

Comprehensive Foster Care FAQ – Department of Child & Family Services (DCFS), Bermuda Government

General Eligibility

Do I have to be married to be a foster parent?

No. DCFS accepts applications from **single individuals, married couples, and blended families.**

Can non-Bermudians apply to be foster parents?

Yes. **Contract workers** are eligible to apply.

Do I need to own a home to foster?

No. **Homeownership is not required.** Renting is acceptable, but you may need permission from your landlord to foster.

Is there an age requirement for foster parents?

Applicants must be **at least 21 years old.** There is no upper age limit as long as you are emotionally, mentally, and physically capable of caregiving.

Do foster parents need to be employed?

You do not need to earn a specific income, but DCFS requires that you have **financial stability** and can meet personal financial obligations.

Do foster parents need a clean criminal record?

Yes. All applicants undergo **police vetting and child safety checks.** Certain convictions will disqualify applicants.

Home Requirements & Household Dynamics

Does a foster child need their own bedroom?

A separate bedroom is **not required**, but every foster child must have **their own individual bed.**

Can we foster siblings?

Yes. If your home has adequate space, you may foster a **set of siblings.** Foster parents may care for **up to three children.**

Are pets allowed in foster homes?

Yes. Homes with pets are welcome, but pets must be **safe, well-behaved**, and not pose risk to children. Children's allergies must also be considered.

Can I specify the age or gender of the child placed in my home?

Yes. Preferences are captured during the application process and placements are made with these considerations in mind.

Application Process

How do I start the application process?

All potential applicants must schedule a preliminary interview with the Foster Care Coordinator – at this meeting, you will receive the full application packet along with reading material.

How long does the approval process take?

Typically, **8-12 weeks**, depending on completion of background checks, training, and home assessment availability.

Is there a home assessment?

Yes. There is a mandatory Health Department Home Inspection completed along with a Home Study evaluation completed by a Social Worker.

Training & Support

Does DCFS offer training for new foster parents?

Yes. **Online and in-person training** is available before approval and ongoing support afterward.

What types of support will I receive as a foster parent?

- A dedicated **Social Worker** and Social Work Assistant
- Access to **counselling and therapeutic support**
- **24/7 emergency support line**
- Ongoing training and educational opportunities
- Peer support groups (where available)

Is respite care available for foster parents?

Yes. DCFS can arrange **short-term respite** so foster parents can take breaks when needed.

Placements & Daily Life

How long do children stay with foster parents?

There is no fixed duration. Length of stay depends on **Family Court rulings** and progress of the biological family.

What are the possible goals of foster placements?

Placements may aim for:

- **Reunification** with biological parents
- **Kinship care** (relative placement)
- **Long-term foster care**
- **Adoption**, in rare cases

Can foster children participate in extracurricular activities?

Yes. DCFS encourages participation in **sports, clubs, youth programs**, and other activities. Funding assistance may be available depending on the activity.

Can foster children travel with us?

Travel outside Bermuda requires **DCFS authorization** and **Family Court approval**. Local travel poses no restrictions.

What if we need support with a child's behaviour or emotional needs?

Your DCFS Social Worker will connect you with:

- Counselling
- Psychological assessments
- Behavioural support programs
- Specialist referrals

Financial Support

Are foster parents compensated?

Yes. DCFS provides:

- **A monthly stipend** to cover food and toiletries
- **A quarterly clothing allowance** for school uniforms and casual wear

Does the stipend cover all expenses?

It is designed to meet the child's basic needs. Additional expenses (e.g., school trips, sports, tutoring) may require approval or out-of-pocket contribution.

Are medical expenses covered?

Yes. All approved medical, dental, and therapeutic services are paid for.

Legal & Administrative FAQs

Who has legal custody of foster children?

DCFS, under the authority of the **Family Court**, maintains legal custody.

Do foster parents make major decisions for the child?

Day-to-day decisions can be made by foster parents.

Major decisions—medical, educational changes, travel, discipline procedures—require DCFS or Family Court involvement.

Are foster parents involved in court hearings?

Foster parents provide relevant information about the progress of the child which the social worker uses for court reports. Foster Parents are not required to attend Court Hearings.

Do biological parents visit their children?

In most cases, yes. Visits are arranged by DCFS and supervised according to **court orders** and the child's best interests.

Ending a Placement

What if fostering isn't working out?

You can request a meeting with your **Social Worker and Social Worker Assistant** to discuss challenges and explore support options. If necessary, you may **end the placement**.

What happens to the child if we request removal?

DCFS will arrange an alternative placement that is safe and appropriate for the child.

Adoption-Related Questions

Can foster parents adopt the children in their care?

It is possible but not guaranteed. Adoption occurs only if:

- The Foster Parents decide to make a formal application to adopt the child which results in a detailed court process.
- Reunification is not possible
- Adoption becomes the child's permanency plan

Is adoption common in the Bermuda foster system?

No. The primary goal is **reunification** with biological families, whenever safely possible.

Additional Program Details

What ages of children need foster homes in Bermuda?

There is ongoing need for:

- Infants
- School-aged children
- Teenagers (age group with the highest need)
- Sibling groups

Why is there an urgent need for foster parents?

The need arises from:

- Increases in child welfare cases
- Children who cannot safely remain at home
- The need to prevent children from being placed in group settings unnecessarily

What qualities make a strong foster parent?

- Patience and consistency
- Flexibility
- Willingness to learn
- Emotional resilience
- Ability to collaborate with DCFS
- A genuine desire to provide stability and love

Becoming Involved Without Fostering

What if I want to help but can't commit to fostering full-time?

You may consider becoming a:

- **Respite caregiver**
- **Mentor** or volunteer
- **Community donor** for clothing, school supplies, or holiday gifts

Contact & Next Steps

How do I contact DCFS to learn more or begin the application?

You can reach the Department of Child and Family Services:

- By phone: 296-7575
- By email: smsimons@gov.bm
- In person: “Customs House” 131 Front Street / 3rd Floor
- Or complete the **online intake form** on our landing page.