

Is Fostering a Good Fit? Things to Consider

Perhaps a billboard caught your eye while on the road. Or maybe you heard a radio announcement or saw a commercial on TV or online. However the idea of becoming a foster parent presented itself, you are considering the possibility.

You likely have a lot of questions about what foster care is, how you could get started, and where to even begin finding answers. Maybe you're also thinking about your existing children; how do you involve them in making the decision, and how do you prepare yourself and the rest of the family?

To get started, please check out our [free foster care information packet](#). It will help answer some frequently asked questions and is the first step you can take to learn more about becoming a foster parent.

For the rest of this tip sheet, we will focus on what and how to discuss the possibility with your children and family.

Depending on the age and maturity of your children, the first step to deciding on family foster care is to discuss the possibility with them. Like you, they may have many questions about foster care in general, the process involved, and even about the kids and youth in out-of-home care. Some initial research, such as downloading

and reading through our [free Foster Care Information Packet](#) or reviewing the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on our website, will help you answer some of your children's questions. We suggest gathering the family to discuss their thoughts and feelings openly and share their questions or concerns about becoming a foster family. Give everyone time to prepare their thoughts and allow time and space for processing and further consideration afterward. You may find that you need more than one family conversation before deciding if fostering is a good fit.

Topics You Could Discuss

The purpose of foster care. Foster care is temporary care for children who cannot live with their families because of safety

concerns. The primary goal of foster care is reunification, meaning children return to their homes and families of origin. Foster parents and birth parents are expected to engage in a co-parenting relationship to

help make this happen.

Most children in foster care return home to their families. When that is not possible, they might find permanence through guardianship or adoption by a relative or their identified foster or adoptive family.



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The children in foster care. Children are placed in foster care for different reasons.

Some examples include a child who has been abandoned, a child who is the victim of abuse or neglect, a child who is at high risk of harm (such as a sibling of a child who was abused or neglected), a child whose parent is incarcerated or hospitalized, a child who has significant medical or mental health needs, or a child who has committed a juvenile offense.

The length of time a child may need foster care. Some children are in care for one day, others for many years; each child's case is different.

The ages of children in foster care. Children in foster care range between 0 and 18 (can be voluntarily extended to 21 for those who qualify).

Emotional and behavioral challenges. Children in foster care might struggle with issues of trust, attachment, and anxiety. Some will present mild emotional and behavioral challenges. In contrast, others may exhibit more moderate to severe emotional and behavioral challenges as a result of the trauma they have experienced. Often, this is coupled with one or more mental health diagnoses and can show up very differently in each child. Mild emotional and behavioral challenges might include being extra quiet, shy, withdrawn, immature, having occasional tantrums, having difficulty expressing feelings or distinguishing feelings of anger, sadness, or fear, etc. Moderate to severe emotional and behavioral challenges might look like big aggressive behaviors, depression, impulsivity, significant mental health concerns that may sometimes pose a danger to themselves or others, hoarding food, difficulty sleeping, delinquent behaviors, running away, sexually acting out, substance abuse, etc.

Despite the many challenges and traumas

children in foster care may encounter, remember that they are often resilient, happy, and thriving.

Demographics. Children in foster care may or may not always share the same age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, etc., as you or your children. It is important to acknowledge any biases you may have and take steps to minimize or eliminate negative impacts on the children in your care who may look or feel different than you.

Adults in charge. Assure your kids that you are responsible for the care and supervision of the children in care. Let them know that you will establish guidelines that will be fair to and considerate of all.

Expect good days and challenging days. Remember that there will be days when the household runs smoothly, and there may be days with chaos and stress. Reassure your children that you will support and teach them how to handle the stressful days and celebrate the good days together.

Sharing with others. Remind your children that becoming a foster family means sharing their parents, house, bedrooms, toys, yard, time, family, and friends. Talk about the rewards of sharing with others and discuss ideas to ensure everyone has their own space.

Supervision. Let your kids know that children in foster care sometimes need to be closely supervised to ensure safety. You, as the adult and parent, will have this job.

Household rules. There may be modifications of house rules depending on factors such as age, needs, and challenges of the child you would be caring for. For example, rules for showers, bedtime, computer and phone use, and other basic rules could change. (For more, see our [Household Rules tip sheet.](#))

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Discuss the adjustment. It may take time for everyone to adjust to any changes in the home. It is important to hold space for everyone to talk about their adjustment experiences, including what may be going well and what may feel challenging.

Time spent with parents. Youth who were part of fostering families stress the importance of this issue. Your children will need reassurance that you will still have time for them. Share some ideas of how each child might have one-on-one time with you and how you'll prioritize that when a child is placed with you for care.

Confidentiality. Because of rules and laws, private information about children in foster care cannot be shared with others. You will need to guide your children on what can and cannot be shared outside of the family and with whom. Be open to practicing situations with them so they know how to respond.

It is okay if you do not have all the answers about foster care. There is a lot to learn, and every situation is unique. As you gather more information to make this decision, we encourage you to check out various resources and experts to help you get clarification when needed. Some examples to consider may include:

- Read books and watch videos about foster care
- Contact local and statewide agencies like the Wisconsin Family Connections Center to talk to a Resource Specialist
- Ask the licensing agency professional you may be working with to meet with you and your kids to talk about foster care and its impact on the family
- Connect with a seasoned foster family to learn more about each member's unique foster experience

Some Final Tips

- Assure your children that their feelings and input are important and that they are a part of the decision to foster.
- For adult children, ask their opinion about your skills and abilities to parent children with challenging behaviors and emotions. (In fact, some licensing agencies require a reference from your adult children.)
- Read between the lines. Sometimes, your kids may not voice their opinions for fear of hurting your feelings or thinking their views are less important than others. Over time, some kids may change their thinking about doing family foster care depending upon their experiences and age.
- Check in often to see how they feel about the foster care experience.

Most families agree that fostering positively affects kids whose family provides foster care. They are often more open to different cultures and backgrounds, compassionate, accepting, loving, and giving to people in need.

Please remember that the Wisconsin Family Connections Center team is here to talk with you, answer your questions, provide resources or referrals, and support you and your family every step of the way. You can reach us at 1-800-762-8063 or info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org.



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Resources

From the [Resource Library](#)

- *How Micah Helped Build a Family: A Story for Foster & Adopted Children*, by Deirdre O'Gorman Goldsmith
- *Another Place At The Table*, by Kathy Harrison
- *Finding Our Place—A Guide for Young People Entering Foster Care*, by Christy Barich and youth writers
- *Keeping It Secret: Teens Write About Foster Care Stigma*, by Youth Communication
- Fostering Across Wisconsin Newsletter: [How Fostering Affects the Whole Family](#)

Tip Sheet

- [Preparing the Kids in Your Home for Fostering](#)

Training From [Champion Classrooms](#)

- [Conversation About Foster Care and Adoption: A Mom and Her Biological Daughter](#)
- [Let's Talk: Preparing Your Home to Welcome a Child](#)

Additional Resources

- [Wisconsin Foster Parent Handbook](#)
- [Becoming a Foster Parent](#)
- [10 Things I Wish I'd Known Before Becoming a Foster Parent](#)