

Foster Family Handbook

Advice and Encouragement for Foster Parents, From Start to Finish



Prepared by:



In partnership with:





Foster Family Handbook

A child's world is turned upside down.

A child desires a stable home.

You recognize and respond with compassion at a critical time.

Not knowing what will happen next, but knowing this:

Today, another parent's child is in your care.

Thank You.



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The mission of Fostering Great Ideas is to restore hope to children in foster care through innovative ideas that are built on meaningful relationships.



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We believe that all children, in all walks of life, are entitled to safety, permanency, and well-being. This is the guiding principle of our public child welfare work. Often, we enter the lives of families and children in their most difficult season: stressful times of disruption, uncertainty, and change. As a Department, we could not begin to address the multiplicity and complexity of challenges present in meeting their individual needs without dedicated foster parents. As a foster parent, you are a vital member of this team.

Foster care is meant to be a temporary living situation for a child. Your role in providing a temporary home for children in care, and working in partnership with birth parents while serving as parenting mentors, when appropriate, is of the utmost importance. Mentoring and sharing parenting responsibilities creates opportunities for birth parents to safely teach, support, and care for their child/ren. Shared parenting promotes a child-centered partnership, enhancing the family's capacity for independence and continued growth.

Every day you “step to the plate” and provide stability and a sense of normalcy to children in need; undoubtedly, making sacrifices in your personal lives to enhance the lives of others. Thank you for enduring and persevering through all of the obstacles you encounter as a foster parent. Thank you for answering that phone call and having the courage to welcome someone into your home with little to no knowledge of who they are or what impact they will make. Thank you for all you do to keep children safe, support parents, and help families stay connected. Although foster care is meant to be temporary, your impact in the life of a child in foster care is significant and lifelong.

Permanency Division,
South Carolina Department of Social Services



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1. Prepare to Foster



Fostering may become the **greatest joy of your lifetime**. It may transform you, your family, and your kids. It may teach you things about yourself or your loved ones. It will definitely change you.

Fostering will open your eyes to new possibilities. You will rise to new heights, discovering your potential from within. You will definitely become more resilient.

There is no doubt that being a foster parent is hard. You may already know that. You will learn it more and more along the way; but know this: **your sacrifices will be rewarded as you experience growth for yourself, your family, and the children who enter your home.** Furthermore, the hard can be equally met with joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment. Thank you for welcoming this new possibility.

License Options

The decision to become a foster parent may feel daunting. Once you get started, you may be anxious to get your license and receive your first placement. While foster homes are always needed, foster home licensing takes time. Licensing is a detailed process that ensures homes are thoroughly safe, capable, and equipped.

Regular Foster Care License

Most foster families offer their home to children needing regular foster care. They wrap their care around a child or children who have experienced trauma or neglect. These children may still have challenges that have not yet been identified. You can help the treatment team, as you become aware of what some of those are!

Therapeutic Foster Care License

Therapeutic foster care is for a child who needs extra care due to emotional or medical needs. Therapeutic foster families receive additional therapies and in-home services. This level of care requires more training hours than regular care. The board payments are also higher to assist with the child's needs. Consider your abilities and talk with others about the struggles and joys of this license level.

Choosing an Agency

You can become licensed through the agency of your choice. In South Carolina, there are over 15 different agencies. Some license for both standard and therapeutic foster care, while others license only one or the other. How do you choose an agency? Good question! It's up to you to critically evaluate the agency best suited for your family. There are resources to help you with this. **Care2Foster** is one resource to help you determine your options and process your decision. **Heartfelt Calling** is another. Both are valuable. You can also contact any agency yourself to ask what makes them unique and what foster families love about working with them.



"I foster to make a **lifelong impact** on children. Fostering has taught me patience, perseverance, and compassion."

~ Danielle, foster parent

Licensing Resources

South Carolina
Department of Social
Services (SC DSS)

dss.sc.gov/foster-care

Care2Foster

fgi4kids.org/care2foster

Heartfelt Calling

heartfeltcalling.org

Kinship Care

Kinship care is when a licensed or unlicensed family member takes in a child. Kinship care is encouraged when there is an appropriate relative ready to foster a related child in need. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, and other extended family members can become licensed as foster parents after a discussion with the case worker. **Fictive Kin** is someone who is not related to, but has a close relationship with the child. Teachers, family friends, mentors, and coaches may be considered as fictive kin for kinship care placements. A child may be placed with a foster family while efforts are made to identify kinship care. Talk to the child's case worker to learn more.



Licensing Process

Your license team will be your guide as you complete training, home inspections, and documentation prior to receiving licensure.

The basic steps to licensure are:

1. **Choose** the type of foster care (regular or therapeutic) and your preferred licensing agency.
2. **Contact** your agency of choice to start the application process.
3. **Talk** to your agency's licensing worker when they come to your home.
4. **Schedule** medical, fingerprinting, DHEC/Fire Inspections, and other required appointments.
5. **Attend** group training required by your licensing agency.
6. **Complete** the required paperwork from your licensing agency.
7. **Prepare** your home and family members for this opportunity.
8. **Wait** for a placement, which can occur at any time of the day or night.

This process can take time. For some, a couple months. For others, longer. **Be patient with the process**, and remember that although you may know your family is safe and ready to get started, there are State guidelines that must determine this too. It takes time.

Ask your licensing agency where the need is greatest. Does your community need foster homes to take in sibling groups? How about more homes for older youth? Every community has a different need. Consider your abilities and your limitations, and have an honest conversation with your licensing worker. They will appreciate and help you to decide a good path forward.

License Process



1. **Choose**
the type of foster care & licensing agency



2. **Contact**
the licensing agency to begin process



3. **Talk**
to licensing worker at home visit



4. **Schedule**
all required appointments



5. **Attend**
all required trainings



6. **Complete**
all paperwork



7. **Prepare**
your home & family



8. **Wait**
for a placement

Childcare

As you begin the licensing process, take time to consider childcare options. If you plan to accept young children, you may **look into daycares or preschools** that can open a spot with short notice. Many daycares accept State (ABC) vouchers to assist with the cost. To enroll in this program or find a daycare near you that accepts these vouchers, visit the [SC Child Care website](https://scchildcare.org/departments/sc-voucher.aspx) and find the SC Voucher program listed under the Departments heading (<https://scchildcare.org/departments/sc-voucher.aspx>).

With school-aged children, you might **look into afterschool programs**, depending on your work situation. Ask your employer about your leave options; you may need to take a day or two off from work when receiving a new placement to help with the adjustment. You may also choose to take leave for court hearings related to the child's case, or to stay home for your annual fire inspection. While none of this may be required, it is good to know your options. Neighbors and trusted family and friends can be great resources to help with childcare, too.

