



## TBCH Foster Care FAQ's

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### **Why become a Foster Parent with Tennessee Baptist Children's Homes (TBCH)?**

Why become a foster parent with TBCH? TBCH does not accept government funding so that children in TBCH care may be taught Christian values. The mission of the Tennessee Baptist Children's Homes is to minister the love of Jesus Christ to children and families in crisis, regardless of their background. The vision of the Tennessee Baptist Children's Homes is to strive to be a ministry to children and families that leads them to become whole persons in Christ through faith, hope and love. When you provide a family for a child in need of care, you become part of the TBCH family.

TBCH is committed to helping you succeed beginning with the first contact and continuing as long as you are part of the TBCH Family. TBCH's primary focus is to support the family in overcoming barriers that prohibit both the child's development and the ongoing operation of a positive family system.

A TBCH Foster Care Caseworker supports every foster family. The Foster Care Caseworker partners with the family to develop support services when assistance, support, direction, and advocacy are needed.

### **Who are the children in our program?**

The children in TBCH's foster care program are between birth and age 12. They have been removed from the custody of their parent(s) generally due to neglect, abuse or abandonment. Some have been in foster care for many years while their parents try to resolve problems; others are entering the system for the first time. As a result of their troubled backgrounds, many of our foster children have difficulties in school. Some suffer from depression and have trouble making friends. Others may have trouble controlling anger and their emotions, following rules or respecting adult authority.

### **What are the duties of a Foster Parent?**

- Providing a safe, comfortable environment for the child
- Providing for the child's emotional growth
- Ensuring that the child attends school, monitoring progress and offering support
- Ensuring that the child receives an annual physical exam and two dental visits each year
  
- Providing consistent guidance that is age appropriate and does not involve corporal punishment
- Ensuring that the child attends counseling sessions
- Ensuring that the child attends an evangelical Christian church and is actively involved
- Preparing one's own children for potential problems associated with fostering other children.
- Accepting a child as part of one's family and to help a child fit into the normal routine.
- Being supportive in every possible way in helping a child to be reunited with the family when reunification is the goal of the Placement/Performance Agreement.
- Cooperating in the visitation plan willingly and with a positive attitude.
- Being uncritical of the family whose child is in Foster Care in their home, and to believe in the family potential for growth and change.



## TBCH Foster Care FAQ's

---

- Cooperating in the Placement/Performance Agreement and Service Plan for the child.
- Being accountable for one's work with the child placed in their home. Foster Parents shall keep records on child's progress, i.e., behavior, school progress or problems, and medication required.
- Creating and maintaining a life storybook for each Foster Child in their care to document and preserve their history during the time they are in foster care.
- Performing routine parenting tasks, i.e., enrolling the child in school, arranging and providing transportation for medical appointments, maintaining church involvement.
- Providing developmentally appropriate activities and supportive services designed to enable the child to prepare to lead self-sufficient adult lives, in accordance with their treatment plan.
- Entering into as many parenting experiences as possible when a child's own family cannot participate fully, i.e. attending father/son banquets, signing report cards.
- Receiving honest, clear, direct communication from TBCH.
- Participating in training and educational opportunities arranged by TBCH as required by approval standards.

### **Who can be a Foster Parent?**

Some of TBCH's requirements are:

- Each applicant must be a professing Evangelical Christian.
- Each applicant must be an active participant in a local evangelical church.
- Each applicant must reflect a disciplined Christian lifestyle. What constitutes a "Disciplined Christian Lifestyle" is a determination that is reserved in the sole and exclusive discretions of Tennessee Baptist Children's Homes, and these decisions are non-appealable. This determination will be evaluated according to the Word of God and the judgment of those tasked with this responsibility within our organization. Our goal in all of these determinations is to please God and act in the best interest of the children we are afforded the privilege of serving.
- The age(s) of Foster Parent(s) should be 21 years or older (relatives 18 years of age or older may be considered to become a Foster Parent for a sibling or other blood relative.)
- A stabilized, legal marriage of at least one year and residence in their present community for at least six months. Single Foster Parents are also considered.
- A United States Citizen. Applicants may also have Legal Permanent Resident Status that has been approved by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services regardless of gender, race, color or national origin.
- Enjoyment of being a parent and experience with children, having demonstrated interest through the experiences he/she has sought.
- Acceptance and understanding of the individual needs of the foster child and how these may differ from his/her own child.
- The ability to accept the child's relationship with his/her parents and with TBCH & DCS.
- An acceptance of TBCH's responsibility for determining the outcome of foster care and cooperating in the treatment of the child.
- A commitment to providing continuity of care and to working with TBCH on the child's behalf.



