

We Said Yes!

A practical guide to your first week of navigating the foster care system.



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Welcome to the chaos!

I'll truly never forget my "first call" as a foster parent. You see your licensing worker's name on the caller ID and immediately your heart starts racing. You answer quickly and hear, "Hi! We're calling to see if you can take an 8-year-old boy...". In the emotional chaos that ensues, you probably forget to ask important questions, let alone think through all of the next steps you need to take to welcome this little one into your home.

This document exists to provide you with four facets of welcoming a foster child into your home: to ask, to do, to document, and to make easier. It is my hope that you will be able to use this document throughout your foster care journey and that it will ease some of the mental burden that comes with being a foster parent.

To Ask

Licensing, CPS, caseworker, attorney...the list goes on of people you will talk to in the next few days, so be sure to ask LOTS of questions!

- Why were the children removed from their home?
Gather as much information as possible about their background.
 - If the child was previously placed, can you contact that placement for information about the child (behaviors, triggers, likes/dislikes)?
 - When was the child's last well-visit and where at?
 - Are immunization records and birth certificate available?
(You'll want to keep these on file and may need for the child's school.)
 - Do the children have a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)?
 - Any known triggers for each child?
 - Are the children eligible for services (therapy, Early On, trauma evaluation, etc.)?
 - Any medications taken currently?
 - Does the child currently attends school and where?
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To Do

Besides reaching out to your local foster closet (hint: that's us!) for practical necessities your foster child will need, here are a few other important things to consider doing the first week.

- If the child hasn't had a recent well-visit, set one up! Just make sure whomever they're seeing accepts Medicaid.
- If the child hasn't seen a dentist recently, set that up too!
- Children ages 0-4 can be signed up for WIC food benefits. Contact the WIC office within your county. You'll need their Medicaid ID or SSN.
- If the children are eligible for Early On (under the age of 3), contact the Early On office for your county and get evaluations set up.
- If a child is on medication, you'll need to call the pharmacy and make sure they know that you are the new guardian of the child and have legal rights to pick up medication.

Note: WIC and Early On should be used through the county you're living in, not the county you're licensed in (because some are licensed in a different county than their address!).

To Document

I am of the opinion that there's no such thing as too much documentation when it comes to foster care. My folder is my best friend, especially in the first few weeks!

- I like to keep a running list of phone numbers on the fridge, including:
 - Caseworker
 - Licensing worker
 - GAL (child's attorney)
 - CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate)
 - Health liaison (if there is one)
 - As you observe them, document child behaviors. This will be especially helpful in the first few weeks so that when the agency asks you if you need extra support, you have documentation.
 - Create a separate folder in your email inbox for all communication regarding the case. This might be helpful down the road if issues arise, and some information is important for tax reasons.
 - Any contact with bio parents. Not all cases will involve contact with bio parents, but if you do talk to them, be sure to make note of when and what was said.
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To Make Easier...

By the time you've read this list, I will have likely thought of another 10 pages of random tips. There's always something to be learned about navigating the foster care system!

- Try to meet the bio parents right away, if it's safe to do so. It's good to get an overall feel for who they are and how they feel about you. I'd recommend transporting to the first few visits just so everyone gets comfortable with the new situation.
 - The kids are going to be thrown off for a while. They will probably be extremely picky about eating and sleeping. For the first week or two, just let them do their thing. If all they want is chicken nuggets, just go with it! They'll adjust over time.
 - Speaking of sleeping, some kids come into foster care and want to sleep a LOT. This is totally okay and a crucial part of their healing. Let them sleep!
 - In most situations, court happens every 3 months. Most times, nobody will inform you of this, so be sure to ask the caseworker/GAL when the next hearing is. You are legally allowed to attend if it is a public hearing, and I highly recommend doing so!
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To Make Easier...

- Many dentists don't accept Medicaid. See our separate PDF download with all Healthy Kids Dental dentists in Ingham County. Your child will either have Delta Dental or BCBS. It is important to figure out which one and clarify with the dentist that coverage is provided.
 - In most situations, the bio parents are legally allowed to come to doctor appointments. Make sure the caseworker knows about upcoming appointments so she can let the parents know. And, make sure the doctor also knows that bio parents might show up.
 - If you have ANY questions at all regarding the child or the case, don't be afraid to call licensing or the caseworker. It's so much better to ask than just assume.
 - Caseworkers have a LOT on their plate. They probably won't answer your call/text/email right away. I like to give them 24 hours to respond, and then if I hear nothing, I send another polite message.
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That's It!

Just kidding...

Welcoming a foster child into your home is a huge undertaking. This guide has only scratched the surface of the journey you're embarking on, but I hope that it at least helps you navigate the first week with a new placement.

You will soon be tired, in desperate need of a shower, and sick of eating mac n' cheese. BUT, you'll also be given the opportunity to love on a child who craves safety and healing. Foster care is joyful, broken, and everything in between. Ready or not, let's go!

Have more questions?

I can't promise that I'll be able to answer every single question, but I'll definitely give it a try! Feel free to email me:

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