

Make a difference ...



Become a Foster or Adoptive Family

An introduction...

Speaking out...

“Thousands of children are served by our state's foster care system. Every time foster and adoptive parents open their homes to these children, it is an opportunity to mold self-reliant, law-abiding, productive adults.”

— Ted Kulongoski, Governor

My Life

Home sick is a weird thing. When you wake up you think your home, but your not. You don't know whats right and what is wrong because you don't no the rules. Evrething gets weird in its own way. Its like a air born disees to. You can't know whats going to happin next.

A new life is like being put in a foster home. You dont know who's who. You don't know whitch dog is whitch. In fact you don't know any thing.

— An 8-year old foster child

"Foster parents are integral partners in the child protection system and valued team members in assessing the needs of children and planning for their future, sometimes becoming the adoptive parents. Fostering a child fosters our future."

**— Ramona Foley, Assistant Director,
Oregon Department of Human Services**

Why should you consider becoming a foster or adoptive family?

- ✓ You like kids.
- ✓ You want to make a difference in a child's life.
- ✓ Patience and a sense of humor are two of your greatest strengths.
- ✓ Reaching out to others seems natural to you.
- ✓ You have room for a child in your home and heart.
- ✓ You know how important it is to be part of a family.
- ✓ Your entire family is ready to accept the challenge of parenting a special child.

"Foster parenting can change your idea of what family is, for bigger, for better, forever."

— Lori



Can you tell who the foster children are in this picture?

- ✓ You believe that kids need to stay in their neighborhoods so they remain in their schools, keep their same friends and visit familiar places.
- ✓ You know that kids in your community need you.

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If you need this document in an alternate format such as large print, computer disk, braille, audiotape, or oral presentation, talk to your local DHS branch office.



What is foster and adoptive parenting?



On an average day, approximately 6,135 Oregon children are in family foster care.

More than 1,100 adoptions were finalized by the state in 2002.*

* 2002 statistics refer to the
*Federal Fiscal Year 2002 —
October 1, 2001 through September 30, 2002*

Q. What is foster care?

Foster care is the full-time, though temporary, care of children until their parent(s) can resume their parenting responsibility, or, if necessary, until another permanent home can be found. Foster parents are not the legal guardians for the children in their care.

Q. What is adoption?

Adoption is the permanent, legal transfer of all parental rights and responsibilities to an adoptive parent(s). Adoption is a lifetime commitment of sharing one's life with a child as if the child was born into the adoptive family.

Q. Can relatives foster or adopt?

Yes! Relatives are encouraged to become a temporary or permanent placement resource whenever possible.

Q. Can friends foster or adopt?

Yes! Maintaining ties is important for children. Therefore, friends are encouraged to become foster parents. All established requirements for foster care certification must be met.

Continued on page 4

Can friends foster or adopt? — continued

When relatives or current foster parents are not available to adopt a child, other adults who know the child may apply to adopt. All established requirements for adoption must be met.

Q. Can a person provide foster care without adopting, and vice versa?

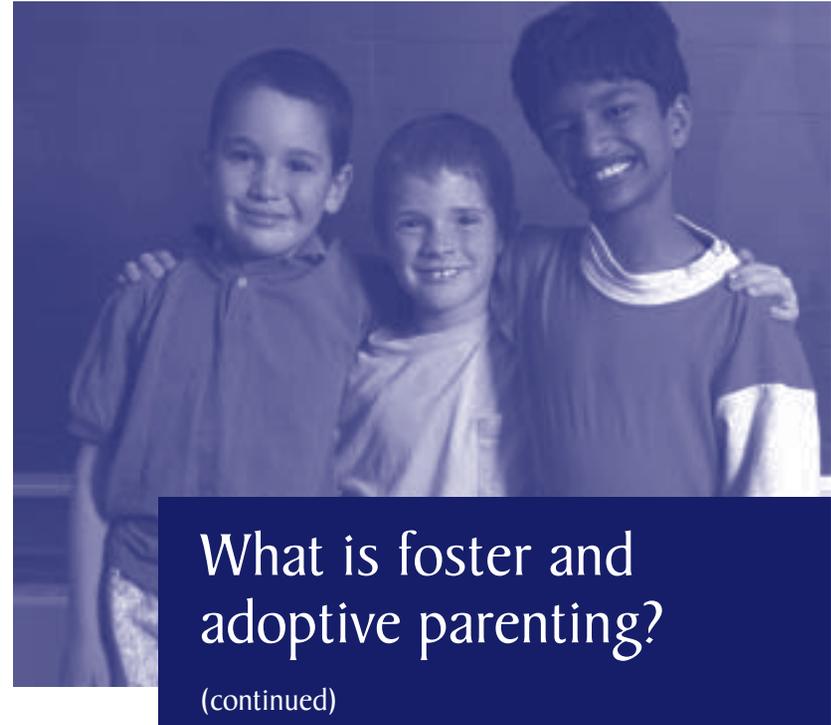
Yes, definitely.

