



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO  
**FOSTER**  
**PARENTING**  
IN NORTH CAROLINA

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## About Children's Hope Alliance

Children's Hope Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that provides an array of services for children, families, and individuals throughout North Carolina. Our focus is on three things:

- Hope for a safe, forever home through foster care, and adoption
- A healthy start through educational, prevention and community-based programs
- Healing the hurt for children and families who are troubled, abused or neglected



**ChildrensHopeAlliance.org**  
**844-791-3117**





# Loving a Child Can **Change Your Life**

Becoming a foster parent to help a child in need is one of the greatest acts of service you can offer.

The fact that you are even considering fostering already shows **you have a big heart**.

At this stage, it's natural to feel cautious and to have a lot of questions. It shows that you are someone who thinks carefully before committing to such a large responsibility.

The goal of this guide is to help answer those questions and give you a high-level overview of what it means to foster a child.

We'll answer questions like,

**What is a foster parent?**

**What does it take to be a foster parent?**

**What are the steps to becoming a foster parent?**

After reading this guide, we hope you walk away knowing that while being a foster parent isn't always easy, you will never be alone. At every stage of the foster care journey, members of your community and foster care agency will be there to support you.

Together, we can provide hope, health, and healing for the children in our community and the generations to follow.

# What Makes a **Great Foster Parent?**

Like foster children themselves, there's no such thing as a "typical" foster parent.

Foster parents can be old or young, single or married, stay-at-home moms or full-time employees, first-time parents, or experienced grandparents.

Regardless of how they define themselves, foster parents are all united by a common set of core values and personality traits. These include:

- The desire to give back and make a difference. Foster parents feel called to support their community, especially the children within it.
- Patience and flexibility. Foster parents are able to go with the flow and support their foster children, even when things get hard.
- Empathy and understanding. Many foster children have been through difficult circumstances. It's important that foster parents try to understand, rather than judge, their foster child.
- A willingness to ask questions. First-time foster families will encounter many new situations. They must be open to asking questions and sometimes asking for help.
- A sense of humor. Sometimes the best way to approach the challenges of being a foster parent is with a smile and a sense of humor!
- A genuine love for children. For those who truly care for children, there is no greater reward than fostering and creating a sense of home for those who need it most.



## North Carolina **Foster Parent Requirements**

In North Carolina, eligible foster parents must:

- Be 21+ years old
- Provide a stable, drug-free home
- Have a reliable income
- Be open to a criminal records check and being fingerprinted
- Complete training required by the state
- Be licensed by the state of North Carolina



# The Rewards of Foster Care

Fostering has the ability to positively impact the life of a child, as well as generations to come. The benefits of foster care reach even beyond the children and their families, having a positive impact on the foster parents themselves.



## The Benefits for Foster Children

- A healthy, supportive home environment
- Access to resources like medical care and therapy
- A structured schedule for school and activities
- Tutoring, summer camp, and holiday parties, provided through generous donor support at Children's Hope Alliance
- Depending on the circumstances, continued connection with their siblings and family
- In some cases, a safe haven from abuse and neglect
- A chance at a better, healthier life
- Hope for the future—and future generations

## The Benefits for Foster Parents

- The opportunity to fulfill a mission within your own community
- Developing an enriching relationship with a special child
- A greater understanding of your community
- A chance to put your empathy into practice
- If you're married, growing closer to your spouse through the shared experience of fostering
- Inspiring others in your community to give back through fostering
- Life lessons that can be applied to many other areas of your life



84 to 97 percent of parents who adopt foster children would make the same decision again.<sup>1</sup>

## Common Questions & Concerns About Foster Parenting

The decision to be a foster parent is a potentially life-changing choice. It's normal to have questions or even concerns as you consider whether this is the right decision for you and your family. In fact, doing so indicates that you care. And that's the most important quality in any prospective foster parent.

As you begin your foster care journey, the foster care team at Children's Hope Alliance is here to help.

We encourage you to ask the big questions—even the scary ones. We'll answer without judgment and with as much information as possible so that you can feel confident moving forward.

