



You may have been thinking about becoming a foster parent for some time now. Like many people who share your interest in helping children in need, there is much to think about and to consider before proceeding with an application to foster. We encourage you to enlist the help of our TFC Program's Recruiter/Trainer. He will answer all of your questions and will provide an honest assessment about whether Treatment Foster Care is a healthy fit for you and your family.

Before turning your interest into an application, we want to ensure that you have all the information you need. Appointments with the Recruiter/Trainer can be booked during the day, evenings, and whenever possible during weekends. Meetings can be held at Algoma Family Services or in your home.

Who can be a treatment foster parent?

Foster parents come from all walks of life. Some have their own children, some have grown children, some have never been parents before, some are couples and some are single. While the description varies, the following are some basic requirements:

- The minimum age requirement to foster is 18 years. However given the treatment aspect of fostering, life experience, good communication skills; ability to work as part of a treatment team, and having empathy and understanding for children with emotional problems will be important determining factors that must be explored.
- Your marital status should be unchanged over the past year. Foster parents can be single, married or living common-law.
- All family members should be interested in fostering.
- You should be physically, emotionally and financially stable.
- You and your family should not have had a major illness or trauma during the past year.
- With Treatment Foster Care, you must be able to provide a child with his or her own bedroom.
- You or your partner must be able to be in the home on a full-time basis. Your foster child will be taking part in a treatment program; therefore she/he will need your support to attend meetings with therapists and skills trainers. Treatment foster parents become an integral part of the treatment team. You will be required to attend weekly foster parent meetings for support and guidance.
- You will need reliable transportation and a willingness to drive a foster child to and from appointments and home visits.



Your home must have characteristics of a healthy family environment

Communication: In a healthy family, there is a shared belief that talking about "it" helps and that there are very few subjects that cannot be discussed within the family. Good communication within a family does not necessarily require sophisticated skills, but rather a belief that sharing is important, which is then carried into action.

Appreciation: In a healthy family, members are able to express caring for each other directly and consistently, give esteem-building messages to each other as individuals, and also to the family as a whole. Appreciation can be expressed directly – "*I love you*", "*I care about you*" – through appropriate touch, and by spending meaningful time together.

Time together: A climate exists in healthy families that says: "*our time together is important to our relationship*". This time together is often what special memories are made of and every family member's interests are considered during family time.

History: Healthy families have a sense of their past, often demonstrated by traditions and customs.

Outreach: This trait means that families are committed to something beyond themselves, that often demonstrates their values and own esteem, e.g. church, community activities, volunteerism, etc.

Ability to accept crisis into your lives: Within every family, there are bound to be times of crisis. In healthy families, the attitude is, "*how will we handle this one*", rather than folding because of a feelings of powerlessness. Healthy families also seem to learn from crisis and know when to ask for outside help. Treatment foster parents need to feel comfortable calling the program coordinator for guidance on a regular and sometimes daily basis. You are not expected to be a child behaviour expert; therefore an ability to ask for help is imperative to your success and the success of the child in treatment. We need to be assured that you are comfortable asking an expert who will be happy to provide help and guidance that is based on practices that have been well researched.

Support of each other's growth: There is a healthy support within the family that not only supports growth, but also actually encourages it. Research shows us that encouragement is a very powerful way to teach and elicit cooperation. It's easy to get so caught up in dealing with problem behaviour that we forget one of the most important parts of being a treatment foster parent – supporting your child and encouraging positive behaviour. Children learn new skills by either being corrected through consequences or through encouragement. Treatment foster parents use a ratio of at least 4 to 1 of positive comments to corrective ones. You will receive lots of support to build that level of support into your daily routine.



Characteristics of a treatment foster family & parent

- Open versus closed family system (uses program support and resources)
- Accepting of your family as being different from others
- High tolerance for stress within your family system
- Do not take behaviour or verbal abuse personally
- Open to new ideas and information
- Tolerant of being seen as different
- Balanced and mature personality
- Can delay your own gratification
- Sensitive to other's needs
- Flexible and adaptable
- Willing to be involved
- Self-disciplined
- Self-motivated
- Determined
- Resourceful
- Optimistic
- Intuitive
- Creative
- Resilient
- Observant
- Enthusiastic
- Self-sufficient
- Loving and caring
- Strong in self-care
- Strong marital relationship
- Have realistic expectations
- Commitment to family Patient
- Can find happiness in small measures
- Able to accept guidance and clinical direction
- Make decisions based on logic rather than feelings
- Able to address concerns rather than let them fester
- Acceptance of people and behaviours that are different
- View fostering as a family matter rather than an individual's problem
- Able to tolerate differences in terms of behaviour and depth of relationship

OFFERING UNDERSTANDING TO A FOSTER CHILD

After learning that his home visit was unfortunately cancelled, Billy stomps off to his room, slams the door and yells, “*I hate all of you*”. When he emerges, his treatment foster parent responds to Billy’s stomping, door slamming and his comment ...

“I’m sorry things didn’t work out with your home visit, Billy. I know you were looking forward to seeing your family. You were disappointed and angry about not being able to go and I really like that you took time in your room to calm down”.