



# First Steps

TO FOSTERING & ADOPTION

## Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in foster care and for taking the time to discover what you can do to help. Children in our state need families like yours.

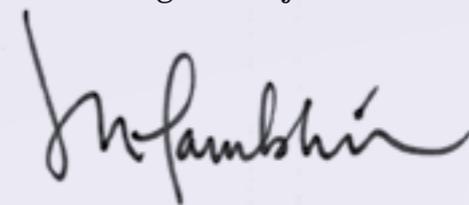
Children do best within a family. When they can't stay with their biological parents or another relative, they need a foster family. While foster parenting is not without its challenges, the rewards are real. As we say: foster care changes lives—and not just the child's!

This packet is likely your first step as you explore whether foster care is a good fit for your family. But it's only the first. We know you'll have questions, and we're here to answer them.

So read through the packet, then give us a call:

**1 (877) 505-5437**

No obligation... just the facts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Hamblin".

Mike Hamblin  
*Director of Foster Family Recruitment*  
*Utah Foster Care*



## What is Foster Care?

Foster care is intended to be short-term care for children who cannot safely remain with their own families. Children are usually in foster care because of abuse or neglect. Often drug or alcohol abuse by their parents is a factor.

*Foster parents agree: In the end, children in foster care are just children... in foster care.*

The ultimate goal of foster care is for children to return home (reunification). State caseworkers are assigned to help the family resolve their issues so they can safely parent their children again. Foster parents are asked to support this goal. It might be difficult to say goodbye to a child when it is time for them to go home.

We hope you also understand that the children's needs come first. As a foster parent, you will be trained to help children deal with trauma.

## Who are the children in foster care?

Most children in foster care have experienced abuse or neglect. Aside from that, they are as diverse as the communities from which they come. They come from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. They're boys and girls and range in age from newborn to 19-years-old. Some are the only child in their family. Most have brothers and sisters. What they all have in common is a need for a family to provide a safe environment while their parents work things out.

When children experience abuse or neglect, it has an impact on their development. Many children in foster care have learned habits that helped keep them safe in the past, but are now viewed negatively.

Children in foster care need families who will help them feel safe and give them the time they need to change past habits. They may need other services too, to help them make sense of the abuse or neglect they've experienced and allow them a chance to heal.

As a foster parent, you'll have the opportunity to identify which children are the best fit for your family. You can choose the age range, boys or girls, and how many children you are able to foster. Before a child is placed in your home, you'll have the chance to ask as many questions as you'd like about that child. Ultimately *you* decide whether or not the child is placed in your home.

*Ultimately you decide whether or not a child is placed in your home.*



# What about adoption?

**WHY IS THE STATE INVOLVED IN ADOPTION?** The first goal of foster care is to reunite a child with their *biological* family. But sometimes biological families simply aren't able to make the changes necessary. Adoption then becomes the priority.

Research shows that *each* time a child in foster care is moved, they are traumatized. This trauma can have *lasting and serious* effects. To reduce trauma, every effort is made to ensure the first placement lasts. For this reason, the State places younger children with foster families who are *also* interested in adopting. Another State policy gives priority to the current foster family when adoption becomes the goal. Because of these policies, most children are adopted by their foster family (this is called *foster-to-adopt*).

Even with all of the care that's put into matching children with families, some children who don't return to their biological families won't be adopted by their foster family. This happens for all sorts of reasons, but it means there are children—right now—waiting for a permanent home. Many of these children are older or may have special medical or mental health needs. They are called *waiting children*.

**FOSTER-TO-ADOPT** is when a family *begins* as a foster family and then adopts the child *already in their care*. Reunification, as we've stated, is the first priority. If reunification efforts are unsuccessful, the foster family is invited to adopt the child. In Utah, *most* children adopted from foster care are adopted this way.

Fostering to adopt means that a family may see multiple children pass through their home before one becomes available to adopt. We recognize the emotional toll of saying goodbye when children return home... but experienced families share countless stories of the joy that can come from reunification—and the wonderful friendships that may be made during that important process.

**WAITING CHILDREN** are usually children who have been in foster care for more than a year and are unable to return to their biological family. The court process of making the child legally available for adoption has *already* taken place. When a family takes a waiting child into their home, they know that the child is available for adoption from the *very beginning*. Even so, the child must live with the family for at least 6 months before the adoption may be finalized.

Because parents who wish to *adopt* from the state must meet the same requirements that *foster parents* meet, you will be asked about foster care all along the way. This isn't necessarily an attempt to convince you to foster. Rather, it's an attempt to understand your goals and clarify expectations.