At Children's Hope Alliance, we encourage you to ask the big questions—even the scary ones. We'll answer without judgment. Contact us online or call 844-791-3117.

Let's address some of the more common questions asked by prospective foster parents.

## **I don't look like a "traditional" parent. Can I still foster a child?**

The answer is simple: Yes! You don't have to have a "traditional" two-parent household or be young to foster a child. Single or older people who choose to foster usually lean on their community support system for help. Whether that means asking your extended family to help with childcare or turning to your church members for supplies such as children's clothing, community can be an important resource for all kinds of foster parents.

## **Will I have a choice in the children I foster?**

Yes, you will always have the choice to say "no" to a potential foster child placement. When a child or sibling group needs help, you'll receive a call from your case manager. While we all want to help every child, every time, it's important to ask the right questions in order to decide whether or not your home is the best place for this child at this time. (See page XX for more information.)

## **Will the children I foster have behavioral challenges?**

Every child in foster care has experienced trauma, whether neglect, abuse, or simply being separated from their family. This can manifest in different behavioral issues in foster children, such as temper tantrums or emotional outbursts. You will learn in foster parenting training that behaviors originate from a child's desire to meet their need(s)..

Developing trust and communication with a foster child can go a long way in alleviating these challenges. An agency like Children's Hope Alliance will offer tools, training, and support to help you manage these behaviors.

## **Will I interact with the foster child's family?**

Most likely, yes. The goal of fostering is almost always reunification with the child's biological parents. Even when that's not possible, maintaining healthy, positive relationships with their family is beneficial for the foster child, as well as for all members of the treatment team in order to achieve permanency for the child. Foster parents should talk with their case manager about what's best for the child, then do what's possible to build positive connections with their family.

While it's not required, foster parents are also encouraged to attend major foster court hearings, where the child's parents will likely be present.

## **Will I become attached to my foster children?**

Yes, you'll likely become attached to your foster children, and that's actually a benefit. It's important that foster youth feel seen, loved, and supported, and cultivating real connections with your foster children ensures they do so. When a foster child is reunited with their family, it's ok to grieve. Most foster parents recognize that the sacrifices of fostering—of which grief is only one—are more than worth it.



# Support for Foster Parents

First of all, it's important to normalize the need to ask for help when fostering. Foster parents are met with challenges every day, and asking for help makes you a better caregiver.

Your foster care agency and case manager will always be there to answer your questions or offer support. Children's Hope Alliance, for example, provides 24/7 support, therapy services, parenting classes, and respite services when foster parents need a break. You can also turn to your community, like your extended family or church, when you need help.

## Foster Care Stipend

In North Carolina, foster parents receive a monthly stipend to support the children in their care. As of 2022, the Standard Foster Care Board Rates are:

### Family Foster Care:

- Age 0-5: \$702/month
- Age 6-12: \$724/month
- Age 13+: 810/month

### Therapeutic Foster Care:

- \$108 per day/per child

### IAFT:

- \$115 per day/per child

The foster care stipend can be spent on expenses such as:

- Food
- Clothing
- Housing
- Day care
- School supplies
- Other daily living expenses

Foster parents should also expect to pay for some of the child's needs.





## Deciding if Foster Care Is **Right for You**

Doing research, asking questions, and speaking with other foster parents are great first steps toward deciding if you should become a foster parent. But ultimately, only you will know whether or not fostering is the right choice for your family.

Asking yourself these questions can help:

### **Are my other family members ok with this decision?**

While you may be called to serve, if your spouse, other children, or other family members don't agree with your decision, it might not be the right one. Your family will have to live alongside a foster child, too, and it's important they be prepared to offer support.

### **Am I prepared to temper my expectations?**

It's easy to romanticize the idea of fostering, but the truth is, it's hard. You need to be prepared for your foster child to be unhappy or act out just like any other child, no matter how carefully you provide support. This doesn't make them a bad foster child or make you a bad foster parent. You just have to be prepared for the peaks of troughs of what parenting entails.

### **Am I patient and flexible?**

Fostering youth can test the patience of even the calmest parent, and routines are constantly upset. Foster parents must be completely willing to adapt to these circumstances. When children feel vulnerable, they may not be their best selves.

