



FOSTER CARE

Make a Difference, Become a Foster Parent

Information Booklet

Q: What does it mean to be a foster family?

A: Becoming a foster family is a positive, life-changing experience. It involves providing a selfless kind of love and support to children in need of a secure and stable home. The ultimate goal of Foster Care is to provide a safe and nurturing home environment for children until other suitable long-term living arrangements can be made. All members of the approved foster parent's family are involved in this process. All registered foster parents must be approved by the Children's Authority of Trinidad & Tobago.

Q: What types of children may enter the Foster Care system?

A: Children are placed in Foster Care for a variety of reasons, such as:

- *Abuse, neglect (intentional or unintentional), abandonment*
- *Children with behavioural or special needs*
- *Children without parents or any other family*
- *Children who are in the process of being adopted*

Children can be placed in Foster Care either alone or with siblings. The Children's Authority will strive to keep siblings together where possible.

Q: What types of Foster Care are there?

A: There are two types of Foster Care, Traditional and Specialist. Specialist Foster Care aims to serve children with unique physical, psychological, social, behavioural and emotional needs. These needs require more specialist training.



Q: Who can become a foster parent?

- *Persons at least 21 years and over*
- *Males or Females*
- *Single, Married, Divorced, Cohabiting persons*
- *Persons willing to actively support children in maintaining connections with their own cultural and religious heritage*

Q: What Qualities are required to become a Foster Parent?

A: Foster Parents need to have the desire to love and parent a child, the ability to nurture, have an understanding of children, have patience and flexibility, the ability to provide a safe and stable home, and to provide daily care for children with diverse life experiences and needs.

Q: How can you become a foster parent?

A: Please contact the Foster Care Unit of the Children's Authority, and a member of the team will answer any questions you may have. Once you have decided that Foster Care is right for you, an application package will be provided to you. As part of the initial application process, we will need you to provide the Children's Authority with the following: -

- *A Medical Certificate of Fitness*
- *Photo Identification*
- *The names and contact information of two referees*
- *A current certificate of character issued by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for all members of household over the age of 18*

There will be additional screening of all applicants. Training will be mandatory for all successful applicants.



Q: What happens after I submit the application and all the documents?

A: The Children's Authority begins to review and verify the information and documents submitted with the application form. This will be followed by any necessary investigations, which include background checks, in-depth interviews, psychological assessments, home assessments and reference checks. Once this stage is completed, the applicant will undergo all necessary training. After this, the Board of Management of the Children's Authority must give final approval before the applicant can be placed on the Register of approved Foster Care providers.

Q: Are there any costs for applying?

A: There is no cost to apply to be a foster parent, however there will be costs incurred in obtaining some of the documents which need to accompany the application form, such as the Police Character Certificate and the Medical Report (if the applicant chooses to complete this at a private physician).

Q: When will I know if my application is successful?

A: We will aim to notify all applicants within 2 weeks after receipt of the completed application form. Once all additional required accompanying documents are submitted, the assessment process will then be initiated and this will be processed in collaboration with the availability and cooperation of the applicant.

Q: Will I be Provided with Training?

A: All foster parents would be required to initially attend a mandatory training that covers general topics relevant to the fostering process and the basic child care process. Additional specialist training will also be provided for those who care for children with special needs.



Q: What kind of support will foster parents receive from the Children's Authority?

A: The Children's Authority provides ongoing support to all foster parents in the form of monitoring, training, counselling, donations, etc.

Q: Is there any Financial Support for Foster Parents?

A: Foster Parents will be provided with a monthly allowance based on the age and needs of the child. This stipend covers the direct costs of caring for the foster children in the home and is paid at the end of the month.

Q: How can foster parents prepare their home for foster care?

A: Foster parents need to provide a safe, secure and suitable environment for any children placed in their care. An appropriate space therefore needs to be allocated to the foster child, which takes into consideration their age, gender and developmental needs.

Q: Once approved, how long will a child stay with me?

A: The duration of the child's stay will be dependent on the needs of the child, and this will be based on recommendations made by both the assessment process completed by the Children's Authority as well as through the determination of the Court. However, both short-term and long-term placement options are available.

Q: Will I be able to foster more than one child?

A: This will be dependent on the foster home's capacity as well as the foster parent's training, resources and support systems.



Q: Do Foster Parents have a choice about which children they foster?

A: During the application process, potential foster parents can express the age and gender of their preference. As children in need of care and protection come to the attention of the Children's Authority, the Foster Care Unit will always try to find the best match between children and foster parents.

Q: Are birth parents/guardians or other relatives permitted visitation with the child placed in my home?

A: Where possible, appropriate and in the best interest of the child, parents/relatives are allowed visitation with their children. This is however conducted on the premises of the Children's Authority or the Court, and as such the location of the foster home or the names of the foster parents will not be disclosed to the birth parents/relatives.

Q: What is involved in the day to day care of a foster child?

A: The day to day care of a child in foster care involves meeting the individual needs of the child. This will vary from child to child, however all basic needs, such as provision of shelter, food and clothing, must be provided for. The child's educational, developmental and healthcare needs must also be addressed. But most importantly, the emotional needs of the child must be met, which means that above all the foster home should be full of love.



Q: Will I be able to work full time or part time and still be a foster parent?

A: Foster parents can work full time or part time, as long as their employment does not compromise the level of care that the foster child receives. The Authority must however be satisfied that your support systems will adequately address the needs of the child in your absence.

Q: Can I take Foster Children on a Vacation with me?

A: Permission from the Court must be obtained before a foster child can accompany a foster parent on vacation. In all cases of travel, whether local or overseas, prior written notification to the Children's Authority would be necessary. The foster parent must submit the request in a manner that allows adequate time for the request to be reviewed and approved.

Q: Can a foster parent adopt a foster child in their care?

A: It is possible to move from fostering to adoption, but this is on a case by case basis and is therefore not guaranteed. Many children in foster care are not available for adoption. The adoption process remains independent from the foster care process, so that a foster parent will have to comply with the Authority's Adoption application process. This application will be processed just as any other application for adoption. It is important to note that foster care should not be used as a route into adoption.



Q: Can I provide foster care for a child who is currently in a children's home?

A: In order to determine whether foster care is the best placement option for a child, whether that child was previously cared for in a children's home, or generally determined to be in need of care and protection, he or she will need to be assessed by the Children's Authority's multi-disciplinary team. Once it is determined that there are no alternative placement options, such as a relative or Fit Person, and that foster care is in fact the most appropriate option, the Children's Authority will then seek to match the child with an approved foster parent.

**For Further Information Please Contact
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