

You Don't  
Have to Be  
Perfect to be  
a Perfect Parent



Foster a Child | Adopt a Child

NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network is a  
program of the North Carolina Division of Social Services





You Don't Have to Be Perfect to be a Perfect Parent

## Introduction

This brochure is designed to provide information on how you can become a foster or adoptive parent in North Carolina. It explains why children enter the child welfare system, reviews frequently asked questions about adoption and foster care, and reviews the requirements and steps you would take to explore these options for your family.

Imagine a child who has never experienced a loving family environment. By becoming a foster parent, you will have a deep and lasting impact on this child's life. Your home will be remembered as a safe place where they saw, maybe for the first time, how this world can be kind and loving.

Imagine a child who cannot call any place home. Some of the children who enter the child welfare system will not be able to return home through no fault of their own. These children need and deserve a forever family. They deserve a family to spend holidays with, to help them as they transition into adulthood, and to be there for them on their wedding day.

You don't have to be rich. You don't have to have a degree. You don't have to be perfect to be the perfect parent for a child. They just need you to be there for them, to be stable and loving, and to provide limits and guidance. They need a family just like you!

If you are interested in providing a safe and loving home to a child, if you have patience and wisdom to share, if you are willing to learn about fostering or adoption, you could be the perfect parent for a child who truly needs you. The process of becoming a foster or adoptive parent is not expensive or complicated.

## Why Foster or Adopt?

Every child deserves to have some place to call home. Every child deserves a family. Every child deserves to feel loved and wanted.

But the truth is many children in North Carolina, have no permanent home or family and feel like nobody wants them. Foster children often live in group homes because there is no licensed foster family who can take them. Children who need to be adopted often wait for years and still no family is found.

The other truth is that many families find great joy in providing care for children, whether through foster care or adoption (and foster care sometimes leads to adoption).

Adoption means there are footsteps and laughter in my home when before there was silence. It means that one journey has ended and another has begun. It means that my life is richer; my bank account poorer. It means that my dog has a best friend, my parents have a grandson, and I have endless stories and pictures to share with my friends and coworkers. It means that my son has my last name, my hopes, my dreams, and my heart forever.

Adoptive parent  
Thomasville, NC



Couples and single people who foster or adopt children have love to give, wisdom to share, and patience to guide young lives. They give so much, in terms of healing, stability, and love. They often find that the reward of making a true difference in a child's life is without measure.

## About the Children

Children who are living in unsafe situations may be removed from their families and placed in the custody of their county's Department of Social Services (DSS). Most of these children are in DSS custody temporarily while social work professionals and families attempt to safely return the children to their families of origin. When reunification is not possible, parental rights are terminated and the goal becomes finding a permanent home, preferably through adoption.

Children come into foster care because of abuse, neglect, or dependency. Sometimes illness prevents parents from caring for their children or parents may be struggling with drug or alcohol addiction. Often children come from stressful situations where they

have been abused physically, emotionally, and/or sexually. When the county DSS finds that a child cannot be cared for by the birth family or that the child is in danger, social services obtains permission from the court to take the child into custody and place him or her in foster care.

## About the Parents

In North Carolina, a single person or married couple must be at least 21 years old to become a foster parent and at least 18 years old to become an adoptive parent. You do not have to own a home or have a certain amount of income to be a foster or adoptive parent. You do need to consider what it will mean to have a child come into your family and how this will affect your life and the child's life. Foster or adoptive parents must be ready to give a child or children opportunities to develop to their full potential; physically, academically, socially, and emotionally – with realistic expectations and unconditional support and love.



Every child wants to be part of a family. Everybody wants someone to come home to.

Latisha, age 15

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Will I receive training?

The law requires that 30 hours of preparatory training be provided before a person can be licensed as a foster parent in North Carolina. Numerous agencies across the state utilize a training called TIPS MAPP (Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence: Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting.) The purpose of TIPS MAPP is to inform potential parents about the needs of children who come into the foster care system. This training is designed to help them decide whether they can parent these children and explain the importance of working in partnership with social service agencies and birth and foster families to meet the needs of the children.