Medical Providers

Ask your medical providers if they accept patients with **Medicaid**. See if they currently serve any kids in foster care. If they don't, talk to them about your desire to be foster parents and make sure they are willing to treat the children who enter your home. Often, a medical evaluation is required before you have all the child's information, such as a Medicaid number. Are they willing to work with you in these situations? You might reach out to other foster parents to find providers experienced in serving foster families.

Board Payment

You will receive a **board payment** for each child based on the number of nights the child lives with you. The board payment is payable by the **16th calendar day of the month** following the month the child is placed in your home. The board payment is to cover basic needs of the child such as food (at home and away), clothing, housing, transportation and education. While this money will help care for the child, you should expect to cover some expenses for the child yourself.

Prepare Yourself

This time can be an incredible opportunity to become knowledgeable about **trauma-informed care and attachment parenting**. Find helpful resources in the back of this handbook. Find other foster parents and begin making connections. Relationships will prove invaluable once you begin the adventure. Begin thinking about items to have on hand when a child arrives at your home. You will need things to keep them healthy, safe, and comfortable.

Childcare Tip:

Many foster families identify a few preferred childcare locations, let them know that they will be fostering, and **check with them on a regular basis** to find out if they have availability for certain ages at that time.

Board Payment Tip:

You should be prepared to spend some **out of pocket money** upfront for immediate needs such as shoes, clothing, or school supplies.

Preparing Your Home

Here are some items to have on hand:

- first aid kit
- locking medicine box
- children's medicine
- fire extinguisher
- smoke detectors
- outlet covers
- baby proofing supplies
- bedding & mattress pads
- night lights
- school supplies
- children's books & toys
- kid-friendly snacks
- journals or sketch pads
- stuffed animals

2. Meet the Child Welfare Team ♥

The Child Welfare Team refers to all the parties involved in supporting a child during their time in foster care. The members of the child welfare team may vary by county/region and by licensing agency. The team always includes **YOU!** The Child Welfare Team will be able to provide you with access to resources and support. **Get to know everyone, be respectful and kind, even when stress hits the roof, and jump right in.**

Team Members

While each of the team members should be in place for each child, exact job titles may vary from those listed below.

Foster Care Case Worker: This person is the primary representative of SC DSS, which has temporary legal custody of the child. The case worker understands the gravity of the family situation. Each works with multiple families at a time. They should reach out to you shortly after the child is placed in your home. You can ask for your case worker's name and contact information (if known) when the child is dropped off.

Foster Care Supervisor: This person has experience managing multiple cases. Keep them involved and copy them on all important emails. When first introduced to the child's case worker, ask for their supervisor's name and contact information so that you can reach out when needed.

Foster Family Coordinator: This person works for your licensing agency. They should reach out and introduce themselves when you are initially licensed. They will visit your home quarterly and work with you to maintain licensing requirements. This person advocates for your family by offering resources and assistance, so let them know your needs.

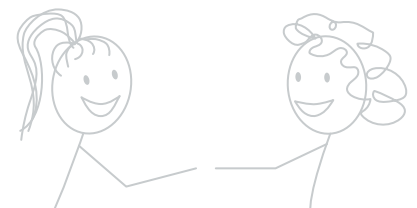
Investigator: The investigator gathers evidence on the case when it first begins. This is a difficult role, but very important as the State determines how the case will progress.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)/Guardian ad Litem (GAL): This person is appointed by the court to advocate for the best interest of the child and to help the judge make an informed decision about the child's future. They review documents, interview family members and professionals in the child's life, and stay in direct contact with the child. In some communities, this person is a volunteer; in others, it is a professional attorney. The advocate should reach out to you once assigned to the case.

Foster Parent Association: Most counties have an association that meets regularly to provide ongoing training and support. Join and become active. This is a rich community of wisdom. We all need peer support. Find one near you.

Family Group Decision Making

In this best practice model, the child's extended family is welcomed into discussion of care. They become active participants on the team. In fact, they are asked to help lead team meetings. Their voices are heard during this difficult time, as all parties work towards a permanent solution.



Find a Foster Parent Association Near You:

South Carolina
Foster Parent Association

scfpa.com

Therapist: Most children in foster care live with unseen pain. It is not uncommon for a child to feel invisible or hurt by the label, “foster child.” A therapist can help with behaviors and trauma. Foster parents may use their county Department of Mental Health center or use a private mental health provider that accepts Medicaid.

Teacher: Teachers will want to build rapport with you. If the child in your care sees the teacher and foster parent talking with each other, the child may feel encouraged to ask their teacher for academic support.

State Leadership: Every county has a foster care director. Every region has a regional director. State-level teams focus on permanency, transitions, well-being, resource deployment and more. You are part of a large network.

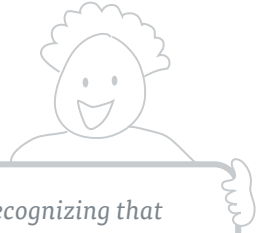
Foster Family: You and your family are very important team members. The foster family includes all persons who reside in the home, including children or additional adults.

Child’s Family: Children love their family, and it is important to have empathy for each and every person in the situation. After discussing with the case worker that it is safe and appropriate, consider meeting the child’s family at family visits. Letting the family know their child is safe can relieve stress and anxiety for all.

Your Role

Fostering can be thankless. Most people will not understand the sacrifices and hard choices you and your family make to provide a safe home for a child. Their perspectives about foster parents may come from myths or misconceptions, outdated information, or media representation. People may consider you a hero, crazy, or in it for the money. Explain your decision to your social support community early on, **encourage them to join you in learning more about loving children and families, and ask if they will be willing to support you.** You will need support early and often, so finding people who can understand and help you is an important part of this process.

You are a loving family, not a superhero family. Often, foster parents carry the grief of these children, the shame they may feel, and the trauma they have experienced. When a child comes to live with you, you find a new rhythm and it feels comfortable, and then the child may leave. It can be an emotional rollercoaster. Lean on your supportive family and friends.



“Fostering is recognizing that children are the responsibility of the entire community, and we must collectively

work together for their success.”

~ Adrian, foster parent



Foster care is not about finding a child for your family.

It is about **finding a family** for a child.

Your Responsibilities

As a foster parent, you are responsible for...

- ❑ **Caring for the child's daily needs**, such as choosing a medical provider, handling school enrollment, and keeping the case worker informed of changes or challenges.
- ❑ **Protecting the confidentiality of the child and their family.** This requires a special note of importance as you become privy to very personal details. Protect a child in your care just like you would protect your own children's and spouse's privacy. Remain in compliance with state standards about photos and social media, as well.
- ❑ **Working together with all the members of the Child Welfare Team.** There will be moments of stress, but the working relationship of this team is critical to the success of a child's stability. Be respectful and communicate to the best of your ability.
- ❑ **Maintaining your foster home license** by maintaining safety standards, completing training hours and required visits, and keeping your agency informed of any changes to your health, home, family structure, or income.
- ❑ **Using the board payment appropriately** for the child's needs.