Q. Does providing foster care increase the possibility of getting an adoptive placement?

Providing foster care will provide valuable experience about how to meet the special needs of children in care. This experience is helpful for those hoping to parent an adoptive child.

Q. What are the chances of foster parents adopting their foster child?

Chances? In reality an extremely small percentage of foster children become available for adoption. 2002 statistics show that 60 percent of foster children who left foster care in Oregon were reunited with their birth parents. Of those who were adopted, only 37 percent were adopted by their non-relative foster



parents. Another 37 percent were adopted by relatives, and the final 26 percent were adopted by approved families who had been waiting to be matched with adoptive children.

Agency priorities are to reunite children with their birth families, including extended family members, whenever possible. If that is not possible, children may benefit by being adopted by their foster parents with whom they have developed an attachment.



Q. Should it be a family decision to foster or adopt?

Yes! Foster and adoptive parenting affects every member of the family. Family members, including extended family, need to be involved in the decision to foster or adopt a child.

Q. Are there other ways to help?

Yes! You might consider providing respite care for a foster or adoptive child (e.g., an afternoon a week or one weekend a month).

There are many other ways to help. Ask for a copy of “Yes, I Want to Help Kids in My Neighborhood” for a list of options in your community.

Q. How do these children come to the attention of the state?

The state has the responsibility to ensure the safety of children. Friends, neighbors, or relatives may report that a family does not appear to be providing adequate care for their children.

Many professionals who come into contact with children (e.g., doctors, foster parents, teachers) are required by law to report any situations in which they believe children are in need of protection. Occasionally, birth parents decide they are unable to meet the needs of their children.

Are there other ways to help?

Who are the children needing homes?

Q. Who are the children needing foster and adoptive homes?

Children entering foster care are like other children. They have a wide range of abilities, personalities and potential. Most, however, have been hurt in ways one cannot see.

Many have been emotionally, physically, or sexually abused, and may have emotional, mental, or physical problems. Many are insecure, frightened,



confused, and often angry about what is happening to them. Based on their past and the disruption in their lives, children with these experiences may often present challenging behaviors.

Most of the children needing homes are:

- Children older than five years of age*
- Children with physical, mental or emotional disabilities.

**See note on page 7*

Who are the children needing homes? (continued)



*Age of Children in Family Foster Care

0-5	36%
6-12	35%
13+	29%

2002

*Ethnicity of Children in Family Foster Care

Caucasian	70%
Hispanic	12%
African American	9%
Native American	8%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1%

*Rounded off

Homes are also needed to more adequately meet the needs of:

- Children of color
- Siblings who need to be placed together
- Teens
- Children with medical issues.

Foster children are too often separated not only from their families but also from their friends, schools and communities.

By providing foster care, neighbors make it possible for a child to have continuity in school, and participate in routine activities such as sports, church, riding bikes with friends and visiting familiar places.

“I have always loved children and wanted to do something to make a difference in the lives of children who need safety and love.”

— *foster parent*

*NOTE: Families wishing to adopt a newborn infant are encouraged to contact one of Oregon's licensed private adoption agencies. (See contacts on page 21.)

“There’s never a dull moment... lots of giggles... and I can have a conversation with them.

— foster parent of teens

“Teens need homes (and love) too!”

— F.A.T.E. representatives

(Foster & Adoptive Teens Empowered)

THAT DAY

The day I drove away from my home, from everything I knew; I was so confused, so sad, so so bad, too too blue
— Renee

What about teens?

IN OREGON IN 2002

- 3,872 teens spent at least one day in foster care
- 880 teens came into care — that’s almost three teens a day

Teens may be the greatest challenge, but can also give the greatest reward.

It just takes one person to create a turning point in a foster teen’s life.