### **Will I take their behavior personally?**

Foster children who have been abused may act cruelly toward their foster parents. This is not a reflection of the foster parents but of the foster child's experience. However, it can be difficult to not take their behavior personally. You should be prepared to take their verbal or even physical attacks without reproach.

### **Do I have a lot of love to give?**

Despite the many challenges it presents, fostering children is ultimately an act of boundless love. If you have love to give, doing so through fostering can be incredibly rewarding and even fun.





# The Process of Becoming a Foster Parent

- Step One: **Begin Your Research**
- Step Two: **Attend an Info Session**
- Step Three: **Develop a Relationship with Your Agency**
- Step Four: **Complete the Required Training**
- Step Five: **Complete a Mutual Home Assessment**
- Step Six: **Complete Your Foster Home Application**
- Step Seven: **Accept Foster Care Placements**

## Step One: **Begin Your Research**

There are many websites, books, and forums dedicated to the experience of being a foster parent. You can also connect with foster parents in your community to learn about their experiences.

## Step Two: **Attend an Informational Session**

Organizations like Children's Hope Alliance host regular info sessions for those interested in foster parenting. Attending an info session can help answer any questions you may have about becoming a foster parent and provide real-world examples of what to expect.

## Step Three: **Develop a Relationship with Your Agency**

After attending an info session, an agency like Children's Hope Alliance can help guide you through the next steps of becoming a foster parent. Our team is here to help you every step of the way as you prepare to support a child in our community.

## Step Four: **Complete the Required Training**

In North Carolina, potential foster parents must complete TIPS-MAPP (Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence—Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting) or an equivalent training and assessment process. This 30+ hour training is provided by your agency.

## Step Five: **Complete a Mutual Home Assessment**

In order to be licensed as a foster parent in North Carolina, you must complete a mutual home assessment. This ensures that the home is safe for children and meets the state's environmental and health regulations. The home assessment also confirms preparations are in place, such as a bed for the foster child.

## Step Six: **Complete Your Foster Home Application**

Your agency will help you complete and submit your Foster Home Application and submit it to the NC Division of Social Services. If approved, you'll be licensed to begin fostering children! It's important to note that you'll need to apply for relicensure every two years.

## Step Seven: **Accept Foster Care Placements**

Once licensed, you'll be able to work with your agency to review and accept foster care placements. In doing so, you'll be providing a safe harbor and support system for the youth in your community who need it most.



## Finding the **Right Agency**

Your foster care agency will be your primary partner and support system through every step of your foster care journey, from licensure to placement to caring for your foster children. That's why it's so important that you find the right agency for you.

### **There are two primary entities through which you can foster:**

- The Department of Children's Services: A state-run department that connects foster parents to children from their immediate community, such as their county
- An agency like Children's Hope Alliance: A private agency connects foster parents to children from across their area and provides additional support to both parties

### **What to Look For in an Agency**

- Responsiveness
- Open communication
- One-on-one attention
- A tour of the agency
- A good reputation
- Lots of experience
- 24/7 support
- Immediate access to therapy and medication
- A supportive community
- Programming for children
- It feels right!





## Your Foster Care Team

Becoming a foster parent is far from a solo pursuit. There's a team of community members here to support you and your foster child every step of the way. DSS is a critical part of the team.

### Case Manager

Your case manager is your main point of contact with your agency. They're available any day, any time, to answer questions and provide support.

### Guardian ad Litem (GAL)

The Guardian ad Litem (GAL) is a volunteer appointed by the court to advocate for the best interests of the foster child. They maintain contact with the child, hold interviews with family members, and help the judge decide what's best for him or her.

### Therapist

Foster children are often recovering from trauma, and speaking to a qualified therapist can provide both relief and opportunities for growth. Your agency can help arrange for regular therapy for your foster child.

### School Personnel

As with all children, school personnel are an integral part of a foster child's community and support system. Maintaining communication with your foster child's teacher can help ensure their needs are met.

### Foster Parent Association

Connecting with a local foster parent association can provide much-needed support, wisdom, and camaraderie. It's important to remember you're not alone, and others have been in your position. Lean on them for help.