Your Rights

Foster parents should be treated with respect and dignity. If this is ever in question, contact your Foster Family Coordinator who is there to support your family. You may also contact the SC DSS Foster Parent Support Liaison at fphelp@dss.sc.gov, as a secondary option.

You are a valued member of the child's team. You have the right to relevant information and to receive the necessary support services in order to effectively care for the child in your home. This includes access to personnel 24-7 for emergencies. You exercise parental authority within the policies and procedures of SC DSS and SC laws. Ask your Foster Family Coordinator to learn more.

As a foster parent, you have the right for your personal information to remain confidential. You have the right to accept or refuse placement of a child. You also have the right to know how many times a child has moved prior to living with you. You have the right to take a time of respite or break from fostering at any time.

Training and support are to be provided to you, usually from your licensing agency. Don't be afraid to seek outside resources and support for help. It takes a team to foster well.

Responsibilities



Caring
for the child's
daily needs



Protecting
the confidentiality
of the child and family



Working
together with the
Child Welfare Team



Maintaining
your foster license



Using
board payments
appropriately

Find a Foster Parent Training Near You:

South Carolina
Foster Parent Association

scfpa.com

Your Relationship With The Case Worker

Consistent communication is important to all members of the Child Welfare Team. Ask the case worker their communication preference: is it text, email, or phone call? Include all parties in your written correspondence (case worker, CASA/GAL, and licensing agency). Developing this communication loop from the beginning ensures that everyone stays on the same page.

Case workers are an essential member of the team, who also carry the burdens, trauma, and emotions of the children. They are in the unique position of being the State's primary representative as custodian for the child. **Seek to understand their challenges.** By doing this, you can better help the child in your care.

Keep Perspective: Your caseworker likely has a caseload that requires an enormous amount of time to manage and stretches them over a wide geographic area. Here are a few questions that we suggest asking when you first meet:

- How many cases are you currently handling?
- What is the farthest distance you travel to see one of your cases?
- How long do you work each day?
- Do you have family/kids?

Share Purpose: You are advocating for the best interest of the child in your care. The nature of foster care can create unusually tense situations. Emotions that have built up over weeks can explode in one exchange. An outburst can be detrimental to the caseworker-foster parent relationship. Remember that you are both on the same team. Here are a few suggestions to keep it positive if you feel frustrated:

- Before communicating** with your case worker, consider the perspective questions you asked your case worker (above).
- Before communicating**, ask yourself if you are viewing the case worker as a valuable person, and not as an obstacle.
- Before sending any written communication**, review it multiple times. If the communication relays emotion or disagreement, allow the communication to sit for a few hours or even a day before sending. You can also have a spouse or friend review the content and ask them for feedback. Example: "Is this clearly and fairly stated?" Be careful not to violate privacy rules in asking someone to review your communication.



"Communicating with the child welfare team consistently and openly is key.
Always be respectful
and use the golden rule: treat others as you'd like to be treated."
~ Ruby, foster parent

3. Understand the Court Process ♥

Court hearings follow a process. Recommendations are made to the judge about the child's case, and the judge will determine the outcome. The family will be present with an attorney, as well as a SC DSS caseworker and attorney, and the CASA/GAL.

Foster parents should be notified of hearings as the case progresses. Communicate with the case worker for specifics of the case. When invited, ask whether you have a right to speak or to provide a written statement.

Major Court Hearings

When a child enters foster care, the following hearings take place in this order:

- ❑ **Probable Cause:** This hearing should occur within 72 hours of removal. The hearing determines whether there was probable cause to remove children in the first place.
- ❑ **Merits Hearing:** This hearing should take place within 35 days of removal. At the hearing, the State agency and CASA/GAL recommend a treatment plan for the family which can include parenting classes, drug treatment, therapy, and more, based on the family's needs.
- ❑ **Judicial Review Hearing:** These hearings give the judge the opportunity to review the status of the case and the treatment plan on a regular basis.
- ❑ **Permanency Planning Hearing:** Within 12 months of removal, an appropriate permanency plan should be established. Reunification is the priority when possible. The alternative is termination of parental rights, and subsequent adoption or guardianship. Evidence is given as to whether the family has completed their court-ordered treatment plan.
- ❑ **Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) hearing:** A TPR hearing determines whether parental rights should be terminated. It is the first step in a process that can take several months before TPR is finalized. If the court makes this decision, then a child becomes legally free for adoption.

There are times when court hearings are delayed or "continued". It is impossible to predict an accurate timeline for any child entering care, since each case progresses differently.



It is impossible to predict the timeline for any child, since **each case progresses differently.**

Foster Care Review Board

Separate from court hearings is the Foster Care Review Board, a committee of private citizens who are appointed by the State Legislature to review foster care cases every six months. Their purpose is to ensure plans are carried out in a timely manner. The Board involves the Child Welfare Team and makes recommendations to family court. Foster parents should be notified of all meetings and encouraged to attend. Children ages 10 and older may attend.

Attendance in Court

While you are not required to attend Family Court, it is highly recommended. However, as hearings take place during normal work hours, many foster parents cannot attend. It may be helpful to share information with the child's CASA/Guardian ad Litem in advance. You may also choose to write a letter to the court; simply know that the Judge may or may not read it. After the hearing, ask for an update from someone on the Child Welfare Team.

If you do attend, it's important to represent yourself well. Do not bring children with you. Dress appropriately. Business casual is preferred, but you may want to look up any requirements for court attire online in advance. Arrive early and be prepared to leave your phone in your car or turn it on silent during court. Take a copy of the hearing notice with you. When you arrive, make time to find the case worker and SC DSS attorney. Let them know if you are just there to observe, or plan to speak in court. Be prepared to wait, and be patient with the day. Court varies in how long it may last.

Addressing the Court

Prior to the start of the hearing, inform the SC DSS attorney or case worker if you plan to address the court. Then, take your seat and wait. During the hearing, you must be recognized by the judge before you speak. First stand, then speak loudly and clearly. The judge may ask you to speak from your seat, or ask you to take the witness stand prior to addressing the court. Be prepared for either.

You may use descriptive language to describe what the child has expressed or displayed to them directly. **Only first-hand knowledge will be acceptable.** The court does not allow you to share information that you have heard secondhand from others who know the family.



"I have always tried to attend court. It helps me understand the case better, and it's a place where
I can build relationships
with families when reunification is the goal."