“I’m a kindergarten teacher ... and a former foster child. My foster parents made a difference in my life.”

Helping Hands

Foster youth are cast aside
Just another stain to hide
A blemish on your perfect earth
Unthought to have any worth

Unseen and hidden in the dust
Just looking for someone to trust
Someone to lift us to our feet
When we feel like we’ve been beat

But none of you can understand
That all we need is a helping hand
To renew the life within us all
To pick us up in case we fall

To let us know you’re still there
To let us know you still care
Be a Helping Hand...

... Angela, a foster teen

What about siblings?

Keeping brothers and sisters together is a high priority because bonds among siblings are unique and are often their longest lasting relationships.



When family stress makes it difficult for parents to meet children's needs, sibling relationships may become stronger as they learn to depend on each other to help cope with shared life experiences.

If it is necessary to remove children from their parents and they are also separated from their siblings, children suffer additional grief and trauma.

Q. What are the benefits?

Siblings who remain together can learn how to resolve differences and develop lasting relationships. Sibling relationships can teach children how to:

- Interact with peers
- Resolve conflicts
- Be accepting of others
- Work as a team
- Care for others.

Sixty percent of children in care are siblings with brothers and sisters also in care. In 2002, 57 percent of these siblings were placed together. An additional 23 percent of children in sibling groups were placed with at least one of their siblings.

Q. What could happen if siblings are separated?

They may:

- Lose their sibling bonds
- Believe family relationships are not important
- Be more vulnerable to emotional, social or school problems
- Learn to deal with problems by walking away rather than resolving them.

Foster families are needed who can be available to provide important support and care for siblings. These families must also understand that they may have to wait for awhile, in order to be available when the need for sibling care arises.

Families desiring to adopt a sibling group are in high demand.

What do foster or adoptive parents do?



- Share their sense of humor
- Be self-confident, but not afraid to ask for help or support when needed
- Whenever possible have a relationship with the child's family
- Work with social workers, teachers, therapists and community partners
- Be willing to keep kids connected to their family and community
- Support racial and cultural diversity
- Be patient, yet persistent
- Accept children for who they are, helping them grow into successful, competent adults

Q. What do foster or adoptive parents do?

All children need stable, caring families with nurturing parents who can provide a safe home and good role models. Foster and adoptive children need parents who can:

- Understand and accept a child's sense of loss and need to heal
- Accept and nurture a child not born to them

It is important to be available, patient, and understanding of the challenges the child faces.

A foster or adoptive parent's values or ways of doing things may be considerably different from what the child has known, (e.g., eating habits and bedtime routines).

The rewards may be slow in coming. It takes time to build a child's trust and create a sense of belonging.

Q. Who can foster or adopt a child?

No two families look alike. They are as varied as the children needing homes.

Successful families are caring people who are ready to make a commitment to a child. Foster and adoptive parents:

- Are single, married, or divorced people of all ages, lifestyles, religions, ethnicities and incomes
- Live in a house or apartment
- Have not been convicted of a violent crime or a crime against a child
- Are flexible, energetic, and able to care for a child
- Work inside or outside their home
- Are open to learning new things

Families of every race and ethnicity are needed to help children grow with a strong sense of racial and cultural identity.

Who can foster or adopt?



“It’s not the money, it’s not that I don’t have anything else to do, it’s that I don’t have anything more important to do.”

– *foster parent*

What about birth families?



“When you see a birth parent and child reunited, it’s just like you’ve taken that final test in school and you aced it!”

— *foster mom Tayma*

Q. Do foster parents have contact with birth families?

Some form of contact between foster parents and birth parents should occur. There are many levels of contact — from sending written information about the child to phone calls and/or face-to-face contact.

Foster parent contact with the birth family can ease a child’s anxieties and reduce loyalty issues. It can be an opportunity to mentor and model good parenting behaviors.

The type and frequency of contact is determined on a case-by-case basis.

When it is safe and in the best interest of the child, direct contact between the foster and birth parents is encouraged.

Foster parents are expected to support children in planned visits with their birth families.

Q. Do adoptive parents have contact with birth parents?

When it is in the best interest of the child, adoptive parents may agree to some ongoing contact with the birth parents such as letters, email, visits.

What about discipline?



“I like to find different ways to reach children with behavior problems.”

— *foster parent*

Q. What about discipline?

Discipline should teach a child positive ways to deal with conflict. Although a child may push any parent to their limit, the challenge is to teach the child without resorting to physical punishment, which includes spanking.