### The Child's Family

No matter what the child has gone through, it's important to focus on continuity and connectivity for the child. Your intentions are aligned: to keep the child safe, happy, and healthy. Oftentimes, this is achieved alongside their family.



## Foster Parent **Preparation Checklist**

After getting licensed, you'll need to take additional steps before you receive your placement call and ultimately welcome a foster child into your home. There are many factors across your personal and professional lives, as well as your community, to take into consideration as you prepare to foster a child.

To stay organized and on-task, you can print this checklist and keep it with your other foster parent documentation.

- Connect with your **medical provider** to ensure they accept Medicaid and will be able to see your foster child.
- If you're planning to foster young children, reach out to local **daycares or preschools** to inquire whether they may have a spot on short notice.
- If you're planning to foster older children, ask the schools in your district about **after-school care**.
- Ask your **employer** about taking two or three days' leave when you receive your assignment. FMLA is also an option for new placements
- Connect with other **foster parents** in your community and begin developing relationships.
- Clean your **home** and set up their **bedroom**.
- Lock up anything potentially dangerous, such as **medications and chemicals**, as well as anything of sentimental value.
- Purchase any **essentials or supplies** you'll need to provide your foster child with a safe, welcoming home.

## Supply List

- **First aid kit**
- **Toiletries**
  - Toothbrush
  - Toothpaste
  - Soap
  - Deodorant
  - Shampoo & conditioner
- **Children's medicine**
- **Fire extinguisher**
- **Smoke detectors**
- **Outlet covers**
- **Baby-proofing supplies**
- **Mattress and bedding**
- **Night lights or a flashlight**
- **Pajamas of varying sizes**
- **Kid-friendly snacks**
- **School supplies**
- **Children's books & toys**
- **Journals, sketch pads, crayons, and markers**
- **Toys and stuffed animals**



# Child Placement Calls

When a child is in need of foster care, your case manager may call and ask if you are available to welcome them into your home. You prepared for months, maybe even years, for this moment—but it's important to pause and consider if you are really the right person to support this particular child.

If not, that's ok. It's better for you to be honest with yourself and your case manager so that the agency can find the best family to help him or her. You'll still be considered for other placements in the future.

**In order to determine whether your home is the right fit, ask your case manager the following questions:**

1. How old is the child?
2. Why are they in foster care?
3. Have they been in foster care before?
4. Are they currently in another foster placement? If so, why are they changing to a new placement?
5. Do they have siblings in foster care? If yes, where are the siblings? Can they be in contact with each other?
6. Do they have a visitation schedule with their birth family members? If so, where do they live?
7. Are there any physical or mental health concerns I should know about?
8. Does the child have any allergies? Are they on any medications?
9. Are there any behavioral issues I should know about? What are their triggers?
10. Will they be changing school districts if they're placed with me?
11. If you have pets, ask: Can they be in a home with pets?
12. Are they at risk of running away?
13. What is the legal status of the child?

If you decide to move forward with the placement, be sure to ask more follow-up questions so that you're prepared to welcome this child into your home. The more information you have, the better you—and your foster child—will feel.

**Ask these follow-up questions:**

1. What's the child's full name? Do they have any nicknames?
2. What's their date of birth?
3. Can you share their medical information?
4. Where were they attending school?
5. What are their likes and dislikes? Do they have any hobbies, favorite foods or movies, or play any sports?





## Welcoming a Foster Child into Your Home



The arrival of a foster child can feel like a momentous occasion. However, it's important to remember that as big as this day feels for you, it's likely even more overwhelming for the child. She or he may be entering your home after the worst period in their life, and you are a stranger. Be sure to put their interests, comfort, and safety first.

The first hours in your home are among the most important for building a relationship with a foster child. Be patient, gentle, and kind. Prepare a sequence of events in advance so that you're prepared every step of the way during these first hours together.

