

# LET'S TALK ABOUT FOSTERING

---

FOSTER PARENTING FOR BEGINNERS



LIFESPAN FAMILY SERVICES

# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A FOSTER PARENT?

Foster parenting begins when a child is removed from their family of origin and placed into temporary care — often due to safety concerns, neglect, or other difficult circumstances.

The primary goal of foster care is always reunification — helping children return to their biological families once it's safe and stable to do so.

But when reunification isn't possible, foster parents often become the first in line to adopt the child they've cared for — because they've already built trust, love, and a sense of home.

As a foster parent, your role is to be a steady, supportive presence during one of the hardest moments in a child's life. Your job is to help them heal, grow, and feel safe — to give them a chance to thrive, even in the face of chaos. You're not replacing their past — you're helping them build a future.

# CHAPTER 1

Foster parenting isn't always easy — it takes time, patience, and heart. At Lifespan Family Services, we do everything we can to walk with you through the process.

Here's what you need to know to get started: You must be at least 21 years old to apply. Every household member over the age of 18 must pass child abuse clearances and background checks. This is to make sure our kids are safe, always.

A stable income is required. You don't need to be rich — but you do need to be financially secure enough to support your household without relying on agency funds. We'll ask for financial documents like statements or tax returns.

Foster parents receive a daily stipend to reimburse them for providing care.

Training is provided, including classes in basic first aid, crisis response, and trauma-informed care. Many children in care have experienced trauma, and while no training can prepare you for every situation, we do have trauma-informed trainings to help you understand children's individual needs.

Every child is different. Every foster family is different. We're here to help you navigate it — step by step.



## HOME SAFETY

Every agency's requirements for the homes of foster parents are different.

There are however a lot of basics that most agencies will require.

1. **Safety and Childproofing** : Hazardous items must be secured. There must be smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, and fire extinguishers in the home. Heavy furniture must be anchored. There should be safety gates, electrical outlets should be covered and sharp furniture should be protected. All firearms should be locked in secure containers away from ammunition. There should also be a well-equipped first aid kit on hand.
2. **Welcoming Environment** : Your home should be arranged to include spaces for children to play, relax, and do homework. Hobby items should be provided and tailored to the interests and age of children. There should always be a space at the dinner table, a focus on cultural sensitivity by incorporating familiar items or practices. Positive language, comfort and reassurance should be displayed.
3. **Sleeping Arrangements** : Sturdy, safe, and comfortable bed with clean bedding. Clean, quiet, inviting Space with age-appropriate furniture, organized storage spaces & adequate lighting that is free of potential hazards
4. **Documentation & Clearances** : Potential foster parents will be asked for up to date financial statements, marriage certificate if applicable, background & criminal history checks, medical clearances to ensure a child can be cared for, as well as multiple professional & personal references.

## PREPARING YOUR HOME

It can be difficult at times to prepare your home.

The following is a basic list that approved foster parents may want to have ready. In addition to this list, items should be purchased on a case-by-case basis.

Clothing basics:

A few outfits in general sizes for different age ranges you're open to (even simple Walmart/Target tees, joggers, leggings, and PJs)

Socks and underwear (new, in packaging – different sizes if possible)

Seasonal items like a hoodie or light jacket

Bedding & comfort:

Extra blankets and sheets

A twin bed or crib if accepting infants/toddlers

Comfort items like soft stuffed animals or cozy pillows

Nightlights

Hygiene essentials:

Shampoo/conditioner and body wash for both kids and teens

Toothbrushes, floss and toothpaste

Hairbrushes and hair ties

Diapers and wipes if accepting younger children

Food & snacks:

Kid-friendly snacks like applesauce pouches, granola bars, crackers, juice boxes, name-brand comfort foods

A meal you can quickly prepare for their first night

Emotional readiness:

A notebook or journal for them if they want to write or draw

Age-appropriate books to read together

An open, patient heart to listen and provide reassurance



# CHAPTER 2

As you begin the foster parent approval process, Lifespan Family Services will be right there to guide you every step of the way.

To meet state requirements, all foster parent applicants must complete several clearances and checks, including:

- PA Child Abuse Clearance
- Criminal Background Check
- FBI Fingerprint Check
- Out-of-State Child Abuse Clearance (if you've lived out of state)

Any household members over the age of 18 are also required to complete the same clearances and background checks.

In addition, applicants must submit a fully completed financial statement that verifies adequate income. This includes your most recent tax return or W-2, a Social Security earnings statement.



## HOME DOCUMENTATION

Applicants will also need to complete several key safety steps as part of the approval process:

A Disaster Plan, Emergency Contact Form, and Evacuation Plan must be completed.

A Home Safety Checklist will be completed to ensure your home meets all state and agency safety standards.

To verify your home environment is suitable and secure, you'll also need to submit:

A current homeowner's insurance statement

A recent water bill or proof of access to safe, potable drinking water

These requirements aren't just paperwork — they're in place to ensure your home is fully prepared to keep children safe in any situation. Lifespan will guide you through each step and make sure you're supported every step of the way.

## PERSONAL INFORMATION

In addition to background checks and financial documentation, foster parent applicants will need to complete a few more important steps:

Three personal references are required per foster parent. These should be people who can speak to your character, lifestyle, and ability to care for children.

A health assessment dated within one year of your approval is required. The results must verify that you're physically and mentally able to care for children in your home.

A valid driver's license and proof of vehicle insurance must be submitted for each applicant.

Mandatory trainings will be required as part of your pre-approval process. These are designed to help you feel prepared and confident as you step into foster care.

Applicants will also be asked to review and sign key agency policies and paperwork.

Don't forget your personal documents:

Birth certificates and Social Security cards for each applicant

Marriage certificate, if applicable

We know it can feel like a lot upfront — and it is — but every requirement is there to ensure the safety and stability of children in care. And you won't be doing it alone. Lifespan Family Services will walk alongside you the whole way, making the process as clear and stress-free as possible. You've got this.



# CHAPTER 3

Once you're officially approved as a foster parent — congratulations! — the next step is welcoming your first placement. Every child and every foster family is unique, which means placements are made thoughtfully and intentionally on a case-by-case basis. During the approval process, you'll have submitted a family profile outlining your preferences: age range, gender, types of needs you're comfortable supporting, and more. That profile helps us match you with a child whose needs align with your strengths and comfort level — and most importantly, where both the child and the family can thrive.

Quick heads up: Your first placement might not happen right away. And that's okay! The timing can vary for everyone. Foster care isn't a one-size-fits-all journey — every family walks a different path, and that's part of what makes this experience so meaningful.

Take this time to keep learning, stay connected with your agency, and prepare your home. When the right match comes along, you'll be ready.

## AFTER A PLACEMENT

As mentioned before, the needs of every child and every family are different! The ultimate goal of foster care is to give a child a safe home until it is time for them to be reunited with their families.

However, in some cases, reunification is not possible. If a foster family is a great fit for a child, and it is determined that the child's permanency goal is changed to adoption, the foster family is usually given the first opportunity to adopt.

After a placement ends—whether through reunification, adoption, or another outcome—it's completely normal for foster families to feel a mix of emotions. You may experience grief, relief, pride, or even uncertainty. That's why support doesn't stop once the child leaves your care.

At Lifespan Family Services, we stay connected. Our team is here to help you process the experience, answer questions, and prepare for whatever comes next—whether that's taking a break or welcoming another child into your home. Every placement changes you, and we believe in supporting our families every step of the way.