



## Basics for relatives of foster children

### Foster care placement

Foster care placement occurs when a child cannot remain safely in their home and a court orders custody of child/ren to a county or tribal agency, or a child is placed in foster care through a voluntary placement agreement between parent/s and an agency. When a child has been or is being placed in foster care, agency staff need help from family members and others who know the child to help make plans that are in the child's best interest.

The responsible agency must notify and consider relatives first when looking for a family foster home to care for a child. "Relative" means:

- A person related to a child by blood, marriage, or adoption
- The legal parent, guardian, or custodian of a child's siblings
- An individual who is an important friend with whom a child has resided or had significant contact.

"Relative of an Indian child" means a person who is a member of an Indian child's family as defined by the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978.

Contact agency staff as soon as possible if you are willing to:

- Be considered for placement of child/ren
- Establish/maintain contact with child/ren, or
- Help plan for child/ren and support their parents.

Agencies have continued responsibility to appropriately involve relatives who respond,

including helping them participate in care and planning for child/ren.

Agency staff develop a plan for child's/ren's care and services, including visits with parents, siblings and other family members, as determined by the court and agency. Relatives caring for child/ren are responsible to follow instructions of the court and child's/ren's service plan.

### Foster care placement and licensing

All foster parents, including relatives, must be licensed. Agencies may make an emergency relative foster care placement with a relative or important friend in an unlicensed home. When considering placement in an unlicensed home, agency staff make initial safety checks that include a review of criminal and child protection histories for all household members, and complete a safety inspection of the home.

If not selected for an emergency relative foster care placement, relatives may still apply to become a licensed foster home. To be licensed as a foster parent, apply for a foster care license through a county, tribal, or private child-placing agency. When agencies make an emergency relative placement, relatives must submit an application for a license within 10 days of placement. If submitting an application to a county agency or a private child-placing agency, it must provide an opportunity to become licensed, even if the agency responsible for placing a child states that it is not currently considering the relative for placement; relatives are not required to be available for non-relative children in need of foster care. Tribes may have different requirements.

The licensing process includes a fingerprint-based background study of applicants and household members, and review of criminal and child protection histories. It also includes home visits to assess if a home offers a safe environment for a child, and discussions about parental care and supervision. Agencies may vary some licensing requirements for relatives. If a specific licensing requirement cannot be met, and it does not pose a health or safety risk, relatives may ask the licensing agency for a variance.

Foster care licensing also requires training. Orientation and specific training (including mental health and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders) is required for all foster parents. When caring for a young child, Children and Restraint Systems (car seat), Sudden Unexpected Infant Death, and Abusive Head Trauma trainings are also required.

The MN ADOPT Fostering Network provides information and assistance, including help selecting a licensing agency and/or addressing barriers. See <https://www.mnadopt.org/fostering-network/> or call 612-746-5133.

## Foster care benefits and services

All foster parents receive the same supports, including foster care payments and other services, to help keep children in their care. After a foster child is placed in a home, local county agency or appropriate tribal agency staff complete the Minnesota Assessment of Parenting Children and Youth (MAPCY), and provide the results in writing, including the amount of monthly payments. See “What is the MAPCY assessment?” in the Minnesota Department of Human Services’ eDocs library (DHS-7060A).

Agencies arrange for Medical Assistance or other medical insurance to cover a foster child’s medical, dental, vision care and mental health services. If a foster child needs additional services, agencies will assist to determine appropriate services and eligibility for those services. Services may include child protection, Medical Assistance, independent living and transition, mental health, disability, chemical dependency, home- and community-based services, Intensive Treatment in Foster Care, vulnerable adult services, or other services offered by a county or tribal agency.

## Participating in care and planning

Even if not able, or not selected, to be the foster care placement for relative child/ren, relatives may participate in care and planning for them, including:

- Participating in case planning
- Identifying strengths and needs of parent/s and child
- Supervising visits
- Providing respite and vacation visits for the child
- Providing transportation to appointments
- Suggesting other relatives who might be able to help support the case plan, and
- To the extent possible, helping to maintain child’s familiar and regular activities, and contact with friends and relatives.

See “Children in Foster Care: Using relative visits and alternative child care arrangements” in the eDocs library (DHS-7830A) for information on relative visitation and respite.



## Court reviews and permanency planning

Foster care is temporary. State and federal laws limit the time a child can remain in foster care, and require regular court reviews of placements. If a child cannot be safely returned to the care of their parent/s, the agency must seek a permanent home for them. Minnesota law prioritizes adoption, preferably with relatives, when a child cannot return home; in some circumstances the court may find that transfer of permanent legal and physical custody (TPLPC) is more appropriate.

Child's/ren's relatives have the right to ask to be notified of court hearings regarding the child and may attend hearings. To receive future notices about court hearings, contact the court administrator. Any foster parent or relative providing care for a child has a "right to be heard" and may speak at hearings. Any other relative may request an opportunity to be heard. Future notices of court hearings and the need for a permanent home will be sent to relatives who respond to a notice, unless the court relieves an agency of permanency notice requirements.

A decision not to be an initial placement resource should not affect later consideration. However, further notifications to relatives who did not respond to the initial notice, or were not involved in care and planning for the child, is not required when there is a family committed to adopting or accepting TPLPC. See the "Paths to Permanency" brochures in the eDocs library (DHS-7024A and DHS-7024B) for information about adoption and TPLPC.

## Northstar Adoption Assistance or Kinship Assistance benefits

For relatives who commit to permanency for foster children, Northstar Adoption Assistance or Kinship Assistance are available for eligible children. Based on eligibility, these programs provide monthly payments, Medical Assistance and reimbursement for non-recurring expenses incurred by caregivers to finalize an adoption or permanent transfer of physical and legal custody. For children age 6 and older, the monthly payment for these programs will be the same as foster care reimbursement. Relatives are encouraged to talk with county or tribal caseworkers about eligibility, licensing, commitment and other requirements under Northstar Adoption Assistance or Kinship Assistance.