## TBCH Foster Care FAQ's

---

- A Foster Parent Medical Report must be completed to verify applicants are healthy enough to carry out the duties of a Foster Parent.
- An acceptance of and agreement to work with the Service Plan and Placement/Performance Agreement developed for the child and the family.
- Foster Parent must have a valid TN driver's license. They must also have a car in good working condition and be willing to provide transportation as needed for the foster child.
- Foster Parents must have viable income not including public assistance, such as SSI, Food Stamps or AFDC.
- Foster Parents must be tolerant of differences in racial, ethnic, religious and educational backgrounds.
- They must have adequate space in their homes. You can live in a house or apartment, but must have room to house a child. The Foster Child may share a bedroom with a child of the same gender and similar age, but must have his/her own bed. The child should also have adequate space to keep belongings (closet, drawers, etc.)
- Foster Parents must provide proof of homeowner's or renter's insurance and automobile insurance.
- Foster Parents must not be working with another foster care agency. If currently with another agency, they must formally terminate with that agency and verify this in writing.
- Foster parents may not operate a licensed day home or daycare center in the home.
- They may have no more than three minor children living in the home, and no more than two children under the age of 2.
- Foster Parents must pass both criminal record and driving record checks.
- Foster Parents must be willing to refrain from any use of physical discipline with the Foster Child. Foster Parents are expected to learn and use alternative forms of discipline.
- All members of the prospective Foster Family must be interviewed. All members of the prospective Foster Family must receive required training.

### **What kind of support does TBCH provide for Foster Parents?**

- Free training
- On-call support services with a TBCH Foster Care Caseworker. When you become a TBCH Foster Parent, a TBCH Foster Care Caseworker will be assigned to help you meet requirements, handle any paperwork and provide ongoing support and advice.
- Assistance with any issues regarding monthly reimbursement paid directly from the State of Tennessee

### **If I become a Foster Parent, how long can I expect a child placed in my home to stay with me?**

Foster care is designed to be temporary with the goal being to return to parents. We do our best to provide you with a projected length of stay, but that is not always easy to determine. We have children who are in care for a few weeks to a few years. Each situation is unique. The average stay is 12-18 months. A plan of care is developed with the biological parents which outlines the areas where improvement is expected and which specifies the responsibilities of each party. If a parent fails to comply with the plan of care for a significant period of time, parental rights may be



## TBCH Foster Care FAQ's

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terminated so that the child can be placed in a permanent home through adoption. TBCH and DCS are working to reduce the amount of time a child stays in foster care.

### **Is there a limit to how many children I can foster at a time?**

Yes. In order to provide the highest quality of care to the children entrusted to them, TBCH allows Foster Parents to have no more than 2 non-related Foster Children in their home at a time, unless taking in a sibling group. This amount is also limited to a total number of 5 children under the age of 18 in the home. This can be any combination of biological, adoptive, and/or foster children.

### **How long does it take to become approved to get a Foster Child?**

The home study and training process varies in length, but on average takes from four to six months. After that process and your training are completed, you will either be approved or denied to foster. The approval is valid for one year. When a Foster Child gets referred to TBCH, you may be called to see if you are interested in taking the child. You can then determine whether this child will be a good fit with your family and, if interested, accept the child into your home.

### **What is required to become reapproved as a Foster Parent?**

TBCH reserves the right to determine if a foster home is to be reapproved. Reapproving occurs on an annual basis. The re-approval packet should be sent to TBCH 60 days prior to the expiration date of the Foster Home approval. TBCH provides a detailed checklist regarding all the information that needs to be included in a re-approval study.