The law does not specify the number of training hours to become an adoptive parent; however, most departments of social services provide the TIPS MAPP training to those who want to be foster or adoptive parents. Some private agencies use other models for training for parents.

### What is the role of foster parents?

The primary goal for a foster parent is to provide a safe and loving temporary home for children to live until they can be



safely returned home or be placed with a permanent family. A foster parent nurtures and cares for children as a member of the family and helps the child transition to a permanent placement, whether that is reunification with the birth family or adoption.

## Will I be able to adopt my foster child?

The primary goal of foster care is to provide a safe, temporary place for children to live until they can be placed in a permanent home. The majority of children go back home to live with their families. If a child is not able to go back home, he or she may become available for adoption. Since the children have a bond with the foster parents, agencies will give consideration to the foster parents if it is in the best interest of the child to remain with them.

## What about siblings?

Siblings are placed together whenever possible. However, sometimes it is in the best interest of the children to be separated based on their individual special needs. When appropriate, efforts are made by agencies to continue sibling visits while the children are in foster care and following their adoptions.

## Are there infants or very young children available for adoption?

There are very few infants and toddlers in foster care in need of an adoptive home. There are licensed private child placing agencies that specialize in infant adoption. Often, there is a waiting list and a fee involved in adopting an infant who is not in the child welfare system.

## Will I receive financial support?

Foster parents receive monthly financial assistance based on each child's age and needs. These payments are intended to help cover some of the costs of caring for foster children. Foster children are eligible for Medicaid benefits, which include medical, dental, and mental health coverage. Some agencies provide additional benefits for foster parents.

Adoptive parents of children with special needs may receive adoption assistance until the child reaches 18 years old or 21 in certain circumstances. Adoption assistance comes in many forms. It might be monthly financial assistance based on each child's age, Medicaid, or support for additional costs such as tutoring or other special needs. If you would like more information about the financial support available for a particular child or sibling group, please contact your local DSS or adoption agency.

People often tell me how lucky our children were to have gotten such a good home and what good people we are to have taken them in. I tell them we are the ones who are blessed.

Adoptive family  
Elizabethtown, N.C.



## What is the cost of adoption?

The cost of adopting a child with special needs from the foster care system is provided by the child's agency.

## Where do I go to start this process?

Each county has a Department of Social Services that can license you as a foster parent and/or approve you to adopt. Additionally, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services has licensed numerous child placing agencies from which you may choose your agency. NC Kids Adoption & Foster Care Network is an information and referral service that can help connect you to an agency and support you through this process.



## Steps to Becoming a Licensed Foster Parent

If you are at least 21 years of age, capable of caring for a child, and have adequate room for a child, you may be eligible to become a foster parent. The licensing process takes approximately four-to-six months from start to finish.

### 1 Choose one foster care agency

You may select your local county DSS or a private agency to work with you. Representatives of NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network can provide contact information for the licensed agencies in North Carolina. You will then complete an application to become a foster parent at the agency you select. The agency will ask you about your family and the types of children you wish to parent.

### 2 Complete the licensing requirements

Each person interested in becoming a foster parent (both prospective parents, if a couple) will need to complete the licensing requirements. This includes such things as: attending 30 hours of pre-service training; have a working telephone; pass a fire and building safety inspection of your home (including smoke detectors and fire extinguishers); have everyone 18 years or older living in the home pass a criminal background check, a fingerprint check, and a physical exam (including a TB test); provide personal identification documents such as driver's license, social security card, and automobile insurance to the agency; have adequate income to support yourself without relying on foster care board payment; provide additional family information to the agency to complete the family assessment;

and be trained in First Aid/Universal Precautions and CPR. The licensing materials are then submitted to the state office where your information will be reviewed. When the state office team deems your home to be appropriate, they will issue your license specifications.

## Renewal

Each foster care license is valid for two years, unless circumstances prevent your agency from continuing your license. Parents must attend 20 hours of in-service training over the two-year period to renew their license. Training may be provided by your agency, local support group, and/or alternative training resources. NC Division of Social Services has launched [fosteringnc.org](http://fosteringnc.org), a learning site for our state's foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers.