~Jenny, foster parent

Tips for Attending Court

- Dress appropriately
- Arrive early
- No cell phones!
- Bring the hearing notice

4. Begin the Adventure



You receive the call. A child or sibling group is in need. Oh my! You must decide whether to welcome this child into your home...or not. Be realistic. You are not a superhero. It is okay to say “no” if you have concerns about your ability to help this child. It is better to let the placement team continue looking for the child’s best fit elsewhere than to accept a child that you ask to relocate later. You will still be considered for future placements.

Say “yes” if you feel ready. How will you know you are ready? Ask questions. Some answers may be, “We don’t know.” This can be hard, but it is often a reality. **Decide based on your comfort level.**

Child Placement Calls

Ask these questions about a child being placed with you...

1. What is the child’s age?
2. What county is the child from?
3. Why is the child in foster care?
4. Has the child been in foster care before?
5. Has the child lived in other foster placements? If so, why is the child changing placement, or not returning to a previous foster placement?
6. Does the child have siblings in foster care? If so, where are the siblings and can they contact each other?
7. What are the child’s physical and mental health concerns? Are there any known therapy, medications, allergies, or other issues?
8. When the child struggles, what does this look like? What are some triggers?
9. If applicable, can the child be in a home with pets?

When You Say “Yes”

The case worker who brings the child to your home may stay for a while, or may not. **At a minimum, get the following information.** If not received, email a request to the case worker, copying the supervisor. The supervisor may help if the case worker is busy with another family.

- Child’s full name and name called by family
- Date of birth
- Medical information (food allergies and primary care doctor)
- Known likes and dislikes (food, movies, hobbies, interests)
- Prior school attended (if applicable)
- Case team member names, emails, and phone numbers



“I foster to **meet a need.** Fostering has taught me to embrace uncertainty and be **open-minded.”**
~Ryan, foster parent

Information to Request

When a child enters your home, ask the case worker for:

- Child’s Full Name**
- Date of Birth**
- Medical Info**
- Likes & Dislikes**
- School Info**
- Case Team Info**

After you accept placement, you will be asked to sign a **Foster Parent Contract**. This is an agreement of placement and is used to prove guardianship. This may be the focus for some workers when the child arrives. Remember the child is scared and you are a stranger. Focus on the child first. After reassuring the child, read and sign the contract. You may decide to keep a blank copy of this form on hand, in case the child comes without one.

The first few hours in your home are important. Many foster families find it helpful to **give the child a tour of the home, offer a popular meal such as pizza, and then provide space or down time prior to bath and bedtime**. Depending on the time of day and the child's emotional state, you may need to vary what you do in those first few hours.

A child comes, and everything changes. **Be patient with yourself**. It may take several weeks to find a new rhythm. In the first day and week, there are logistical details you need to focus on. Aside from that, your job is to help the child during the transition. Notice how they respond to various triggers, interact with others, and talk about their family. **Be sensitive to their needs**. Don't ask too many questions or set too many rules in the beginning, as they may feel overwhelmed. Ease them into their new home routine, and be willing to make changes as necessary to meet everyone's needs.

Day 1 of Placement

Make a copy of the Foster Parent Contract and Medical Consent Form, and keep them with you at all times. These documents may feel like your lifeline at times. Use them to complete the following tasks, as applicable to your situation.

Schedule a medical appointment for the child's initial health assessment. Call to schedule this appointment within 24 hours of the child entering foster care (actual day of appointment does not need to be within 24 hours). Take the Medical Consent Form with you.

Confirm school placement for the child. A Best Interest Determination (BID) meeting must be held between the school and DSS to determine if the child should stay at their school of origin or be enrolled in a new school (usually the one the foster parent is zoned for). This meeting must be held prior to a child being enrolled in a new school and should happen as quickly as possible (within three school days). This process may delay the child being enrolled in school.

The school is required to enroll the child without immunization records, birth certificate, or social security card. Ask who will be your contact at the school. If you have an issue enrolling your child, visit the SC

Remember, the child is scared and you are a stranger.

Focus on the child first.



First Day Checklist

- Make a copy of the Foster Parent Contract and Medical Consent form to keep with you
- Schedule the child's medical assessment
- Enroll the child in school
- Secure childcare
- Spend some time getting to know the child

Department of Education website and find enrollment forms on the [Title I page](https://ed.sc.gov/policy/federal-education-programs/title-i/title-i-part-a-foster-care/) (<https://ed.sc.gov/policy/federal-education-programs/title-i/title-i-part-a-foster-care/>).

Secure childcare or after-school care, as needed. Be mindful that not all daycares accept State (ABC) Vouchers. Some daycares require foster parents to pay a copay if the voucher does not cover full costs. Talk to the director of the daycare in advance to determine what is covered.

Take a moment to sit with the child, explain your role, and set expectations. Get to know the child, by asking, “What do you like to eat? How can I make today easier for you? What is your favorite movie, hobby, character?” Try to make the child feel comfortable in their new environment. It’s okay to be flexible in your expectations during this time, if you feel this will help a child transition.

Week 1 of Placement

In the first week, focus on getting the child used to a routine. **As you settle in, be sure to find time for these important tasks:**

Request Information. Ask your case worker for these documents:

- Educational records
- Medical history and immunization records
- Medicaid card/number
- State (ABC) Voucher Application for daycare or afterschool care

Medical/Dental Appointments. Make sure your providers understand that the child has Medicaid. Always put SC DSS as the guarantor for payment, and do not agree to be responsible for payments yourself.

Schedule the following appointments:

- For children older than 2, a comprehensive dental screening within 30 days (and ongoing checkups every 6 months)
- Comprehensive behavioral health assessment within 30 days
- Comprehensive physical health screening within 30 days
 - This is not just shots or a sports physical, but is a complete medical checkup
 - If children are 3 and under, SC DSS is required to make a referral to Babynet within 30 days. If you receive a call from Babynet staff, a face-to-face assessment is required.

Request and send any after-visit medical or dental summary to: childhealth@dss.sc.gov.

First Week Checklist

- Request any additional documents from the case worker
- Schedule the child’s medical and dental appointments
- Obtain clothes for the child
- Check in with the child

Clothes. You may try to find new or used items at local foster closets. Check with your local Foster Parent Association. Friends may also donate. **Let the child choose a few new items.** This tells them that they matter and helps them feel at home.

Check in with the child. You might ask, “What is one thing we can do to make you more comfortable? Is there something you need?” Pause. Breathe. Reflect. Be patient with yourself, as it takes time to settle in.

Pause. Breathe. Reflect.
**Be patient
with yourself.**
It takes time for a child
to settle in.

5. Do Your Best



You've gone through the training. You've received your license. You jumped every time the phone buzzed wondering if it would be a call for a new placement. You've said yes and now there is a child in your home. Now what? **The child is trying to determine if you are safe. You are trying to learn about the child.** It can be overwhelming for everyone.

