

Foster Care FAQ

What's the difference between foster care and treatment foster care?

Treatment foster care is a specialized form of foster care, and parents who provide it need additional training. A child placed in Treatment Foster Care Services might need counseling (both individual and family), psychiatric services, special accommodations at school, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, etc. Treatment foster care is referred to as a "higher level of care." Parents licensed at the treatment level receive additional support and financial reimbursement.

What are the children like that I/we will be working with?

Most of the children referred to us for foster care placement experience one or more of the following challenges: delinquency, mental illness, behavioral disorders, family issues, alcohol and other drug abuse issues, developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, or other challenges. The majority of children referred have not lived in healthy environments and have experienced some level of trauma for many years and may struggle to adapt to a home that has different rules and expectations. Sibling groups are often referred to us because many of our foster homes are able to take two to four children at one time.

With these challenges, it is important that foster parents take a trauma-informed care approach to working with a child. "Trauma-informed" means recognizing people are shaped by their experiences and approaching that person from the perspective that they are having this behavior because of the trauma they experienced. People who have experienced trauma need support and understanding from those around them. Kids can be re-traumatized by well-meaning caregivers and supports because they don't understand the impact trauma can have. Understanding and recognizing a child's behavior is because of past trauma and not because they want to be defiant is the first step in becoming a compassionate and supportive caregiver. Our agency will teach our treatment foster parents about trauma-informed care and help them implement the approach into their parenting.

What's expected of me, my home, and my family?

As a treatment foster parent, you are expected to act as a positive role model to foster children in your care; to provide structure; and to provide emotional, educational and social support. You are responsible for providing foster children with a sense of family while they are distanced from their own. One of our expectations for a treatment foster home is that there will be a parent at home at all times (occasionally, exceptions can be made). Again, this is to ensure that the foster children in your care receive the highest level of support and structure possible.

As a treatment foster parent, you will serve as a member of the treatment team, which typically includes the child's social worker, therapist(s), school personnel and parent(s) or legal guardian(s). In

most cases, we strive to reunite the child with his/her family; to achieve this, the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) must be involved. When they are involved, they will have a lot of contact with you and with us. We expect your relationship with the birth family to be supportive and professional; you are not expected to be their friends. You should set boundaries and enforce them in order to maintain a professional relationship.

What can I expect for financial support for the children in my care?

Your income is expected to be sufficient for you and your family; the monthly monetary compensation is to be used to cover any expenses that may be incurred for the child. The rate of pay varies depending on the needs of the child.

What qualifications do I need to become licensed as a treatment foster parent?

You must pass all background checks, have a positive home study and have at least THREE of the following:

- One year of experience as a foster parent or kinship care provider. (A child must have been in your home for at least one year)
- Five years of experience working with or parenting children.
- A minimum of 500 hours of experience as a respite care provider for children under the supervision of a human services agency respite provider.
- A high school diploma or the equivalent.
- A college, vocational, technical or advanced degree in the area of a child's treatment needs, such as nursing, medicine, social work or psychology.
- A substantial relationship with the child to being placed through previous professional or personal experience.
- Work or personal experience for which the applicant has demonstrated the knowledge, skill, ability and motivation to meet the needs of a child.

What's the licensing process like?

The entire process takes approximately three to six months.

Following your initial informational phone call, a packet of information will either be sent to you or an agency representative will set up an appointment to meet with you. The packet will include background checks, which need to be completed by all family members over the age of ten.

The first home visit is an opportunity for our staff to review the information in the licensing packet, in addition to meeting you and your family. You are encouraged to ask questions at this visit. Our staff member may conduct a walk-through of your home.

State statutes require ongoing training and education while in the program. You will be required to complete 36 hours of pre-service training before a child is placed in your home and 24 hours of training annually thereafter. Education and training will target both your needs and the needs of the child placed in your home.

While you are completing the training, an assigned worker will verify information with you and perform a Home Study/ Resource Family Assessment (RFA). This involves the worker coming to your home to interview you, your spouse or partner, and your children. The Home Study/RFA is required, and can be somewhat time consuming and intrusive.

You will also be responsible for completing several forms (part of the licensing packet reviewed with you at the first meeting) and providing numerous documents needed for your file maintained at our office.

What kind of training and support are provided?

You are required to complete 36 hours of pre-service training which is paid for by our organization. Of the 36 hours, six hours of training is completed online and the remaining 30 hours of training is through a class called Foundations. Foundations is a curriculum with nine sections to help prepare you for becoming a foster parent. You will participate in Foundations with a group of other foster parents wanting to be licensed. The training is taught by an experienced foster parent as well as a social worker trained in the criteria.

Once you have completed the pre-service training, you are required to have 24 hours each year thereafter. We supply information about ongoing training opportunities provided by our organization as well as other outside agencies. The trainings will fit your needs and the needs of the child(ren) placed in your home. Foster parents are required to complete CPR and first aid every two years. We provide this training free of charge to our foster parents.

Your family will be assigned a licenser and social worker. The social worker for the child placed in your home will provide a great deal of support through home visits (at least every other week), telephone contact, and email and treatment team meetings. Our staff members will also help you identify respite options. Your licenser and other team members will help identify training opportunities for you. We also offer a 24-hour crisis/support line.

How often can I take vacation?

In the world of foster care, we call vacation "respite," and our policy is that you can take respite as needed. We pay for two days of respite care per child, per month. Respite days cannot be transferred from one child to another or be accumulated. We pay respite providers directly, unless additional days of respite are used and/or other arrangements are agreed upon. All respite providers must be approved by our team. Your assigned social worker will help you find respite options.

We strongly encourage foster parents to take respite on a regular basis to reduce compassion fatigue/burn out and nurture the relationship with the foster child. Taking respite only during

difficult times can result in the foster child viewing respite as a punishment, which is not its intended purpose.

Learn more about our respite program.

What if the foster child damages my property?

During the licensing process, you will be asked to have your homeowner's insurance changed so it includes an "umbrella" liability policy. Part of your compensation is intended to cover replacement/repair costs, as well as the additional costs associated with the umbrella policy. All claims for property damage should be submitted to your insurance company. Contact your insurance agent for rates and information.

If the damage is not covered by your insurance policy, there is also foster care insurance through the State of Wisconsin. However, damages need to be submitted through your homeowner's insurance first.

What if I change my mind and no longer want the child to live in my home?

A 30-day written notice must be given if a child needs to be removed from your home (required by state statute). We work hard not to "bounce" children around and need adequate time to find an appropriate alternative and develop a support plan for the child.

What if I want to support a child in foster care, but I am not ready to commit to being a foster parent? Are there other ways that I can support a child?

We are always looking for respite providers. A respite provider would provide a "break" for foster parents one weekend a month in your home. As a respite provider you can provide respite for more than one family and youth at a time. If you would like to become a respite provider, you would meet with the licensor to complete all necessary paperwork. The process to be licensed as a respite provider can go as quickly or slowly as you would like it to. This process does not usually take as long as becoming a licensed foster parent.