*Regardless of whether you plan to foster-to-adopt or wish to adopt a waiting child, please remember that families who are open to a broader range of ages and other conditions will have more opportunity to adopt.*



# How do I start the fostering or adoption process? The steps are the same...

**1**

**CALL US:** A member of our staff will answer your questions...

1 (877) 505-5437

[moreinfo@utahfostercare.org](mailto:moreinfo@utahfostercare.org)



**2**

**INITIAL CONSULTATION:** We'll meet with you in your home to familiarize you with the process. Then, when you're ready, we'll invite you to start classes.



**3**

**PRE-SERVICE TRAINING:** Our training is designed to give you the tools you need to assess your own ability and to be a more effective parent. There are 8 classes—both parents need to attend.

**4**

**PAPERWORK:** Before you have your homestudy visit, you'll need to complete your licensing paperwork, CPR certification, background check, et cetera\*.

*\* We'll give you the list.*



**5**

**HOMESTUDY:** Once you've completed the paperwork and at least half of our classes, you may call\* and schedule a time for a licensor—from the State—to visit your home.

*\* Don't worry; we've got their number.*

**6**

**LICENSURE:** After a successful homestudy, the State licensor will issue you a license and alert the Utah Division of Child & Family Services (DCFS) that you're ready for their consideration.

**7**

**PLACEMENT!** DCFS matches children with the family that is best able to meet each child's needs. When it's *your* family, they'll give you a call to discuss your availability.



*At any point in the process you may pause as you consider your next step. No matter your choice, you'll have our sincere and abiding appreciation.*



## Foster Families Speak...

**BETHANY** “You do not have to be a saint to do this job. These kids have seen so much chaos and anger. You can help change them through your love, patience, and kindness.”

**RYAN** “I think if people knew more about the kids in foster care, and that it’s not so scary, then more people would do it. They’re just like your own kids, like anyone else in the world. We’re all looking to succeed and be happy, to be loved and to love back.”

**TRESSIE** “Our deepest concern was the effect fostering would have on our biological kids. But they’ve become better people—more compassionate and more loving—because of our choice to become foster parents.”

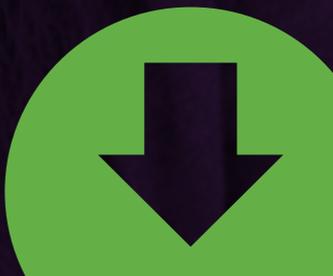


For more conversations with Utah foster parents and teens in foster care visit us online: [utahfostercare.org/changeslives](http://utahfostercare.org/changeslives)

*They were like, “You’re 16. You’re going to go off to college in a couple of years, why do you want a family?” — It’s about my entire life, it’s not just about my childhood.*

*I want to know that I’m going to have a place to come home to during Christmas breaks. I want to know that I’m going to have a dad to walk me down the aisle... that I’m going to have grandparents for my children.*

*— Mary, formerly in foster care*



## Three Partner Agencies

You may have noticed that there are three different agencies you will interact with as you go from learning about becoming a foster parent to actually caring for children in foster care.

**UTAH FOSTER CARE (UFC):** That's us! We're a private non-profit agency responsible for finding, training, and nurturing the foster families who serve Utah's children in foster care.

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF LICENSING (OL):** This State agency is responsible for processing the paperwork, conducting a homestudy, issuing your initial foster parent license, and renewing that license each year.

**UTAH DIVISION OF CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS):** This State agency is responsible for placing children with families and overseeing their care. Part of that oversight includes a wide range of services available. DCFS also works with the child's biological parents in an effort to address the problems which warranted the child's removal so that the child may safely return home (reunification).

## Support for Foster Families

We know that caring for children in foster care is not without its challenges, and we want you to know that you aren't alone! You'll have a team to help you along the way, as well as other supports.

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT:** Foster families receive a modest reimbursement for each child in their care. It starts at a little over \$15 per day and goes up from there, depending on the age and needs of the child. Children in foster care receive free school lunch and children under age 5 qualify for the WIC program. Utah Foster Care also has Wishing Well Funds, which may be accessed to help pay for additional activities in which the child participates.

**CASEWORKER SUPPORT:** Children in foster care are assigned a DCFS caseworker to oversee the child's care and help the foster family access services the child may need. There are other caseworkers, called Resource Family Consultants, who are an additional support to the family.