Spanking is prohibited.

Physical punishment may be devastating or meaningless to the child who has a history of emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse.

Q. Is there help?

Yes! Training is provided for foster and adoptive parents on how to cope with challenging behaviors of children in care.

Does it cost anything?



Q. How much will it cost to become a foster or adoptive parent?

The state does not charge any fee for the application, training and processing to become a foster or adoptive parent.

Q. Once a child is placed, how are expenses covered?

For foster care, a monthly reimbursement is provided to help cover the cost of caring for the child (housing, food, clothing and age-appropriate allowance for the child). This reimbursement is not considered income, and would not be taxable as is income from employment. The child's medical, dental and mental health costs are also covered.

Although adoptive parents have the primary responsibility for supporting their adoptive children, some financial benefits that are usually less than foster care payments may be available through the Adoption Assistance program.

Adopted children receiving Adoption Assistance are eligible for the Oregon Health Plan, which covers medical, dental and mental health costs.

Registration fees for state-approved training may be reimbursed.



Steps to becoming a foster or adoptive parent

After initial contact:

The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) offers opportunities to talk with staff, or attend an open house or orientation to ask questions and learn more before attending required training. For contact information, see page 21.

Basic/preservice training:

Foster and adoptive parents require skills that are unique to parenting children with special needs. It is critical that the parents learn about:

- The children who will be in their care
- Agency rules and regulations
- How to effectively work with therapists, schools, etc. to help children in their care.

Local offices provide a series of classes designed to help prospective foster and adoptive parents make a well-informed decision about whether foster or adoptive parenting is right for their family. The Special Needs Adoption Coalition (SNAC) provides the same services for prospective adoptive parents.

The 'Am I Ready?' personal survey may be helpful. Check with your local DHS office.

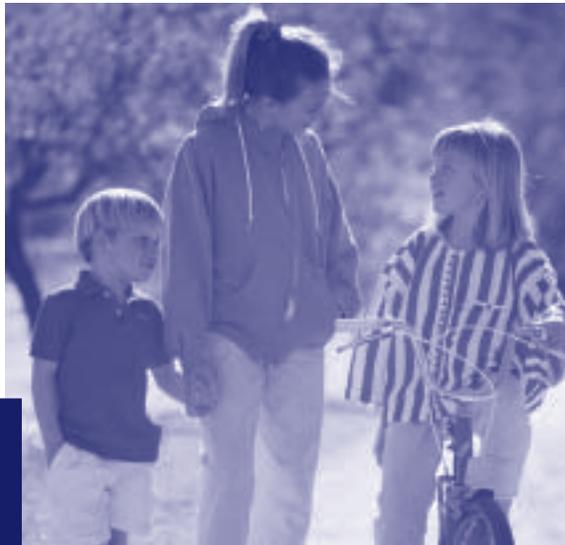
The initial training is the beginning of ongoing opportunities available to the parents as they identify areas of need specific to children placed in their homes.

Application process:*

After deciding to pursue becoming a foster or adoptive parent, individuals need to:

- Complete an application
- Have a criminal record check completed
- Provide four references
- Participate in the progressive family assessment process, which cannot begin until the application is submitted

*NOTE: Families wishing to adopt a newborn infant are encouraged to contact one of Oregon's licensed private adoption agencies. (See contacts on page 21.)



Progressive Family Assessment Process:

After an application is accepted, the progressive family assessment process begins with an assigned worker. This is a very thorough process consisting of interviews, home visits, safety/fire inspections, medical information and more paperwork!

Foster parents are certified by state agencies and often care for several unrelated children at the same time. Adoptive parents are approved by the state or a private adoption agency.

Becoming an adoptive parent requires additional information, which builds on the initial work of the progressive family assessment.

How long will it take?

It may take from one to four months for the training, assessment and criminal history check. Availability of staff and applicant initiative can also impact the time it takes to complete the assessment process.

Placement of children:

Working together with their certifier/worker, foster and adoptive parents identify children they could best care for. A prospective foster/adoptive parent will be given as much information as is available to help make a decision. The waiting period before placement of a foster or adoptive child varies depending on the needs of the children and the strengths and skills of the families.

“I was a foster child myself. When I finally landed in a good home, it made all the difference in the world to me. I’d like to give back what I received.”