## Foster Care Placements

After becoming a licensed foster family, you could provide a temporary home for a child or sibling group. These placements are typically referred to as:

### Family Foster Care Placement

The majority of parents become licensed to provide care for a child or children for as long as the agency deems necessary. The duration of a foster care placement ranges from a few days to much longer. The initial plan for a child is reunification with biological family and relatives. In some instances, reunification efforts are ceased and the plan changes to adoptions.

### Respite Care Placement

Some parents become licensed to provide care for children for a scheduled, temporary break such as when another foster family is on vacation or they need a weekend break. Any licensed foster home can provide respite care for their agency on an as needed basis.



## Relative Care Placement

Many parents become licensed to care for a relative who is in the custody of the state of North Carolina. This is also referred to as kinship care.

## Specialized Foster Care Placements

In addition to the above types of foster care placements, there are other specialized categories of service. These placements are typically referred to as:

### Therapeutic Foster Care Placement

Some parents are licensed by their agency to provide therapeutic care for children who may have intense mental health challenges or other special needs. This type of foster care license requires additional training for such areas as medication administration, crisis intervention, and emotional/behavioral disorders and substance abuse in children and families. Therapeutic placements require weekly supervision.

### Group Home Placement

Some children are placed in a group home when no family foster care setting is available. Other children need placements in group home settings to meet their behavioral and/or mental health needs. Group homes for children who do not require mental health services are licensed by the Division of Social Services. Group homes for children with therapeutic behavioral mental health needs are licensed by the Division of Facility Service.

## Steps to Adoption

### 1 Choose one adoption agency

You can choose your local county DSS or a private agency. Call NC Kids or go to [www.adoptnckids.org](http://www.adoptnckids.org) for information on all of your options.

### 2 Submit an application

To begin the process, you will first complete an application for adoption at the agency you select. The agency will ask about your family and the children you are interested in parenting.

### 3 Complete the Pre-Placement Assessment or PPA (adoption home study)

You will participate in preparatory and consultation sessions to help you understand the adoption process and your responsibilities as an adoptive parent. The Pre-Placement Assessment is different from a home study for foster parenting.

### 4 Work with your social worker to find the right child

Once your Pre-Placement Assessment (PPA) is complete, your social worker will work with you to locate a child whose needs can be met in your family.

## 5 Visit with your child

Once a child has been identified for you, a visiting plan is set up so that the child and your family can get to know each other before a placement is made.

## 6 Bring your child home

All children, even very young children, will go through a period of adjustment when they join a new family. A child moving into a new home needs patience, tolerance, and love. Your social worker should be there to support you.

## 7 Supervisory period

North Carolina law requires your child to be in your home at least three months before the adoption process can be legally completed. In some instances, the time needed for adjustment will be longer. During this time, your social worker will visit with you in your home to provide support and assistance.

## 8 Legalize the adoption in court

While some adoptive parents choose to file their own legal documents, it is recommended that you use an attorney for filing the legal proceedings. If the child is a special needs child who is in the custody of an agency, funds are available to assist with legal fees.

## Types of Adoption

### Agency adoption

Children in the foster care system who need adoptive families or children relinquished to licensed private adoption agencies for the purpose of adoption are considered agency adoptions.

### Relative adoption

When children are unable to be raised by their birth parents, family members or friends may come forward to care for the children. Placement with relatives or friends is the first choice for these children. If the children are in the custody of a county DSS and have special needs, relatives who adopt may receive adoption assistance.

### Step-parent adoption

Step-parents often adopt their spouse's children. After foster and relative adoptions, step-parent adoption is the next most common form of adoption in this state.

You will never know if you can be an adoptive parent unless you explore the possibilities.

Adoptive family  
Greensboro, N.C.

## International adoption

North Carolina families interested in adopting internationally must work with an authorized agency to complete a Pre-Placement Assessment that satisfies the requirements of this state and the country from which the child will come. The cost and requirements vary from agency to agency.

## Independent adoption

These are non-agency adoptions involving a direct arrangement between the birth parents and the adoptive parents.



