



GETTING STARTED ON YOUR FOSTER CARE JOURNEY

JFS Richmond has developed this information to provide information in response to frequently asked questions about important policies and procedures that will impact your foster care journey.

1. What is an example of the paperwork I will get and be asked to sign?

As a foster parent you will be provided a placement agreement for each child coming into your home. The [Code of Ethics and Mutual Responsibilities Placement Agreement](#) will have an attached Financial Agreement for your review and information. You will be provided The Code of Ethics during annual training and when each child comes into your home. The Agreement is **only** useful if you use it. Take time to read it. When children leave or enter your home take time to discuss the Agreement with your worker. Talk about what has been working and any changes that could improve experiences for children. As a foster parent you will be required to sign the Agreement along with the worker and agency director. The agreement is required by state policy.

2. Will I receive any financial support to cover the expenses of caring for a child?

Foster parents receive a monthly maintenance payment that helps cover some of the costs associated with raising a child. To learn about 2020 foster care rates visit Section 18 of the Foster Care Manual. The child in your care may also require additional parental supervision. The Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool (VEMAT) is used to identify the behaviors or conditions of the child that will require additional parental supervision. If the assessment determines the child needs additional daily parental supervision, a payment will be made to you in addition to the monthly maintenance payment.

NOTE: Please contact your tax accountant for tax guidance regarding foster care payments. Generally, foster care payments are not considered income for tax purposes. If a child has resided with you for greater than 6 months, you may be able to claim them as a dependent, but you must have the social security number for the child in order to claim them. [Here is an IRS guide to assist you.](#)

3. Will the agency work with me to plan for the child's service needs?

Foster parents are expected to participate as members of the professional team that will make plans for a child and their needed services. As foster parents you must be provided notice of all court hearings, Family Assessment Planning Team (FAPT) meetings, and foster care planning meetings, so that you can provide information about the child and their progress or issues. Learn more about a foster parent's right to be heard in the legal process from [Virginia's Court Improvement program](#) and Virginia DSS requirements for [family engagement](#), view pages 23-26.

4. May I contest the agency's placement decisions?

Foster parents report that one of the most difficult moments in their foster care experience is when a child it moved out of their home. It is important to know that foster parents do not have any appeal rights regarding an agency's placement decision. The agency or the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services may remove the child placed for foster care at any time from your home. However, the [Virginia DSS Guidance Manual](#) says that changes in foster services or placement do require written notice to the foster parents except in cases of abuse or neglect or a court-order. Removals for abuse or neglect are conducted by child protective services and/or police, in which case you will be presented with their credentials. Never release a child to anyone without proper credentials.

5. When the court approves a child's service plan, will I receive a copy of the plan?

Virginia law requires that Foster parents are provided copies of a child's court-approved services plan. The agency placing the child in your care is also required to provide you with all available information about the child, such as medical conditions, trauma history, medications, etc. The [Foster Care Manual](#) (beginning on page 6) will provide you with more detailed information.

6. Do I have to tell the agency about issues when the child confides in me?

As a foster parent, you must provide the local agency with any information about the child that can impact their care or may be relevant to the agency responsible for the care and protection of the child. Be sure to keep a log of all information provided to the agency including dates and times. If a child discloses any information to you that could impact their health, safety, or actions by social services, you must immediately contact the child's worker, preferably in writing and by phone. In addition, as a foster parent you are mandated to report of abuse or neglect and should review this [material](#).

7. May I include the child in family or public photographs?

Foster parents are required to keep all of a child's information confidential. In addition, **written permission** from the agency is required before a foster parent may share photographs of children in foster care outside of the immediate family. Confidentiality is governed by [Virginia Code](#).

8. How do I participate in special education services planning?

As a foster parent you are expected to participate in a child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). If the birth parent is unable to participate in this planning, then as a foster parent you will be asked to sign the IEP. If the birth parent requests to participate in this process, then you still may attend and provide feedback, but the birth parent will sign off on the plan. The Virginia Department of Education has developed a [Parent's Guide to Special Education](#) and you can find specific information for foster parents on pages 6 and 7.

9. May I file on my own to adopt a child living in our home?

Many foster parents become the adoptive parents for children in their home. Most often, the agency will assist with the adoption process. However, Virginia Code does allow for foster parents to directly petition the courts to adopt any child for whom parental rights have been terminated when the child has been in their home for a continuous 18 months. The [Virginia Code](#) identifies the circumstances for foster parent adoption petitions.

10. What if I have a family emergency or situation that requires me to travel without the child?

Foster Parents may request respite through the local department. Local Agencies are provided funding to cover respite costs for foster parents. Local agencies can help with the funds and the rules for using respite are flexible and designed to prevent foster care disruptions. Learn more about respite by reviewing [the VDSS Foster Care manual](#) (page 19).

This information is provided to assist you in understanding the foster care process in Virginia. There is much more to learn about foster care in Virginia, but we hope this may answer a few of your initial questions.

Thank you for considering foster care – a child's life depends on you!