Comfort the child

Regardless of what the child has experienced in their home, most love their parents. Being taken from everything they've ever known and brought to live with a stranger is traumatic. Keep in mind that this was not something they chose. They may not act happy or grateful because they are not. They want the family that they know.

Follow these tips in comforting the child:

- Be flexible** as they learn your expectations and family routine.
- Try to find out what they like** and make a point to serve familiar foods, purchase items in their favorite color, or let them watch a favorite TV show.
- Remind them of your names** often within the first few days and let them decide what they want to call you.
- Help them understand what to expect** so that they aren't overwhelmed. Explain in advance what you are doing each day and why you are doing it. Remind them of the routine and who will pick them up when.
- Validate their emotions.** They will miss their family, and that's okay. They might be scared of their new bed or sleeping with the lights out - that's okay too. Validate, validate, validate! This will build trust.

In these tough early moments, remember that in a few short weeks, you will likely have some sort of new rhythm as a family. All of this takes time for everyone.

Respect Their Family

Most children will have a visit with their family within the first week of being in care, if possible. There will probably be many emotions that come with this visit and having to leave their parents again. There will likely be regressive behaviors following the visit. This doesn't mean it was bad. It means that the child is confused and trying to understand this new living arrangement. It is normal for them to want to be with their family.



"I am different after fostering because

I see the world differently,

I understand my privilege more acutely, and I have had to grow in ways that I don't know I could have any other way."

~ Nolan, foster parent

You can build trust with the child by supporting their relationship with family. Try this:

- ❑ **Always be respectful.** Refrain from negative language, and speak respectfully about the parent-child relationship. Ask the child what they love about their family.
- ❑ **Wait to inform the child** about a family visit until you receive confirmation from the case worker one or two days before the visit. Children get their hopes up in anticipation, and sharing too early could be devastating to a child, especially if the visit gets postponed.
- ❑ **Help the parents feel connected to the child's life and daily routine.** Encourage the child to bring pictures, drawings, and homework to share with their parents. You may send photos or notes about the child's activities. You might consider transporting the child to the visit, so you can introduce yourself. Let the family know that you are here to support them and the child.
- ❑ **After the visit, take time to process it with the child.** Ask non-probing questions about the family members who they saw. Ask about any who were not there, such as siblings. Use comforting words to build trust and help the child understand they don't have to choose sides. If the child does not want to share after the visit, that's okay, too. Remember, the child is still getting used to the foster parent. Let the child share as they are comfortable.

Communicate Clearly

Each member of your family experiences foster care differently. In order to stay on the same page, take extra measures to communicate with each other. Pay attention to early indicators of stress, as they will happen.

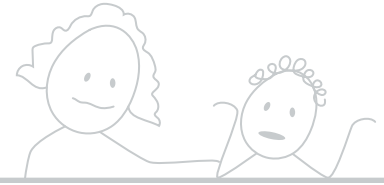
"Honey, I'm home!"

"Great, you take the kids!" is often an indicator of the primary caregiver's stress. Does your partner really know how you feel?

"Mom. Did you hear what I said?"

"Darling, I always hear what you say," is often an indicator of sibling stress between your children and this new child coming in and taking your time and energy.

Listen and validate, as a good rule of thumb. And take time to consider each family member's physical, mental, and emotional needs as you take this journey together.



"Once I stopped feeling angry, I realized we were in a really good home and I liked that structure and stability."

I felt guilty,

almost like you are being unfaithful to your family. These emotions are difficult to reconcile."

~ Tori, former foster youth

*"The first visit is often the hardest. They have to leave their parents again, not knowing when they will next see them. Each child is unique. They may push us away or be extra clingy. Be patient with the children and **validate their emotions,** even when you don't understand."*

~ Sheila, foster parent

Discipline Wisely

It is important to know that corporal punishment is not allowed. This includes spanking. Instead, try ignoring mild misbehavior and praising good behavior. You might encourage, "Let's clean up this area first" rather than "If you make a mess, you won't get dessert." Provide reminders of natural consequences, and frame statements as positives so the child focuses on what he or she can do. You can also redirect the child away from what is upsetting them and focus their attention on something new. Finally, removing privileges and placing children in age-appropriate timeouts can be effective. For example, a 3-year-old should sit in timeout for up to, but not exceeding, 3 minutes. Use trial and error to find what works for each child.

Consistency is key for children in foster care to learn how to manage their behavior. Children who have lived in unstable households may continually test your response to make sure the boundary is still there. Remain calm and consistent. If you have to tweak rules or discipline practices as you find what works, consider explaining why you are making the changes. You are still learning, too, and each child may have to be parented differently. Clear expectations and explanations can help to build trust. When overwhelmed, work with the Child Welfare Team to identify the best strategies for intervention.

Empathize Deeply

Children often enter foster care with developmental delays. You might see a toddler that can't sit up in a high chair, a two-year-old that struggles to walk, or tantrums from a school-aged child that resemble a toddler's behavior. **This is normal in foster care.** Academic challenges are common, too. Pay attention, and ask yourself, "Where does this child struggle? "How can I help them catch up?" This is the role of the foster parent. If therapy services are needed, find resources from the Child Welfare Team, more experienced foster parents, or others in your social support network.

When you think of children in foster care, consider the difference between chronological age and emotional age. Their emotional maturity may be significantly younger than their age. You may have a child who is 10 years old but functions emotionally as a 6-year-old. Adjust accordingly.

Be on the lookout for medical or dental needs too. You may see a 4-year-old who has never gone to the dentist, or a child who needs glasses or eye patching. Seek help when you need it. In everything, communicate with the Child Welfare Team.



"Children behave best when
working
towards a goal.

Having them earn something
is so much more effective than
taking things away."

~ Angela, foster parent



Chronological Age:
how old you *are*

Emotional Age:
how old you *act*

Understand Healing

Who are the children entering foster care and what are their struggles? Every child is unique and no situation is the same. Most have these three realities:

- ❑ **Loss is Constant.** Family, friends, and even pets change. Their school may change. Religious practices may change. Cultural norms change.
- ❑ **Shame may be deep within.** Being labeled a “foster kid” is difficult, knowing that everyone is talking about you, your behavior, and your family - and not always in a positive way.
- ❑ **Trauma hovers nearby.** Not sure when a trigger may occur, children may feel insecure or helpless when the stress does occur. The children want to be rid of the pain, but may not know how.

When children enter foster care, they might feel confused, angry, or scared. Children often ask: **“What did I do?” “Why is this happening to me?” “What happens next?”**

Foster parents join this journey to comfort, support, and nurture. It is important to understand loss, shame, and trauma when parenting someone else’s child.

Parenting Loss, Shame, and Trauma

Begin by listening. Don’t try to solve anything; instead, listen intently. This sounds simple, but can be hard in practice. The best thing to do is make space each day to be present with the child. If you make the space and are intentional, you will be able to truly listen.