### **Can I adopt my Foster Child?**

The majority of children in foster care across the country are not eligible for adoption. Before Foster Children can be made available for adoption, their parents' rights must be terminated. Foster Parents are not required to adopt the Foster Children in their care. But, if a child has been in a foster home for more than a year and does become eligible for adoption, the Foster Parents get first preference in the adoption. If the child has been in the foster home less than a year at the time he becomes eligible for adoption, his Foster Parents' application to adopt will be reviewed along with other applicants. Counselors will then choose what they consider the best family to meet the child's individual needs.

### **What reimbursement do Foster Parents receive?**

To help offset the cost of bringing a child into your home, the state of Tennessee provides Foster Parents with a monthly reimbursement. Foster Parents must use this reimbursement to provide their Foster Children with food, clothing, school supplies, incidental expenses and a monthly allowance. Foster Parents must also ensure that the child is allowed to participate in school and extracurricular activities such as sports teams or band -- and pay any expenses for those activities. State programs provide medical care for the children. While you should not encounter financial hardships from caring for children, the reimbursement does not substitute for family income. Financial stability is an important factor in a family's ability to provide foster care for children.

### **What is a home study and what does it involve?**

The job of a Foster Parent is to provide a safe home which meets children's needs until they can go to a permanent home. They have round-the-clock close contact with very vulnerable children. A home study is done to assure the health and safety of children.



## TBCH Foster Care FAQ's

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Once the training has begun, the home studies will be assigned to a social worker. The state of Tennessee requires background checks, physical exams, references, and financial statements. Other requirements are explained in training. Interviews occur to gather background information and to document the home and community environment. The home study process will help you make decisions regarding the age and type of child you would be best suited to care for. Once the home study is completed and approved by the Foster Care Staff, Foster Families are ready to be contacted when a need arises.

Some information given in the home study processes are:

**Autobiographies:** TBCH staff ask questions to learn about the Foster Parents' personalities, what growing up was like for them, how they were parented and how they make decisions. This will include information about marriages and divorces and descriptions of children.

**Income:** Foster Parents must have enough income to meet the family's needs. Foster care reimbursements from TBCH are to support the child, not to provide income for the Foster Family.

**Health:** Foster Parents must be sufficiently healthy to meet the needs of the child being placed in the home. TB tests are required.

**Assessment:** Staff takes a careful look at how a Foster Child will affect a family.

### **What can I expect from a home safety check?**

TBCH Foster Care Caseworkers check the home to make sure certain specific requirements are met.

- Home is generally clean and in good repair.
- Home is adequately furnished.
- Home must have a medication lock box, and the box must be under a second lock. All medications for the child and family must be kept in the lock box.
- A smoke detector must be in the child's bedroom.
- The home must have an A-B-C rated fire extinguisher (at least 2 pounds) per floor of the living space.
- Child's room must have two exits: a door to the hallway and a window that opens. The window must not be barred or be painted or nailed shut.
- Bathroom, bedroom and closet doors must either not lock or the lock must be workable from the outside.
- No paint, turpentine, gasoline or other flammable materials are stored in the house.
- The hot water heater must have a safety release valve.
- The attic, basement and garage also must be inspected.
- Unvented fuel-burning heaters are not allowed.
- There must be no frayed wiring or exposed wiring.
- If a child's room is in a basement, there can be no more than three steps leading to the outside.



## TBCH Foster Care FAQ's

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### **Who determines what Foster Child will be placed in my home?**

During the certification process, Foster Parents complete a profile of the type of child they would like to help. Our staff will try to make an appropriate match between the Foster Parents and child, taking into account the other children in the family and the space in the home. Obviously, the better the match between the child's needs and the parents' skills, the more successful the outcome will be. No child is ever placed with a Foster Parent without that parent's consent to the placement. Communication lines between TBCH and Foster Parents are always open. Foster Parents need to be able to accept support and guidance. TBCH's staff works hard to help ensure safety for all and a stable foster placement.

### **How do I (we) get started?**

TBCH provides PATH training (Parents As Tender Healers), which prepares you for the challenges and rewards of fostering. The schedule varies by location. This training is required for anyone wishing to foster. To obtain an application, please email [fostercare@tennesseechildren.org](mailto:fostercare@tennesseechildren.org) or call (615) 376-3140.