

# DOUGLAS COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES

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Dear Prospective Provider,

Enclosed is a folder regarding child foster care licensure. On one side you will find a number of informational handouts to provide an overview of Foster Care and Adoption in Minnesota. On the other side, you will find information specific to Douglas County. This information will answer some basic questions you may have about the licensing process and the children that may be placed in your home. You will also find the foster care application.

There are many things to consider before making your application for foster care. As with many families inquiring about foster care for the first time, there may be one member of your household who is more motivated or interested to foster care than other members. Fostering children will require partnership and involvement of all persons who live in the household. All adults are expected to participate in the licensing process. Some people are motivated by a sincere desire to provide support to families who are less fortunate or going through difficult times. Some are motivated by a desire to be of service. Those who may be motivated to provide foster care as a means to meet their own family's financial needs are not suitable candidates for this type of service. Although foster parents are provided reimbursement for the needs of the children in their care, providers cannot rely upon that reimbursement to cover all costs associated with fostering a child, nor can it be counted on as a source of income for the foster family. Doing foster care is challenging work and will take time away from your own children, family and at times, your employment. Fostering is an experience that will affect your entire family, even those children who no longer live at home. Many of the handouts in this folder are written for people interested in doing foster care to use as tools to help them evaluate further the impact that foster care might have on their family lives. If your family is uncertain, you are encouraged to have me out to your house to ask questions, to contact other foster families and to attend trainings and support groups held locally to learn more about the needs of the children we serve. There are many things to consider before formally beginning the licensing process.

If after reading the enclosed items and/or having your questions and concerns addressed, you decide that foster care is right for you and your family, the next step is to complete the Application form which is enclosed. Once we receive your application the licensing process really begins. We will send a short questionnaire to the three individuals you list as references. When considering persons to list for references, please consider people who have met you and your family members, individuals who have been to your home and have knowledge about your ability to provide a stable and healthy home for children. It would be helpful if you had discussed your family's plans to become licensed for foster care with these persons ahead of time. If you have any questions about how to complete the application, please call me.

Once an application is received by our agency, you will be provided an orientation manual. The first four chapters of this manual will cover the basic information about the licensing process. As part of the requirement for licensure, we must complete an applicant background study on all individuals 13 years of age or older that live at the prospective foster home or who will have significant involvement with the foster child(ren). This fingerprint-based Applicant Background Study will include a review of child protection, adult protection and criminal history records for every county, state, or country that the individual has resided in over the last five years.

As part of the licensing process, you will need to provide a statement that all family members are in good health, free from communicable disease, chemical dependency, mental illness and physically able to provide care to children or are receiving all recommended health care necessary to treat their health care conditions. We will also discuss any involvement that your family has had with community services such as counseling, chemical dependency treatment or law enforcement in order to identify if there are concerns that would need to be further addressed during the home study as well as life experiences that you have had which may be helpful in assessing how you can be a positive role model for a child.

As a part of licensing, we will be scheduling meetings so that I may meet your entire family and review the licensing paperwork with you. These visits can be arranged around your family's schedule. The completion of a Home Safety Checklist will include a walk through of your entire premises to verify compliance with fire and safety codes. If your home has a free-standing wood burning stove or fireplace, is a mobile home or apartment, a rental or would have a bedroom for a foster child located in the basement, you may be required to have an additional inspection completed by the State Deputy Fire Marshal. There is a \$50 inspection fee for the Fire Marshal which will be submitted at a point when we are in mutual agreement that you are ready to pursue completing licensure. At this time, the fee is paid by the county. From the time that we mutually decide you are ready; it will take 6-8 weeks for the Fire Marshal to work you into his schedule.

The licensing process will include a Home Study will consist of some in-depth discussion with your family members about your lifestyles, behavior guidance techniques, expectations for foster children and your own childhood and family life. This will help me get to know your family's strengths and expectations as well as help to identify any areas which we will need to review in more detail during subsequent meetings.

At the time that you inquired about licensure, I added your name to a list with other interested persons. I send notices to applicants and persons who have inquired about licensing regarding group training opportunities & other resources available for self study. Much of what you will learn about foster care will come from hands-on experiences while children are in your care, however, I cannot express enough the importance of applicants seeking out as much information and education about the needs of foster children as they can prior to accepting placements into your home. I strongly encourage applicants to participate in group orientation or self-study preparation. My experience has been that the *single most important factor in successful fostering* time and time again has been *PREPARATION*. A family who understands well the concepts mentioned above will have a far easier time managing the needs of the children in their care.