**PEER SUPPORT:** There are groups of foster parents in each region, called Clusters, which meet once a month. There are also online e-Clusters via Facebook for support between meetings. Clusters and e-Clusters are a vital support for foster parents as they tackle issues unique to foster care... together.

**MENTAL HEALTH:** Each child in foster care will have a mental health evaluation. As needed, they may attend counseling and you'll have the necessary support to better understand and meet the child's needs.

**MEDICAL INSURANCE:** Children in foster care receive Medicaid, which covers medical, dental, and mental health care.

*When we brought children into our home to foster them, we learned quickly that you can love them and feel like a "normal" family — to be a foster parent is to be... a parent.*

*— Rob, Foster Parent*



## Are you ready? Take the quiz!

- T F I am legally married or single.
- T F Everyone in my home would pass a background check.
- T F I'm financially stable.
- T F I'm in good physical, emotional, and mental health.
- T F My home is safe and in good repair.
- T F I have space available.
- T F I have the time available.

If you answered TRUE to the above questions, you probably qualify and are ready to find out more.

\* \* \*

Call and set up an initial consultation today—our staff will answer any questions you have and help you explore whether foster parenting or adoption is right for you:

1 (877) 505-5437

[moreinfo@utahfostercare.org](mailto:moreinfo@utahfostercare.org)

*HINTS... Foster parents may be married, or single and living alone. Foster parents may not be an unmarried couple living together.*

*Everyone in the home should be able to pass a background check. Felony charges, violent crimes, sexual crimes, and crimes against families or children are of particular concern.*

*Foster parents need to be able to support themselves financially without relying on foster care reimbursements.*

*Your doctor will need to fill out a short form indicating that you don't have any medical, emotional, or mental health issues that will interfere with your ability to care for children.*

*As part of the homestudy, the licensor will do a health and safety check of your home. Among other things, they'll check for smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, railings on stairs, and bedroom size (you get the idea). We'll provide you with a full list.*

*Children can share a room with another child of the same sex, but each child needs their own bed.*

*Among other obligations, children in foster care have medical visits, mental health check-ups, time spent with their case worker, and child visits with their biological family — it helps to have a flexible schedule as you make these appointments.*

## So you've made it this far...

Plug into the foster care community—it's an easy way to contribute to the conversation while you're exploring whether becoming a foster parent is right for you!

**HAVE A FEW MINUTES?** Like us on Facebook. It's an easy way to stay informed about a topic that interests you: [facebook.com/utahfostercare](https://facebook.com/utahfostercare)

**HAVE A SPARE LUNCH HOUR?** Invite us to present to your co-workers, family, or friends!

**HAVE A FEW HOURS?** Volunteer at an event or in one of our offices.

**HAVE NO TIME AT ALL?** Donations are always welcome: [donate.utahfostercare.org](https://donate.utahfostercare.org)

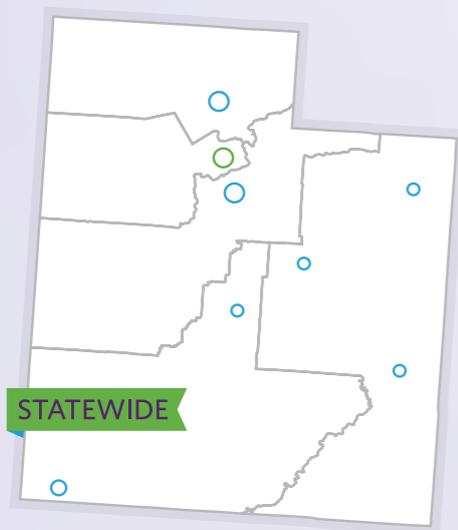
Finally, check out our online calendar for open houses or meet-and-greets where you can talk to actual foster parents from your area: [utahfostercare.org](https://utahfostercare.org)

*thank you!*



## We're Statewide!

- 1 (877) 392-1114 Ogden
- 1 (877) 505-5437 Murray
- 1 (877) 373-3006 Orem
- 1 (435) 790-8009 Vernal
- 1 (877) 506-4666 Price
- 1 (435) 979-2233 Richfield
- 1 (435) 259-3345 Moab
- 1 (877) 656-8065 St George



[moreinfo@utahfostercare.org](mailto:moreinfo@utahfostercare.org)

[utahfostercare.org](http://utahfostercare.org)

[facebook.com/utahfostercare](https://facebook.com/utahfostercare)

*It's not the size of the step that counts — but our willingness to take it.*

