

STANDARDS FOR DCF FOSTER/PRE-ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

The need is great for families to become foster care and adoption placements for children who enter DCF care or custody. DCF welcomes your expression of interest in becoming a foster or adoptive family for such children. We hope you appreciate our need to ensure that DCF children receive the care they deserve from qualified families who are fully prepared for the role they are assuming.

The children in the care and custody of the Department need close and careful supervision. DCF, therefore, establishes capacity limits on the number of children residing and being cared for in any foster or pre-adoptive home, inclusive of child care and babysitting, of up to 6 children in total, of whom up to 4 may be foster/pre-adoptive children. In addition, up to 2 children age 24 months or younger and only 1 infant age 1 month or younger, except for siblings, can be cared for by the foster/ pre-adoptive parent. Waivers may be available under certain circumstances.

Standards for Eligibility to Apply

DCF utilizes these standards and those below for foster/pre-adoptive family *homes* to determine at the outset whether families meet certain basic requirements:

- Any individual providing foster/ pre-adoptive care must have reached her/his 18th birthday. The parent of a child to be placed in foster/ pre-adoptive care is not eligible to be a foster/pre-adoptive parent for that child. All approved foster/pre-adoptive parents are eligible to receive reimbursement for children placed in their home. This reimbursement is equal to the standard foster care rate for a child of that age.
- All household members, age 14 years and older, must have a record which is free of criminal conduct which, in the judgment of the Department, bears upon the foster/pre-adoptive family's ability to assume and carry out the responsibilities of a foster/pre-adoptive parent.
- No member of the household has currently, or during the 12 months prior to completion of Initial Eligibility Screening, has had a DCF open case. The hosting Regional Director may approve a waiver, based on a review of supporting information and the approval of a clinical review team, for one of the following exceptions:
 - The individual/household member has a DCF open case to receive services following an adoption legalization.
 - The individual/household member has a DCF open case to receive services on behalf of a child for whom a household member is a guardian.
 - The family is a prospective *kinship* placement (ONLY), and the household member who has the open case is the teen parent of a child to be placed, the teen is NOT the person alleged to be responsible for the physical or sexual abuse of any child in a supported 51B investigation, and it is considered to be in the child's best interests for the teen parent to be a member of that kinship household.
 - Any other circumstance as approved by the Regional Director, upon the recommendation of a Regional clinical review team.

- No member of the household has been identified as the person alleged to be responsible for abuse or neglect of a child in a supported 51B investigation and the report which identified her/him is referred to the District Attorney.
- No member of the household has a history of involvement with the Department which would bear adversely on the prospective foster/pre-adoptive parent's ability to assume and carry out foster/adoption responsibilities.
- The family has a stable source of income for support of current household members.
- The family has a stable housing history and current housing which meets the Department's physical requirements and currently has sufficient space to accommodate at least one additional household member within the Department's limits for maximum number of children in the home.
- At least one prospective applicant in the household has a basic ability to read and write in English or in the family's primary language.
- The prospective applicant(s) has sufficient time and availability to be a foster/pre-adoptive parent(s). A foster/pre-adoptive parent may place a foster/pre-adoptive child in work-related child care for no more than 50 hours per week for a pre-school age child or 25 hours per week for a child in grade 1 or up.
- No animal that poses a danger to a foster/pre-adoptive child is maintained on the premises of the home.

Standards for Foster/Pre-Adoptive Family Homes

- Home must be clean, safe, free of obvious fire and other hazards, and of sufficient size to accommodate comfortably all members of the household and the approved number of foster/pre-adoptive children.
- Home must have safe and adequate lighting, ventilation, hot and cold water supply, plumbing, electricity and heat.
- Home must be furnished with a refrigerator and cooking stove in safe working condition.
- No foster/pre-adoptive child over age one year shall share a bedroom with an adult.
- No foster/pre-adoptive child over age 4 years, except for siblings up to age 8 years, shall share a bedroom with a child of the opposite sex.
- Home must have sufficient furniture to allow each child to sleep in a separate bed and to have adequate storage space for her/his personal belongings.
- Home must have bedrooms which provide at least 50 square feet per child; the Department may waive this requirement for *kinship* homes if the bedrooms provide at least 35 square feet per child.
- No bedroom to be used by foster/ pre-adoptive children shall be located above the second floor unless any such floor has 2 safe means of egress.