Although we strive to complete the licensing process within 6 months after the application is received, it would take months to adequately cover the basic concepts of foster care thoroughly in individual meetings only. Your completion of the licensing process is dependent upon your eagerness to complete it, coordination of our schedules, and your motivation to develop the skills that are necessary to be a successful foster parent. Recommended topics of preparation courses include separation/attachment loss, behavior guidance, working with natural parents, identification of abuse and neglect and how abuse and neglect affect child development.

There is no cost to you to make an application, attend the informational meetings, have the inspections, background study or home study completed. Many workshops are also free of charge. Once all the supporting documentation has been received and reviewed, we will evaluate the information and shall forward our recommendation for issuance or denial of a Child Foster Care License to the Commissioner within 20 days. Those homes that meet all the standards under the Child Foster Care Licensing Guidelines shall be recommended for issuance of a license. Failure, inability, or refusal to comply with licensing laws shall be cause for denial. Upon receipt of the denial letter from the Commissioner, the applicant shall have 20 calendar days to request an appeal and request a contested case hearing under Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 4.

Once licensed, there is no guarantee that a child will be placed with you. It is important to realize that the success of foster children involves matching them with families that are most likely to be able to meet their needs. This involves developing different kinds of homes for different kinds of children. Our needs vary, sometimes on a weekly basis. During summer months our agency has a higher demand for respite care providers. Respite care is intermittent care provided to a child in order to allow that child's full-time caregivers (other foster providers or birth parents) to have a break, renew their energy and to avoid full time or a change of placement. For many new applicants, respite care provides a way that they can experience foster care in a more controlled, time-limited way. Many see respite care as a way to "get

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their feet wet” or to see if foster care is right for their family before making a long-term commitment. It might seem like a small contribution but can be a great way to gain experience and skills and become familiar with workers and other foster parents.

If after reading the enclosed material you have other questions or concerns you would like to address, please give me a call or email. I will try to adjust my schedule as needed to meet around your family’s busy lifestyle if you would like to meet face to face. I recognize that foster care is not right for everyone and that it is a major decision in one’s life. For those who are committed and willing to put in some energy to meetings and paperwork, we will move forward. For those families who are not yet ready to make a full commitment to licensure, I typically contact you every few months to get updated on their interest and answer any additional questions they may have. You are welcome to call me at 320-762-3814 or e-mail me any time at [jenniferm@co.douglas.mn.us](mailto:jenniferm@co.douglas.mn.us) with questions or to set up home visits.

**Training requirements:**

- **Children’s Mental Health:** Required by all. Available in DVD and on-line options.
- **Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standards:** Required by all. Available in DVD and on-line options.
- **Child Passenger Safety Training:** Required for caring for children under 9 years of age. Available in classroom settings in many locations during day, evening, and weekend timeslots.
- **SUID and AHT Training:** Required for those caring for infants through 5 years of age. Available online.
- **Fetal Alcohol Training:** Required for all. Available online.
- **Smoke Free Foster Care:** Required where one or more applicant in the home is a smoker. Available online.

If you are serious about becoming licensed, please plan to register/view the videos or upcoming classes. If there are registration fees for classes you attend, you may be eligible for up to \$200 of training expenses/family upon licensure. The Douglas County website has links to the videos of most of the training listed above.

<http://www.co.douglas.mn.us/dc/child-foster-care-training.aspx>

In addition to the State Requirements, Douglas County, in partnership with surrounding rural counties has been providing Foster Care Orientation through a Blended Service Curriculum. This curriculum involves a combination of 10 online learning modules and four virtual group sessions led by a DHS trainer in addition to the licensing and homestudy visits. The total estimated time investment would be around 35-40 hours. A flier is included in the folder with more information.

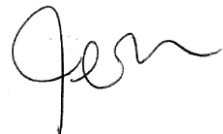
There are also many opportunities to do self-study through hundreds of foster care websites. Some of the most helpful sites can be found at [sociallearning.com](http://sociallearning.com) and [fosterparentcollege.com](http://fosterparentcollege.com). and [fosterparentstest.com](http://fosterparentstest.com) and [fosterclub.org](http://fosterclub.org). Your name will also be placed on a general mailing and email list, and you will receive notices about other training opportunities.

For additional information about becoming a foster parent in Minnesota, please go to:

<https://www.mnadopt.org/fostering-network/foster-care-process/>

Looking forward to hearing from you again!

Sincerely,



Jennifer McLaughlin, Licensing Worker