

Foster & Kinship Foster Care

When you become a foster parent, you become part of a team that is dedicated to protecting children, supporting families, and helping young people develop to their fullest potential. *Foster care is all about teamwork!*

Foster parents:

- Provide safe, stable, and nurturing homes for children in DCF custody;
- Support the parents; and
- Work as part of a family's team—alongside the parents, extended family members, social worker, and others—towards a child's safe return home (when that is the goal).

The need for foster parents

There is always a need for foster parents, especially those who are willing to care for:

- Children with special needs;
- Sibling groups; and
- Teens.

To help keep children in their own communities and schools, we need foster parents in every town —for all age groups and needs.

RESEARCH TELLS US THAT CHILDREN WITH CONSISTENT, STABLE EDUCATION ARE MORE LIKELY TO GRADUATE AND HAVE GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT AND STABLE HOUSING AS ADULTS. BEING ABLE TO STAY IN THEIR OWN SCHOOLS — WITH FRIENDS, TEACHERS, AND FAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS — IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA, LOSS, AND SEPARATION.

Who can apply

To apply, you:

- Must be at least 21 years old;
- Must have enough room to house a child and sufficient income to support your family; and
- Can be single, married, living with a partner, or joined through a civil union.

You can apply to provide foster care for a specific child you know or for any child in need. *Applications are considered regardless of disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity/ expression, race, religion, or sexual orientation.*

Who we are looking for

Our first choice is to place children with relatives or family friends (*kinship foster care*). This is less traumatic for children and keeps them connected— to their parents, schools, and communities. When that's not possible, we look for other families to care for them.

The main skill you need is the ability to look after children safely. It also helps if you:

- Enjoy being around children;
- Have a sense of humor;
- Can provide direction in a nurturing way;
- Are willing to support the parents and work as part of a team; and
- Are patient, open-minded, and willing to ask for help when you need it.

The Licensing Process

1. Contact the resource coordinator in your local Family Services district office (see *list on back*).

He or she will talk to you about your experience with children, why you are interested in foster care, the type of children you'd like to care for, and other issues (e.g., your family's financial situation, interests, and health).

2. Complete the application package the resource coordinator provides.

It includes several forms, including one that gives us permission to conduct background checks on all members of your household age 16 & older.

3. We conduct background checks.

This includes, but is not limited to, checking child protection & adult abuse registries, motor vehicle violations, restraining/relief from abuse orders, and past-due child support. It also includes a fingerprint-supported national criminal records check. *Any criminal history is considered in light of how it might affect your family's ability to provide safe and appropriate care for a child. Federal law does not, however, allow us to license applicants who have been convicted of certain felonies.*

4. A social worker visits you at home.

He or she will review the forms you completed, talk to all members of your household, and tour your home to make sure it meets licensing regulations. Visits typically last for a few hours.

Request a copy of *Licensing Regulations for Foster Care*. Or go to <http://dcf.vermont.gov/publications>.

5. We assess the information gathered.

We assess your suitability as foster parents using information from the application, home visit, and background checks.

6. Attend training.

All foster parents are required to attend a two-part training offered by the Child Welfare Training Partnership:

- A. First Steps (*Kinship Care or Foster Care*);
- B. Foundations for Kinship, Foster and Adoptive Families.

Most people attend training before they accept children into their homes; some already have children living with them by the time they attend.

7. Receive your license.

If you meet the licensing requirements, you'll get a license that's valid for up to three years. *How soon you are asked to take a child into your home will depend on the local need and your flexibility regarding the age, gender, and special needs of the children you are willing to foster.*

If you do not meet the licensing requirements, you'll get a letter explaining why you won't be licensed and your right to appeal the decision.

BECOMING A FOSTER PARENT WILL AFFECT EVERY ASPECT OF YOUR LIFE AND EVERY MEMBER OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD. EVERYONE IN YOUR HOME NEEDS TO THINK ABOUT WHAT IT WILL MEAN TO THEM AND WHAT ADJUSTMENTS THEY MAY HAVE TO MAKE. THE RESOURCE COORDINATOR CAN HELP YOU FIGURE OUT THE RIGHT QUESTIONS TO ASK SO YOU CAN MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION.

The Support Available

Financial Support

- ▶ You'll get a monthly stipend to help with the cost of caring for a child.
Reimbursement rates vary depending on the training and experience of the foster parents and age of the children they are caring for.
- ▶ You can be reimbursed for expenses related to carrying out the caseplan (e.g., transporting a child to visits).
- ▶ An initial clothing voucher of up to \$100 may be issued if a child comes into care without adequate clothing and efforts to recover his/her clothes are unsuccessful.
- ▶ Children in care are eligible for free school meals and those under 5 are also eligible to receive food from the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program administered by the Department of Health.
- ▶ If a child damages your home, you may be eligible to be reimbursed the cost of repairs.
- ▶ If a child needs special items or has unusual expenses, there may be funds available to help.
- ▶ If a young person turns 18 while in your care, he or she may be eligible for support to stay in your home until the age of 22.

Child Care

Subsidized child care is available if you have an accepted need for care (e.g., you work or attend school) or it's authorized based on the child's special needs. Protective services child care may be authorized if a child's situation calls for it.

Medical Benefits

Children in custody are covered for medical expenses either through their parents' insurance or Medicaid.

Other DCF Support

- ▶ In addition to the training you are required to take, you can also take advantage of training opportunities offered by DCF throughout the year.
- ▶ Family Services district staff, including resource coordinators, social workers, supervisors, and district directors, are available to provide ongoing support. After hours, on weekends, and on state holidays, you can call the Emergency Services Program for support.
- ▶ DCF works with several agencies that provide a limited amount of additional support to foster parents, including case management and consultation.
- ▶ DCF supports the use of respite as a positive break for caregivers. It gives foster parents time to relax and refresh their energy. It's also an opportunity for children to have a break and connect with a supportive network of other caring adults.

Additional Benefits

- ▶ **Vermont Foster and Adoptive Family Association (VFafa)**
<http://www.vfafa.org/>
A statewide network of foster and adoptive parents. Membership includes a newsletter, annual conference, and training & networking opportunities.
- ▶ **Voices at the Table Blog & Website**
<http://voicesatthetable.wordpress.com/>
A bi-weekly blog and website for Vermont kinship, foster, kinship foster, and adoptive families.

Family Services District Offices

Call the Resource Coordinator in your local office to get started!

BARRE - (802) 479-4260

BENNINGTON - (802) 442-8138

BRATTLEBORO- (802) 257-2888

BURLINGTON - (802) 863-7370

HARTFORD - (802) 295-8840

MIDDLEBURY - (802) 388-4660

MORRISVILLE - (802) 888-4576

NEWPORT - (802) 334-6723

RUTLAND - (802) 786-5817

SPRINGFIELD - (802) 885-8900

ST. ALBANS - (802) 527-7741

ST. JOHNSBURY - (802) 748-8374



dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/kids