

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FOR PROSPECTIVE FOSTER PARENTS

How will I be matched with a child or children? Can I decide whether to care for a particular child?

During the certification process, your agency will get to know you so they can identify children that would be a good fit for you and your family. You can choose what age range you feel most equipped to care for. Some families are particularly passionate about caring for certain children, such as sibling groups, parenting teens, or LGBTQ+ youth. In making placement decisions, DHS also prioritizes keeping children close to their home of origin.

When your agency identifies a child who might be a good fit, they will give you as much information as possible before you make a decision. Agencies try to arrange pre-placement visits whenever possible, but emergency placements without the option of a pre-placement visit are common. You can decline a placement if you don't feel comfortable and confident about the fit.

What are the housing requirements?

You can rent or own your house or apartment. If you have children of your own, they can share a bedroom with the child(ren) placed in your home. State regulations require bedrooms to be separated by gender for children 5 and up. Bunk beds are permissible as long as the child on the top bunk can safely climb up and down. Your home will be assessed to ensure that it is physically safe and free of hazards.

What are the financial requirements?

Resource parents must demonstrate financial stability. You will need to provide documentation of stable income that is adequate to support your own household expenses. There is no minimum income, as every family's budget is different. Resource parents receive a daily stipend that can only be used to support the child.

Who is responsible for the child's health care?

Comprehensive medical, dental, and mental health care including prescription coverage is provided to children at *no* cost to the resource parent. Children 5 and under with developmental delays also receive Early Intervention Services at no cost. You will be provided with verification of your child's medical coverage to take the child to appointments. Children should remain with their Primary Care Physician when they enter foster care, unless they are placed out of county or require care that the previous PCP is unable to provide.

DHS Nurses are available to consult with you or the child's case manager if you have questions about a health issue. They can visit your home if needed. Representatives from Community Behavioral Health, the local mental health managed-care organization, work on-site at the case management agencies to consult on any behavioral or mental health issues.

Where does the child go to school, and how is transportation provided?

Federal law requires DHS to keep children in their school of origin when they enter foster care, unless it is determined to be contrary to their best interest. Schools have liaisons who work with the child's case manager to arrange transportation as quickly as possible. You may be responsible for taking a child to and from school for a few days while transportation is set up. There are afterschool programs with reserved spots for children in foster care. DHS has an Education Support Center that works with case managers to resolve any issues or challenges in the child's education.

Do resource parents receive help with child care?

Yes, resource parents who work at least 20 hours per week are automatically eligible for free childcare under the Child Care Information Services (CCIS) program, without regard for income. The DHS Childcare Eligibility Unit (CCEU) contracts with certain daycares to provide free childcare to resource parents who have applied for CCIS and are waiting for the funding to start. Once your case manager applies for CCEU funding, your child can begin attending a CCEU-approved daycare as quickly as the following morning.

Children 3 and 4 years old can attend a free, high-quality pre-kindergarten program through PHLpreK.

Can resource parents take children on trips and make routine parenting decisions?

Yes. Children in foster care have a right to a normal childhood that includes things like extracurricular activities, sports leagues, hanging out with friends, and going on family vacations with the resource family. Your trusted friends and family can help you supervise and care for the child. You will be trained to make decisions under a standard known as "Reasonable & Prudent Parenting." The child's case manager should be kept informed about any travel plans. Decisions cannot conflict with court orders (for example, the biological parent's visitation schedule may need to be considered when scheduling trips).

Do I need to take time off work to accommodate visits from case managers?

No. Social work staff generally try to schedule home visits during normal business hours, but they are able to visit outside business hours if necessary to accommodate the resource parent's or child's schedule.

If I am fostering a child who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning, what supports are available?

Philadelphia has a variety of great organizations that support LGBTQ+ youth and their families, including the Attic Youth Center, GALAEI, and the Mazzoni Center. Your child's case manager will help connect the child with appropriate supports. Children who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming are served with respect for their gender identity and expression.

How do I pick a foster care agency?

DHS contracts with over 25 foster care agencies that can certify homes for children in our care. Choosing an agency is an important decision. You may want to call a few agencies and get a feel for which agency you connect with. Here are some things to consider:

- Is the agency's office convenient to your home?
- Do staff respond to phone calls and emails quickly?
- Are trainings offered at days and times that are convenient for your schedule?
- Agencies use different training curriculums, and many offer trainings that go beyond the state minimum – are any trainings particularly appealing or important to you?
- Does the agency offer training(s) on child trauma?
- Do the social workers seem knowledgeable and experienced?
- Would you prefer to attend trainings in a language other than English?
- Do agency staff receive cultural competency training specific to LGBTQ+ families?
- Would you prefer to work with a secular agency, or an agency affiliated with a particular faith?
- Will the agency connect you with current resource parent(s) who can speak about their experiences with the foster care agency and fostering in general?
- Does the agency offer Specialized Behavioral Health (SBH) foster care, a level of foster care designed to meet the needs of children with significant mental health issues, if you are willing to care for a child with these needs?
- Does the agency offer medical foster care, if you are willing to care for a child with significant medical needs?