



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 caring people like you.

Foster care is a temporary intervention for children who are unable to remain safely in their homes. When they can't stay with their biological parents or another relative, they need a safe and stable foster home; this is where you come in. While foster parenting is not without its challenges, the rewards are real. As many experienced foster parents say, foster care changes their lives—not just the child's.

Utah Foster Care believes every child deserves a safe home with a loving family, whether that be for a day, a year, or a lifetime. By becoming a foster parent, you are surrounded by support from Utah Foster Care, the community, the state, and a foster care village.

This packet will help you discover the first steps of foster parenting.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennie Sheperd".

Jennie Sheperd
Director of Recruitment
Utah Foster Care



WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?

Foster care is intended for children who cannot safely remain with their own families. Children are usually in foster care because of abuse or neglect. Parental substance use disorder is often a factor.

The ultimate goal of foster care is for children to return home. This is called reunification. State caseworkers are assigned to help with this goal. Foster parents are asked to support this outcome.

A foster home needs to be a safe and stable environment for children in foster care.

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

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN?

Children in foster care come from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds and range in age from newborn to 19 years old. While some are the only child in their family, most have siblings.

- 4 out of 5 have siblings (81.7%)
- 1 in 4 are Latino (27.4%)
- 1 in 3 are LGBTQ (Nationally)

What they all have in common is a need for a safe and nurturing environment while their families are being strengthened.



When children experience trauma, it has an impact on their development. They need safety, time, and services such as therapy to support their healing.

As a foster parent, you'll have the opportunity to identify which circumstances are the best fit for your family. You can choose the age range, gender, 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.

“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”

WHAT ABOUT ADOPTION?



The first goal of foster care is to reunite the children with their biological family. While the majority of children in foster care will reunite with their biological families, there will always be a need for families to adopt children from foster care.

ADOPTING FROM FOSTER CARE

If reunification is unsuccessful and the extended family has not stepped forward, the foster family may be invited to adopt the child. Families hoping to adopt may love and care for multiple children in foster care before the opportunity to adopt arises.

Even with all of the care that's put into matching children with foster families, some children who don't return to their biological families won't be adopted by their foster family. This happens for various 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”.

WAITING CHILDREN

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. When a family takes a Waiting Child into their home, adoption is the intention from the beginning. The child must live with the family for at least six months, sometimes more, before the adoption may be finalized.



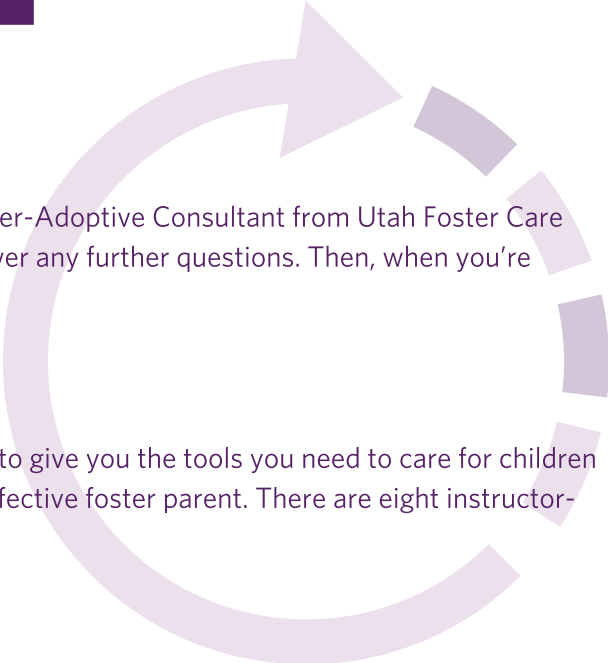
Regardless of whether you plan to foster-to-adopt or wish to adopt a Waiting Child, please remember that families who are open to a broader range of ages and other conditions will have more opportunity to adopt.



Parents who wish to adopt a Waiting Child must meet the same requirements as licensed foster parents.