— *foster parent*



Matching a child and family for adoption:

Once a family has an approved progressive family assessment, they will work with a worker to find a waiting child who best matches the interests and strengths of their family. At the same time, the child’s worker is looking for families who can best meet the needs of the child.

In making an adoption selection for a child, Oregon uses an adoption committee process. The adoption committee is dedicated to

assessing the child’s needs in conjunction with evaluating the relevant strengths and skills of available families.

Placement/transitions:

In 2002 more than 70 percent of the children adopted in Oregon were adopted by relatives or foster parents.

Steps

(continued)

Moves hurt children. Therefore, thoughtful planning based on the child's age and needs is important.

Preparing a child for the transition from foster care to adoption is a long and complex process. It truly involves teamwork by many individuals who have been involved with the child.

Supervision:

After a child is placed in a home, the worker visits regularly. The worker will help locate appropriate services and training to support the placement.

Adoption finalization:

After a child has been placed in a home for the purpose of adoption,

and the family and professionals agree that it is time to do so, the legal action of finalization occurs. A judge will issue a final decree of adoption.

Once an adoption is finalized, the adoptive parents receive a birth certificate with their name(s) listed as the parent(s).



More than 1,100 adoptions were finalized by the state in 2002.

Steps (continued)



Support for families

Q. What other kinds of support are available for foster and adoptive families?

- Foster parent associations have been established in many communities throughout Oregon. Adoptive families often find adoptive support groups in their area. Both provide realistic support and advocacy. Local Department of Human Services (DHS) offices can provide information about local associations as well as other support groups and networks.
- The Oregon Foster Parent Association provides support and advocacy for foster parents. Contact them at 707 13th

Street SE, Suite 275, Salem, OR 97301. In Salem, call 503-361-3906; elsewhere in Oregon, call 1-888-544-3402. Email: ofpaoffice@aol.com or visit the Web site at www.ofpa.com.

- Ongoing training is available to help foster and adoptive parents obtain the skill level needed to care for children and advocate for their needs. DHS and Portland State University have joined together to provide free training through the Child Welfare Partnership, 503-399-5262 or the Web at www.cwporegon.com. Classes are designed to meet the needs of foster, relative and adoptive parents. Financial assistance may be available for travel to trainings outside their area and registration fees if required by other training providers.
- Another resource for foster parents is the Foster Parent Handbook. Written by foster parents, it contains local and state contact information as well as information about rules and regulations, roles and responsibilities, and working with community partners.

- Most local offices also have a library of relevant books and video materials.
- Additional information about financial assistance for adoptive families is available in *The Adoption Assistance Handbook*.
- ORPARC (Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center) offers services to adoptive families who adopt children in the state's custody.



Supports (continued)

ORPARC offers services such as:

- Training opportunities throughout Oregon
- A lending library of videos, audio tapes, books and other materials with mailing options
- Referral lists of mental health providers, advocacy groups, and support groups
- A welcome packet to all adoptive families.

ORPARC staff also recruit parent mentors and work on respite projects. Visit their Web site at www.orparc.org or call 1-800-764-8367 or 503-241-0799 in Portland.

Family Matters newsletter, distributed by the Boys & Girls Aid Society (BGAS) is available with articles on adoption issues and special features on Oregon children waiting for adoption.

Important phone numbers & Web sites

Your Local DHS office, contact, phone:

Local Foster Parent Association:

Phone numbers/Websites

BGAS (Boys and Girls Aid Society) 877-932-2734
www.boysandgirlsaid.org

DHS (Department of Human Services)
Inquiries: -800-331-0503 www.dhs.state.or.us/children

OFPA (Oregon Foster Parent Association) 503-361-3906/
888-544-3402 www.ofpa.com

ORPARC (Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center)
800-764-8367/503-241-0799 www.orparc.org

PSU (Portland State University) Training information
503-399-5262 www.cwporegon.com

SNAC (Special Needs Adoption Coalition) 880-342-6688

Web sites only

NWAE (Northwest
Adoption Exchange)
www.nwae.org

COAA (Coalition of
Oregon Adoption
Agencies)
www.oregonadoptionagencies.org

NAIC (National Adoption
Information
Clearinghouse)
[www.calib.com/
naicindex.com](http://www.calib.com/naicindex.com)

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Foster Care and Adoption
500 Summer Street NE, Salem, OR 97301
www.dhs.state.or.us/children/
PAM 9507 4/03