A sample schedule of events could include:

- **Offer them a full tour of your home**, being sure to emphasize areas that will be important to them, such as their bedroom and the bathroom.
- **Sit down for a kid-friendly meal**, such as pizza or cheeseburgers and fries. Establish your home as a safe space for open communication.
- **Share any house rules or outline your expectations** for their time in your home. Over a meal is a good time to have these conversations.
- **Allow the child some downtime** to acclimate to their surroundings. Perhaps they could use their new art supplies in their room, or sit down together to watch a movie.
- **Set a time for a bath and bedtime**. Establish these nighttime routines from day one.



# Checklist for the First Day & Week with a Foster Child

## DAY ONE

- Schedule** a medical and dental assessment for the child.
- Enroll** the child in a local school or daycare.
- Set** clear expectations with the child and establish any rules.
- Give** them a tour of your home.
- Introduce** them to any other family members living at home.
- Ask** visitors to stay away from your home as the child adjusts.
- Spend** some time getting to know him or her.
- Make** a copy of your Foster Parent Contract and Medical Consent Form, and keep these with you at all times.
- Enable** them the opportunity to decorate their room as they see fit; contribute to household rules/expectations; ask them what they need to feel emotionally safe and supported.

## WEEK ONE

- Ensure** you have:
  - Educational** records
  - Medical** history and immunization records
  - Medicaid** card/number if available
- Schedule** necessary medical or dental appointments
- Plan** for important meetings, a meeting with your case manager, a family of origin visit, or meeting with the guardian ad litem (GAL).
- Purchase** clothes and any other supplies for the child. There is a \$150 stipend to support new placements.
- Take** time to connect and check in with the child often.
- Make** yourself available, whether for questions, concerns, or just to spend time together.
- Maintain** routines and engage in boundary setting with child.
- Check in** with your spouse or other children living at home .



## **Your Responsibilities** as a Foster Parent

As a foster parent, you are responsible for the well-being of your foster child. Having clear definitions of your responsibilities to your foster child—as well as their family and your agency—can serve as clear directions for structuring your role.

### **Your Responsibilities to Your Foster Child**

- Care for the child's day-to-day needs, offering food, comfort, and other necessities
- Provide a safe and comfortable home
- Ensure school attendance and monitor their academic progress
- Attend to their medical and dental needs
- Respect and protect the confidentiality of the child and their family

### **Your Responsibilities to Your Foster Care Agency**

- Maintain your foster care license
- Keep your agency informed, sharing updates as well as information about any issues that arise
- Let the agency know about any changes in your home
- Participate in reviews with the GAL and attend any court hearings
- Keep yourself informed and prepared through the agency's trainings
- Provide a minimum of 30 days notice if you request the child be removed
- Use your stipend appropriately to take care of the child's needs

### **Your Responsibilities to the Biological Family**

- Keep the family up-to-date regarding the child's academic progress and milestones
- If possible, help the child maintain a connection with their parents or extended family
- Work together with their child welfare team and cooperate with visitation plans
- Keep a record of the child's time while in your care, saving things like photos, report cards, artwork, etc. to pass on to their family

# Connecting with Your Foster Child



Providing a safe, secure emotional connection with your foster child is an important aspect of your role as a foster parent. However, this will likely be challenging. Many foster children have never experienced such a relationship with a parental figure. Oftentimes they're recovering from neglect, abuse, or other trauma that makes it difficult to connect.

**Building a relationship with your foster child requires time, effort, and patience.** But, following these steps can help you build a connection with your foster child in the days, weeks, and months that they call your house home.

- 1. Set aside time for your foster child.** While you'll spend time with them during daily routines, you should also set aside special, one-on-one time with your foster child. Schedule an activity together, like a trip to the movies or a hike.
- 2. Share personal stories.** It's important to cultivate a sense of trust with your foster child. Sharing personal stories about yourself shows them that you trust them, and they should trust you, too.
- 3. Listen attentively.** Another way to build trust and a solid relationship with your foster child is by truly listening. When your foster child is ready to talk, even if the conversation is difficult, make time to listen. Listen to understand; not to respond!
- 4. If appropriate and welcomed, offer physical contact.** Depending on what the foster child has been through, they may have negative associations with physical contact. But offering hugs or holding their hand is another way to prove that you're there for them.
- 5. Reinforce positive behavior.** When your foster child exhibits good behavior, they should be rewarded, especially through praise. This helps reinforce these positive behaviors and shows you care.