- No bedroom to be used by foster/pre-adoptive children shall be located below the first floor unless it contains a ground level, standard door exit and at least one operable window.
- The home shall be equipped with smoke detectors in working order on every floor, including the basement.
- If well water is used, it shall be tested and determined safe, and a report of the test results furnished to the Department.
- The home must not have any household member, alternative caretaker or frequent visitor who would, in the judgment of the Department, pose a threat of abuse or neglect to children placed in the home, or would impede or prevent the provision of adequate foster/pre-adoptive care in the home.
- Any firearms located in the home shall be registered and licensed in accordance with state law. All firearms shall be trigger-locked or fully inoperable and stored without ammunition in a locked area. Ammunition shall be stored in a separate locked location.
- The family has a working telephone in the home for both incoming and outgoing calls.
- All dogs maintained on the premises of the foster/pre-adoptive home must have up to date vaccinations and rabies shots, and must be licensed in accordance with local authority requirements.
- No child under age 12 will be placed in a home where a Rotweiler, Pit Bull or German Shepherd dog, or a dog which mixes at least 2 of these 3 breeds, is maintained on the premises, except after a review conducted in accordance with 110 CMR 7.105 (18) and with the approval of the Regional Director.
- Any home that is used for family child care must be in compliance with the requirements of OCCS, as set forth in 102 CMR 8.06 – 8.09.

Standards for Licensing

After being determined eligible to apply, families complete an application and begin a license study, during which DCF evaluates whether the family and home meet the following standards:

- Foster/pre-adoptive parent(s), through the successful completion of the Department's license study and of the DCF-approved foster/pre-adoptive family pre-licensing training program specified for the type of licensing they are seeking, must demonstrate skill in parenting and providing substitute care including the following:
 1. *The physical and emotional stability and well-being to assure that a child placed in her/his care will experience a safe, supportive and stable family environment which is free from abuse and neglect.*
 2. *The ability to assure that a child placed in her/his care will be provided with adequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision and other essential care at all times.*
 3. *The ability to assure that a child placed in her/his care will be provided with routine and emergency medical and dental care.*
 4. *The ability to assure that a child in her/his care will be expected to attend school regularly and will be provided with the opportunity to participate in an educational program and extracurricular activities which meet her/his needs.*
 5. *The ability to promote the physical, mental and emotional well-being of a child in her/his care.*

6. *The ability to draw upon community and professional resources as needed.*
7. *The ability to transport children within standards set by state law.*
8. *The ability to respect the integrity of a foster/adoptive child's racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious background.*
9. *The ability to manage the stressful situations which are frequently associated with the placement of a child such as the temporary nature of the placement, the integration of a child in crisis into the family, and the potential return of the child to his/her family.*
10. *The ability to assist the foster/adoptive child in handling their situation, such as removal from the home of the parent(s); placement in a new home environment, including a new school (when applicable); visits with parents and siblings; and possible return to the home of the parent(s) or placement in other substitute care.*
11. *The ability to deal with difficult issues in the foster/pre-adoptive child's background and to be able to talk with the child comfortably and constructively about her/his birthparents and family.*
12. *The ability to have reasonable expectations of foster/pre-adoptive children's behavior and potential growth.*
13. *The ability to respect and be bound by the same standards of confidentiality as the Department and its employees.*
14. *The ability to accept and support the foster/pre-adoptive child's relationship with her/his parents and the Department.*
15. *The ability to work with the Department and the foster/pre-adoptive child's parents in implementing the child's service plan in order to meet developmental goals and outcomes.*
16. *The ability to develop with the Department and participate in trainings, education, and support, as specified in the family's DSS-approved annual "Professional Development Plan" to assist the family in meeting the needs of the child(ren) to be placed in their care.*
17. *The ability to assume and carry out all responsibilities of a foster/pre-adoptive parent as detailed in "An Agreement Between the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families and Foster/Pre-Adoptive Parents".*

- Foster/pre-adoptive parent applicants must be free of any physical, mental or emotional illness which, in the judgment of the Department would impair her/his ability to assume and carry out the responsibilities of a foster/pre-adoptive parent. No handicap in and of itself shall disqualify an individual from eligibility as a foster/pre-adoptive parent.
- Foster/pre-adoptive applicants must not provide, or seek to provide, foster/pre-adoptive care to a child solely for the purpose of applying for or receiving fees, income or other benefits from public or private sources for anyone other than the foster/pre-adoptive child.

Following completion of the written license study, all foster/pre-adoptive parent(s) will enter into **An Agreement Between the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families and Foster/Pre-Adoptive Parents** which will indicate the type of license the family received according to the following categories:

- kinship,
- child-specific, or
- unrestricted.

All foster/ pre-adoptive families are reassessed using these standards, as well as DCF regulations and policy, on an annual basis. Licenses are renewed every 2 years.