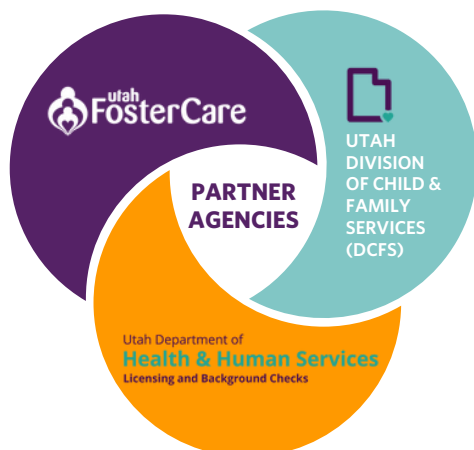
HOW DO I START THE PROCESS?

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- 1 INITIAL CONSULTATION:** You'll meet with a Foster-Adoptive Consultant from Utah Foster Care who will familiarize you with the process and answer any further questions. Then, when you're ready, we'll invite you to start classes and training.
 - 2 PRESERVICE TRAINING:** Our training is designed to give you the tools you need to care for children who have experienced trauma and to be a more effective foster parent. There are eight instructor-led classes and an online training course.
 - 3 FORMS:** You'll need to complete your licensing forms, CPR certification, background check, etc.
 - 4 HOMESTUDY:** Once you've filled out the forms and completed the classes, a licensor from the state will be assigned to visit with you in your home to make sure it is safe and in good repair.
 - 5 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.
 - 6 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 availability.

You may pause at any point in the process as you consider your next step.

PARTNER AGENCIES

There are three different agencies you will interact with as you go from learning about becoming a foster parent to caring for children in foster care.



UTAH FOSTER CARE

That's us! We're a private non-profit agency responsible for finding, educating, and nurturing the foster families who serve Utah's children in foster care.

UTAH DIVISION OF CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS)

This state agency is responsible for placing children with families and overseeing their care. DCFS also works with the child's biological parents to address safety concerns that warranted the child's removal so that the child may safely return home (reunification).

DIVISION OF LICENSING AND BACKGROUND CHECKS (DLBC)

This state agency is responsible for processing foster family paperwork, conducting a safety inspection and homestudy in your home, issuing your initial foster parent license, and renewing that license each year.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION



@UTAHFOSTERCARE



Real And Raw Conversations About Parenting

For bio, foster, adoptive or blended families to increase understanding of issues we all experience as families. You can find it here - [Foster Conversations Podcast](#)



Join us in-person or online at a Utah Foster Care event. Some events may explore what foster parenting looks like or amplify youth voices. Others show support for kids and families experiencing foster care through fun activities like a chalk art festival or other fun event.

FOSTER FAMILY SUPPORT

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 monthly reimbursement for each child in their care. Children in foster care receive free school lunches, and children under age five 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. Other caseworkers, called Resource Family Consultants, are additional support to the family.

PEER SUPPORT: There are groups of foster parents in each region called Clusters, which meet once a month. There is also support via private Facebook groups. The Support Groups are vital for foster parents as they tackle issues unique to foster care.

MENTAL HEALTH: Each child in foster care will have a mental health evaluation. They may attend counseling as needed, 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.



MENTORING: Newly-licensed foster families are not alone. Mentors are available to help with the day-to-day challenges of caring for children in foster care, from what to do when you receive a new placement, creating a positive relationship with birth families, to building confidence for successful fostering.

THERAPY SERVICES: Foster families can access professional support to navigate the emotions that can come with their foster care journey.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT: The local community recognizes the important work that foster families are doing and are here to rally behind you. There are often opportunities for families to receive donations and discounts and attend fun family events.

ARE YOU READY? TAKE THE QUIZ



T or F I am legally married or single.

Foster parents may not be an unmarried couple living together.

T or F Everyone in my home would pass a background check.

Everyone in the home will undergo a background check. Felony charges, violent crimes, sexual crimes, and crimes against families or children are of particular concern.

T or F I'm financially stable.

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

T or F My home is safe and in good repair.

As part of the homestudy, the licensor will do a health and safety check of your home. 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.

T or F I'm physically and mentally stable.

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.

T or F I have the time available.

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

T or F I have space available.

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

If you answered TRUE to the above questions, you likely qualify and are ready to learn more.

If you answered FALSE to any of the above questions, let's discuss your options. Our staff is here for you.

Reach out to your local Utah Foster Care Foster-Adoptive Consultant; if you aren't sure who that is, call us: 1 (877) 505 - 5437 or visit www.utahfostercare.org

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