If the child feels shame, restore the child. Tell this child how wonderful they truly are. Each child is beautiful and deserves to hear this in a thousand different ways, repeatedly.

Trauma is an emotional response to a threat, either sudden or ongoing. For children in foster care, trauma has often been a way of life. They might have witnessed scary events, became the caretaker of younger siblings while still a child, or moved around without understanding why. This only gets more complicated when a child enters foster care.

Trauma parenting is different than any other type of parenting. It begins by looking at connection and attachment, the foundation of all relationships. **Continue to learn.** For further information about trauma and fostering, find a list of resources in the Appendix at the back of this handbook.



*“Fostering is
setting aside
personal convenience and
privacy to offer a safe home
to children in need.”*

~ Jada, foster parent

Trauma:
an emotional response
to a threat, either
sudden or ongoing.

6. Lean on Family and Friends ♥

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes more than that to raise someone else's child. Lots of people may be willing to help. Just remember to keep the child's information confidential. People will ask more questions than you are allowed to answer. Use this as an opportunity to educate family and friends, even strangers, about the child's right to confidentiality and privacy.

Choose a few people to share closely in your journey. Let them be sacred friendships or family relationships - people you trust, people who know your struggles. They will help carry your emotional burdens and struggles, when the journey gets tough.

Ask Others to Help

When people ask about the child, you might redirect them to tangible ways they can help you. Accepting help may be hard. View it as a way to show them what foster care is like. They will learn by watching you.

Wish Lists. You might set up an online registry or wishlist, and ask for items you use constantly, like diapers, wipes, clothes, games, or room decorations. Update it as you foster. When people offer to help, you have a simple place to direct them. You can also allow a friend to bring you last-minute groceries during a chaotic week.

Services. You may let a friend come pick up your laundry and bring it back washed, folded and ready to be worn. What a gift for a busy parent! Meal delivery can be a refreshing gift during the first week of a new placement. Let people deliver meals or pick up food for the family. Babysitting by someone you trust can be just what is needed to reconnect with a spouse or spend a little time alone.

Family Time. When a new child enters the family, it can change the dynamic for everyone, including other kids in the home. Allow grandparents or close friends to take your other kids for a fun outing so you can spend some alone time with the child in your care. You may join a carpool with your neighbors or set up a babysitting rotation with other foster families, so you each have time alone or with your other children.

Relationships. Allow someone who wants to consistently help to serve as a committed mentor or tutor to any of the kids in your home, especially the child who just entered. Kids in foster care often struggle academically after changing schools.

How Others Can Help



Wish Lists



Services



Family Time



Relationships

Use Respite Care

When you feel tired or unbalanced, consider taking a short break from fostering for a day, a weekend, or a week. This is called “respite care,” and it is used by foster parents to rest, focus on other relationships, travel, or to deal with an unexpected life change. Respite allows foster parents to continue fostering.

Talk to your agency to set up respite. They can help you navigate the different types of respite, including paid respite and family-to-family respite. If you have thought about fostering, but are unsure if it’s right for your family, you may want to consider starting as a foster parent that only provides respite. Most families who do this quickly learn that they have what it takes to accept a long-term foster placement.



“Respite has allowed us to reset as a couple and as a family. Knowing our kids are still being loved and well-cared for, using respite has been one way that we

avoid burn-out

and continue fostering.”

~ Roger, foster parent

7. Respect the Child's Family



Reunification is always the goal of foster care. Is this always possible? No. Even when it's not, foster parents can help children maintain positive and healthy bonds with their families, keeping as many connections as possible. **When a foster parent supports and encourages a relationship with family, the child feels safe.** They don't have to choose. They can love and be loved by both.

Shared Parenting

When the family and foster family work together, the child wins. This is the goal. It may sound scary to you. You might even be thinking, "This child entered foster care for a reason. That parent needs help." While this may be true, it is important to realize that you can be part of that help. If the child wants their mom, can you build a relationship with that mom while the child is safely in your custody? Consider whether you can support the child's heart for their family while maintaining appropriate boundaries. Consider speaking on this matter further with the case worker.

Encourage the Parent-Child Relationship

Consider ways to build the parent-child relationship. First, talk to your case worker to determine what is safe and approved. Then, you may choose to allow phone or video calls between the child and parents. You might provide updates to the parents about the child's activities or progress in school. To maintain personal privacy, some foster parents get a separate email address or use a free Google phone number. Decide based on your comfort level.

You may choose to transport the child to a family visit to interact with the family beforehand or afterwards. Introduce yourself and reassure the family that you are doing everything you can to take care of their child, and that you want them to succeed. This may mean the world to them.

Some foster parents develop relationships with family members over time, beginning at supervised visits. Some foster parents feel comfortable sharing important events for the child with family members. The foster parent may host a birthday party at a park for the child and invite the parents to attend. Always talk with your case worker about appropriate decisions regarding visitation.



"My foster family is my real family, and my biological family is my real family.

They do not exist separately.

My foster parents always encouraged me to stay connected to my parents, taught me to have empathy for them, and showed me the path of forgiveness.

Blood doesn't make us family,

love makes us family."

~ Tori, former foster youth

Tips For Shared Parenting

Try to understand the parent's circumstances and feelings. Losing a child to foster care is a traumatic experience, and it takes time to build trust as you parent their child. **Seek to understand, rather than respond.** Begin with reflective listening. For example, "What I hear you saying is that you really miss your child."

Emotions arise. Anger can build. Resentment and frustration surface. Both parents and foster parents experience these emotions, and much of that can be directed at each other. Understand this is common. Allow time to build trust. Try different approaches. Ask the case worker to help if you feel threatened or unsafe. Talk to your Foster Family Coordinator about safety measures you can take to protect yourself when entering into relationships with family members.

Boundaries can help. You may choose to start with strong boundaries, and adjust them once you get to know the parent and build trust. Consider pushing your comfort zone a little, as this is uncomfortable for everyone involved. At the same time, don't overwhelm yourself. Do what you can manage, and keep your family safe.

Speak positively about a child's family. Stay hopeful about reunification. Your attitude about the family's ability to be successful will impact the child. The child will trust you more if they see you support their loved ones.

Sibling Relations

Reasonable efforts are made to place siblings together, but it is not always possible. When placed separately, routine visits are often possible. These help the children relax and feel more comfortable. Kids may wonder if they will ever see their siblings again.

Foster parents can encourage sibling bonds by talking to the child about their siblings. Although it is not the role of foster parents to ensure sibling visits, you may talk to the case worker to determine what is appropriate. If you are comfortable, consider allowing texts, calls, or emails between siblings. You might even arrange for sibling play dates or shared activities together. Sibling visits are often the most important relationships for children separated in foster care.



