwide. In 2004, 24 percent of youth living in out-of-home care were residing with relatives.

Adoption

In 2004, 59 percent of adopted children received a permanent home with their foster parents, while 24 percent were adopted by a relative.

Relative Care

More than 2 million U.S. children live with grandparents or other relatives because their parents cannot care for them. When relatives provide foster care, siblings often can stay together. Relative foster care also improves stability by allowing children to live with their families and maintain familiar community connections.



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FAQs for Foster Parents

Like all parents, foster families are met with many questions throughout their care-giving journey. Although there is no typical foster care experience, DCS has compiled this list of frequently asked questions to help answer the most common queries.

Q: Why should I become a foster parent?

A: As a foster parent, you can change a life – a child’s, and your own. Through fostering, you play an important part in establishing stability for a young person during a difficult time, often as they wait to be reunited with their natural parents or prepare for adoption. You can act as a mentor and peer model for your foster child’s family, teaching effective parenting through example. You can make your own life richer by giving back to your community and to a child that needs you.

Q: What are the requirements to be licensed as foster parents?

A: To become a foster parent in Indiana, you must:

- Be 21 years of age or older (either single or a couple).
- Pass a physical examination (including a Mantoux TB test).

- Provide positive references.
- Pass a criminal history and background check including a fingerprint-based national criminal history.
- Work with a social worker in your home to create a comprehensive family assessment that can help you and the social worker match your strengths with the child’s needs.
- Have home visits that focus on safety issues such as wiring, fire extinguishers and fire alarms.
- Meet state licensing requirements including completion of a pre-service training program (20 hours of initial training, spread over several sessions).
- Complete training in First Aid and CPR.
- Maintain and broaden your skill base through ongoing training.





young toddler. Be aware that these preferences may also limit your opportunities for placement, and that you may go for periods of time without a child in your home.

Q: Do foster parents get any financial compensation for caring for a foster child?

A: In Indiana, foster parents receive a per diem for the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses. Most families will receive the per diem payment once a month.

Q: How are medical and dental costs met for foster children?

A: Foster parents are not responsible for medical expenses. Most foster youth and young adults are covered by Medicaid. Foster youth and young adults not covered by Medicaid are covered by the placing agency.

Q: How does being a foster parent affect our income tax?

A: The daily reimbursement is not considered taxable income.

Q: Is it possible to adopt a foster child?

A: Often, adoption is an option for foster parents if the foster child is available for adoption and not awaiting reunification with his or her birth family. In fact, about one out of every four of the children placed in foster care are later adopted by their foster parents. Foster children are often classified as “special needs” adoptions.

Q: Do I have to be a foster parent before I adopt a child?

A: No. While fostering provides great parenting experience, it is not necessary or required prior to adoption.

Q: How long does it take to become a foster parent?

A: In general, the process takes from 4 to nine months, depending on available staff, the frequency of orientation and training classes and your speed in fulfilling requirements and submitting all the necessary paperwork.

Q: How long will I care for a foster child?

A: The average length of stay for a foster child in Indiana is approximately seven months. The ultimate goal of DCS is a permanent home – with that in mind, foster children may leave your home for a more permanent placement option such as reunification, adoption or legal independence.

Q: Can I choose what kind of child I will foster?

A: Yes. We want you and the child in your care to have a positive experience. After orientation and training are complete, carefully consider what kind of child will benefit most from your lifestyle and parenting strengths. You may relish the idea of helping a teenager prepare for college, but may lack the patience to potty train a