## Support Services

The following agencies often provide support services that have proven to be invaluable to parents.

### County Department of Social Services (DSS)

Each county DSS provides help to families through their foster care and/or adoptive experience. Many offer support groups, individual consultations, and advocacy. Visit <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/local/> for specific county information or call 1-877-625-4371.

### Family Resource Centers (FRC)

Family Resource Centers are a community-based, centralized source for family support services. These support services include information and referral services, on-site programming, or home-based strategies. Services established at a FRC target families and children from birth through school-aged and are provided for all family members. Examples of service models may include parent education, therapy services, and information and referral services, and other services unique to the community. Call 1-919-334-1150 to locate FRC in your area.

### Family Support Network of North Carolina: (FSN-NC)

The FSN-NC locations across the state provide support and information to families caring for children with special needs and for those individuals serving families. They operate a central directory of resources (CDR) which provides referrals to local, state, and national agencies that offer services, parent programs, support groups, disability information, parenting issues, and other topics. They also offer training and outreach to families and an extensive lending library. Call toll-free 1-800-852-0042 or visit [www.fsnn.org](http://www.fsnn.org) for more information.

### NC Kids Adoption & Foster Care Network

NC Kids is a statewide information and referral service. They provide information on North Carolina's adoption and foster care program and help families connect with children and agencies. They are available from 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Call toll-free 1-877-625-4371 or visit [www.adoptnckids.org](http://www.adoptnckids.org) for more information.

## Post Adoption Services

To supplement services that are provided by local county DSS, the Division has contracted with several agencies across the state to provide post-adoption services to families of adoptive children from any type of adoption. Please visit our website at [nckids.org](http://nckids.org) to find the most update list of agencies who provide this service.

## Partnership Model for Foster Care and Adoption

One of the most significant aspects of foster care and adoption is working in partnership with other professionals and with the birth family to provide consistent and quality care for the children. Although the children live with the foster or adoptive parents, all team members working together can increase the likelihood of success for a placement and ultimately a happy, healthy child. Some of the team members you may work with in partnership are:

- Agency social worker
- Child's social worker
- Birth family members
- Guardian ad litem (GAL)
- Teacher
- Therapist
- Doctor

When the adults in a child's life are working together in a respectful, productive way, that child can go about the job of just being a child. Partnering gives team members an opportunity to learn from each other. The quote, "It takes a village to raise a child," was never more true than in foster care and adoption.

Adoption to me means standing with arms wide open and saying to a foster child, "I love you and I will help you by making you a part of my family."

Adoptive family  
Lumberton, N.C.

## Additional Ways to Help Children

If you are unable to be a foster or adoptive parent at this time, there are other ways you might be able to help children. Contact NC Kids or your local DSS to find out how to:

- be a mentor for a youth
- provide respite care to foster or adoptive parents
- provide clerical support
- be a recruiter in your community or faith organization
- serve as a guardian ad litem (GAL)
- be a Big Brother/Big Sister
- provide transportation support
- be a political advocate
- raise funds for a local parent support group
- volunteer for group care facilities
- encourage your employer to offer adoption benefits  
– [www.adoptionfriendlyworkplace.org](http://www.adoptionfriendlyworkplace.org)
- sponsor a “recruitment” party at your home and invite friends, neighbors, co-workers and family members and encourage them to become foster or adoptive parents





# Myths About Foster Care and Adoption

**MYTH** You have to be a saint to be a foster or adoptive parent.

**FACT** You don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent.

**MYTH** You have to own a home to foster or adopt.

**FACT** You can own or rent a home, trailer or apartment.

**MYTH** You have to be married to foster or adopt.

**FACT** You can be single, married, divorced, or widowed.

**MYTH** It is expensive to adopt a child with special needs.

**FACT** The cost of adopting a foster child with special needs is provided by the child's agency.

1-877-NCKIDS-1

1-877-625-4371

[www.adoptnckids.org](http://www.adoptnckids.org)



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at a cost of \$\_\_\_ or \$\_\_\_ per copy. 11/17