"After 150 days, our girl went home. Since then we've had family dinners, visits, and even babysat for her parents. We pushed through and we believed against all odds that they would be in one home as a family again.

***It wasn't easy,
but it was
worth it."***

~ Crystal, foster parent

8. Prepare for Goodbye



There will be times you need extra support. **It's okay to ask for help.** You may lose cherished time with family and friends, or feel overwhelmed as different members of the Child Welfare Team visit or ask you questions. You may have to let go of a child whom you loved dearly. If you are married, you and your spouse may not agree on next steps. Take time to work through each challenge as a family.

Keep the case worker informed of how the child is doing, as well as how your family is doing with the child in your home. Let the case worker know if you need any other resources to help care for the child. If you have asked for help and still the challenge is too much, you may ask that the child be removed from your home. **Consider this a last resort,** as it can compound internalized guilt, shame, and trauma for the child.

Child Removal

If you need a child removed from your home, consider:

- If the well-being of the child or any member of your family is threatened, request emergency removal by contacting the child's case worker and/or the county on-call number. Your Foster Family Coordinator can provide this number, as it varies by county and agency.
- If the child needs to be removed from your home for a non-emergency reason, you need to provide at least 10 days' notice to the child's case worker. You may also notify your Foster Family Coordinator that you are requesting removal of a child. The child's case worker will authorize all moves.
- Accept reality. It is very easy to begin blaming yourself or the child. Take a deep breath. Remember why you began this journey. What have you learned? What can help you next time? Are you ready for "next time" or do you need a break to process things? You are capable. Remember that this is tough work.

In these terribly challenging moments, find other foster parents for support. Many seasoned foster parents have experienced these things. Perhaps more than once. Ask them for help.

Reports of Abuse or Neglect

If allegations of suspected abuse or neglect are made against a foster family, SC DSS may open a case to investigate. This reporting and investigative process is called **Out-of-Home Abuse and Neglect (OHAN)**. Reports may be made about a biological, foster, or adopted child. During the investigative process, the child may remain in the home; however, if it is deemed a safety threat, the child may be moved to an alternate foster home. After an assessment is completed by SC DSS, the case outcome is either "unfounded" or "indicated":



"I always say that **foster parents are my favorite people.** They will jump to help you at a moment's notice. They don't judge or condemn because they've been there too. They've had dark days and joyous days and everything in between."

~ Kaley, foster parent

- ❑ **Unfounded:** there was not any evidence or not enough evidence of abuse or neglect.
- ❑ **Indicated:** there was enough evidence to support a finding of abuse or neglect. The foster family has a right to challenge the finding in an Appeals Process. This is the only way to begin a review of the case or to reverse an identification as a perpetrator in the Central Registry.

The foster family has a right to retain legal counsel throughout the investigative process. This time can be incredibly stressful for a foster family. Lean on your Foster Family Coordinator for guidance, and reach out to your local Foster Parent Association for additional help.

Transitions

When a child leaves the foster home to live somewhere else, often there is a transition period. These transitions can stir up a lot of emotions for the child. You may feel big emotions yourself, usually very different ones from the child. They may be excited, while you are devastated. You may not agree with the decision for the child to leave. It is in these moments that you must dig deep to find that the loss you feel, while important, pales in comparison to the loss the child has experienced. Use or develop helpful coping skills. You've likely recovered from challenges or hardships in the past; **you are resilient.**

How can you help children with transitions?

- ❑ **Begin talking about them early,** if allowable by the case worker. Give the child time to process and anticipate the change.
- ❑ **Be careful how much detail is shared with the child;** the plan can change at any time and you don't want to create additional trauma by creating false expectations.
- ❑ **Prepare people in the child's life,** including coaches, teachers, friends, your family members, mentors, etc.
- ❑ **Prepare a photo book or gather mementos** for the child to take with them.

Transitional Visits

During this time, there may be "transitional visits" designed to help the child prepare for and adjust to the move. These are planned and set by the child's care team. They may include unsupervised visits for a couple hours, an overnight, or a weekend.

Transitional visits can take place when a child is transitioning back home to live with family or moving to live with an adoptive family that was selected by SC DSS. Talk to the child's case worker to learn more.



9. Maintain Your License



Foster families renew their foster home license with their agency every two years. During this time, someone visits the home to update documents, assess household changes, discuss continued interest in fostering and family preferences.

License Renewal

As you consider your license renewal, take a moment to reflect. **How has your family changed on their journey? How have your limits changed? How will you continue to prioritize self-care and maintain healthy boundaries? How will you continue helping children? How are you grieving any losses you have experienced?** Spend time here. Consider finding your own therapist. Talk about it as a family. Then make a thoughtful decision, including those closest to you.

Annual Training

Each foster parent is required to complete training every 2 years for license renewal. Training may be in person and online. Check with your licensing agency about limits for online training hours. To find training opportunities, ask your agency or check with your local foster parent association.



“My **favorite thing** about fostering is the **incredible joy** these kids bring to our home.”

~ Carla, Foster Parent

Required Training Hours (every 2 years)

Regular Care:
28 hours

Therapeutic Care:
32 hours

Appendix



We recognize that online resources are subject to changes of content and location. If you cannot find online resources listed, contact Fostering Great Ideas through our website at fgi4kids.org.

Continued Learning Resources

Foster Care Resources

- Another Place at the Table*, Kathy Harrison
- The Language of Flowers*, Vanessa Diffenbaugh
- Three Little Words: A Memoir*, Ashley Rhodes-Courter
- To the End of June: The Intimate Life of American Foster Care*, Cris Beam

Understanding Trauma

- The Connected Child*, Karyn B. Purvis, Ph.D.
- The Whole Brained Child*, Daniel J. Siegel, Ph.D.
- The Explosive Child*, Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.
- The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.
- The Boy Raised Who Was Raised as a Dog*, Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph.D.
- Wounded Children, Healing Homes: How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families*, Jayne E. Schooler, Betsy Keefer Smalley, LSW, Timothy J. Callahan, PsyD.
- They'll Never Be the Same: A Parent's Guide to PTSD in Youth*, Michael S. Scheeringa, M.D.
- Parenting Children of Trauma: the Foster-Adoption Guide to Understanding Attachment Disorder*, Marcy Pusey
- The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity*, Nadine Burke Harris, M.D.