# Asking for Help as a Foster Parent

When you raise a foster child, you don't do so alone. Your community, friends, family, church, and agency are all here to offer support.

Yet, when someone offers to help, it can be hard to identify a tangible way they can lend a hand. Have this list on hand so that you know how to answer when people offer to help, or what to ask for when times get tough.

## **“Can you help with supplies?”**

Create a wish list of common necessities, such as diapers, clothing, or games, and refer your friends to this list.

## **“Can you help with a meal or two?”**

Ask your community members to set up a meal train, especially for busy weeks.

## **“Can you spend time with my foster child?”**

If a family member or friend wants to offer consistent help, ask them to build a relationship with the child. Tutoring is a particularly helpful way to spend time with them.

## **“Can you babysit?”**

Sometimes you just need some time away, and it's ok to ask your community to help you do so. Remember that an agency like Children's Hope Alliance also offers respite care when you need a break, be that for a night or a weekend.

## **“Can you help around the house?”**

Whether it's doing laundry or tidying up, an extra set of hands can make a big difference.



## Saying Goodbye to a Foster Child

Saying goodbye is never easy, and that's certainly true with a foster child. However, remember that the ultimate goal of foster care is reunification with the biological family. If you help make that possible, it's an accomplishment worth celebrating—even through your heartache.

While you will be experiencing your own emotions as you prepare to say goodbye, it's important to consider and prioritize the experience of the foster child. He or she is probably scared, nervous, or sad. As always, it's your responsibility to provide comfort and support during their transition.

- **Communicate with them.** It's best to communicate with your foster child early and often about the upcoming transition so that they're prepared. This also offers them an opportunity to ask you any questions about the change.
- **Stay calm and positive.** If you're upset, it will foster negative associations with this experience in the foster child. Instead, stay optimistic and try to communicate why this change is a positive one.
- **Don't share too many details.** When it comes time to reunite a foster child with their family, plans can change quickly. So while you should tell them what to expect, try not to set expectations.
- **Create a scrapbook.** To commemorate your time together, create a scrapbook for your foster child. You could create it together or share it as a gift.



Remember, as hard as it is to say goodbye, it's worth it for the positive impact you had on this child's life. As part of their foster care journey, you helped provide hope, health, and healing for generations to come.

### Next Steps

1. **Take your time reviewing this guide.** Review it a few times even and with family members. This will help you ultimately decide whether or not you feel called to be a foster parent.
2. **Have a conversation with a foster agency** like Children's Hope Alliance. Not only will you get a feel for the agency, but you can learn more about the process and ask any unanswered questions.



## I'm Ready. What's Next?

Now that you have learned all about the process of becoming a foster parent in North Carolina, Children's Hope Alliance is excited to welcome you into our community of support.

**Apply:** If you know that this is right for you and your family, visit [childrenshopealliance.org/applytofoster](https://childrenshopealliance.org/applytofoster).

**Contact Us:** Still looking for some more information or would like to talk to a foster care recruiter trainer? Visit [childrenshopealliance.org/foster](https://childrenshopealliance.org/foster) today.

## Not Quite Ready?

Everyone can play a role in supporting children in foster care. At Children's Hope Alliance, we are working to ensure that no child or family is ever hurting alone. Join us in our mission to bring hope, health and healing to generations.

**Advocate:** Use your voice to share about the dire need for foster parents in NC.

**Volunteer:** Organize a supply drive for essential items for foster care

**Give:** Donate online to help support children and families in need.

## Sources

1. [https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/children-adopted-foster-care-child-family-characteristics-adoption-motivation-well-being-0#\\_Toc300125443](https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/children-adopted-foster-care-child-family-characteristics-adoption-motivation-well-being-0#_Toc300125443)



# Be a Hope Hero. Foster Today.

Join us for a **FREE foster parent information session** every month on the 15th!



Visit [ChildrensHopeAlliance.org/FosterParentInfo](https://ChildrensHopeAlliance.org/FosterParentInfo) to register for the event.



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844-791-3117