Online Quick Access Guides

- [Parenting after trauma: Understanding your child's needs, a guide for foster and adoptive parents](http://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/healthy-foster-care-america/Documents/FamilyHandout.pdf) (www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/healthy-foster-care-america/Documents/FamilyHandout.pdf)
- [Resources on Trauma for Caregivers and Families, Child Welfare Information Gateway](http://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/responding/trauma/caregivers/) (www.childwelfare.gov/topics/responding/trauma/caregivers/)
- [Resources for Families and Caregivers; Complex Trauma: Facts for Caregivers, The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](http://www.nctsn.org/resources/complex-trauma-facts-caregivers) (www.nctsn.org/resources/complex-trauma-facts-caregivers)
- [Trauma Informed Care: Perspectives and Resources, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development](http://georgetown.edu/TraumaInformedCare/index.html) ([gucchdtacenter.georgetown.edu/TraumaInformedCare/index.html](http://georgetown.edu/TraumaInformedCare/index.html))
- [Trust Based Relational Intervention, Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development](https://youtu.be/FWScSJKjn1A) (youtu.be/FWScSJKjn1A)

SC Department of Social Services (SC DSS) Resources

SC Department of Social Services

dss.sc.gov/foster-care

Visit the “Foster Care” menu for updated statistics, information, and resources related to fostering.

Policy and Procedure Manual

dss.sc.gov/media/1419/foster_home_licensing_v16-01.pdf

Foster Parent Contract

https://dss.sc.gov/resource-library/forms_brochures/files/1531.pdf

This is an agreement of placement when a child comes to live with you. It is used often to prove guardianship and should be kept with you at all times.

Health Care Oversight and Psychotropic Medications Training

<https://scjcca.expertlearning.net>

This online training through the SC FPA enables foster parents to consent to routine medical care for the child. Training should be taken annually.

Psychotropic Medication Informed Consent

dss.sc.gov/media/1929/dss-form-2056-jan-19.pdf

Foster parents receive this form after completing the “Health Care Oversight and Psychotropic Medications Training”. It should be taken with you to the child’s medical provider.

Foster Parent Support Liaison

A designated staff person to help foster families navigate questions or concerns that cannot be resolved at the local level. Contact by emailing fphelp@dss.sc.gov.

John H. Chafee Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood

<https://dss.sc.gov/foster-care/chafeetv-program>

Formerly known as the Independent Living Program, this program provides services and funding to enhance opportunities that develop necessary skills to promote a successful transition to adulthood and self-reliance. Contact by emailing IndependentLiving@dss.sc.gov.

Fostering Great Ideas Resources

Fostering Great Ideas

fgi4kids.org

The mission of Fostering Great Ideas is to restore hope to children in foster care through innovative ideas that are built on meaningful relationships.

Care2Foster Live Chat

fgi4kids.org/care2foster

Receive nurturing guidance on your decisions about becoming a foster parent.

Care2Foster Blog

fgi4kids.org/care2foster

Find numerous resources and stories from foster parents. Below are some sample posts that may be helpful to you:

- What age should I foster?
- Should I foster out of birth order?
- Waiting for the phone to ring and wondering what happens next.
- 10 items every new foster family needs.
- The hardest goodbye.
- How fostering impacted my children.
- What shared parenting actually looks like and how to hold on to hope.
- A mom’s reflections on her daughter’s time in foster care.
- The best cheat sheet for finding support as a foster parent.
- Foster parent: when you’re tired, hear these words.

SHAREfostering SC

facebook.com/groups/SHAREfosteringSC

Join this vibrant virtual community of foster parents and prospective foster parents from across the state.

Additional Licensing and Training Resources

Heartfelt Calling

heartfeltcalling.org

Anyone who wants to foster or adopt may come here to complete an initial intake process, before choosing a foster care licensing agency.

SC Foster Parent Association (SC FPA)

scfpa.com

Support resources and training for foster parents across the state. Local level meetings and support are organized by county and offer a variety of resources for families. Sign up for their email to get updated information on training, resources, and opportunities.

S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC)

scdhec.gov

DHEC promotes and protects the health of the public and the environment in South Carolina. Licensed foster homes require a DHEC inspection and approval.

Office of the State Fire Marshal

statefire.llr.sc.gov

This office performs annual Fire Inspections for foster homes across the state. Find helpful information about regulations and fire preparedness.

Foster Home Regulations

<http://statefire.llr.sc.gov/osfm/forms/laws/Foster%20Home%20Regulations.pdf>

Child Care, Education, and Mental Health

SC Child Care

scchildcare.org

Find updated information about child care providers and daycares.

ABC Vouchers

<https://scchildcare.org/departments/sc-voucher.aspx>

Foster parents may enroll in this program to help with the cost of daycare.

Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program (WIC)

scdhec.gov/health/wic-nutrition-program

Families who foster children under the age of 5 can apply for WIC to help with the cost of infant formula and other nutritional services.

SC Department of Education, Title 1 Part A - Foster Care

<https://ed.sc.gov/policy/federal-education-programs/title-i/title-i-part-a-foster-care/>

Find immediate enrollment forms and answers to your questions about enrolling a child in school near you.

SC Department of Mental Health (SC DMH)

<https://scdmh.net/dmh-components/community-mental-health-services/>

Children in foster care can benefit from mental health therapy services. To find a center close to you, search their website. You may also choose to find a private provider that accepts Medicaid.

Advocate and Court Resources

Department of Children's Advocacy (DCA)

childadvocate.sc.gov

The SC DCA is an independent state agency that ensures children receive adequate protection and care from the various child welfare services or programs offered by other departments within the state government. On their site, you can find out more about the roles and responsibilities of the DCA, submit a child welfare complaint, or get in touch with other divisions within the agency.

Foster Care Review Board (FCRB)

fcrb.sc.gov

The FCRB is part of the SC Department of Children's Advocacy. Their mission is to provide external accountability to the foster care system and to advocate for children. They review cases regularly to recommend a permanent home for the child either by returning home or placing the child in another stable, permanent home.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)

www.rccasa.org

Guardian ad Litem (GAL)

gal.sc.gov

CASA and GAL are often used interchangeably. In SC, every county operates under the GAL program, with the exception of Richland County which uses CASA.

CASA or GAL volunteers get to know the child and everyone involved in the child's life, including family, teachers, doctors, social workers and others. They gather information about the child and their needs. Their recommendations to the court help the judge make an informed decision about the child's future. CASA or GAL volunteers provide a stable presence in a child's life.

A Final Note

Making a life-changing decision like becoming a foster parent may feel daunting. That's okay. Seek opportunities to build relationships, and lean in to learning as much as you can along the way.

Fostering may be something you do for a short time or for a lifetime. No matter the length of time or the number of children you care for, **foster care will transform you, your family, and your kids** - in big and small ways. You will make an impact on the life of children and families.

As you begin or continue this journey, embrace change, remain flexible, and be open-minded. There will be bumps along the way. If you become discouraged, don't throw in the towel.

These children are worth it!



fgi4kids.org |      @fgi4kids



"If I could choose to do it
all over again,

***I would have
started sooner."***

~ Erica, foster parent

