

How to Become a Foster Parent in North Carolina

A Step-by-Step Guide

BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOMES OF NORTH CAROLINA

Bringing children home—to family, to community, and to Christ

If God has been stirring something in you about foster care, the question that usually comes next is a practical one: what does this actually involve?

Here's the honest answer, start to finish.

Becoming a licensed foster parent through BCH takes about four to six months. It involves 30 hours of training, at least three home visits, background checks, and a significant amount of paperwork. It is not a fast process, and that is on purpose.

Children who have already lost a great deal deserve homes that have been carefully and prayerfully prepared.

None of it is meant to be intimidating. Every family who walks this road walks it with a licensing worker beside them. And you do not have to be married to foster. Single adults are licensed through BCH, and they do this work well.

Who This Guide Is For

Whether you're exploring foster care for your own family, a pastor walking alongside someone who is, or a caseworker handing this to a family who asked "what's the process?", this guide lays out every step in plain language.

Feel free to share it. That's what it's for.

First, an Honest Conversation About Reunification

Before anything else, we talk with every family about the goal of foster care. It may not be the goal you're expecting.

Reunification is always the first goal.

The purpose of foster care is to care for a child while their family works toward bringing them home. Adoption can come out of foster care, but it is not what foster care is for.

We say this plainly and early, because we never want to give a family false hope. If your heart is specifically set on adoption, foster care may not be the road, and it's far better to know that now than four months in.

That's not a discouragement. It's the beginning of honesty between us, and honesty is what this work runs on.

Considering adoption instead? If adoption is where you sense God leading your family, that's worth exploring directly rather than hoping it happens through foster care. Ask us about The Christian Adoption Process in North Carolina, our companion guide to that process.

Step One: Application, References, and a First Visit

Baptist Children's Homes is a Christ-centered ministry, and our process reflects that from the very first step.

What You'll Submit

- One application for your household. If there are two adults in the home, both are included on the same application.
- A pastoral reference. Give us your pastor's name, phone number, and email address, and we will send the reference form directly to them. We'll ask about your faith and where you worship. One pastoral reference covers the household, and it's required before we can approve you for class.
- Three personal references each. Each adult provides three of their own, separate from the pastoral reference.

Your First Home Visit

Once your application and pastoral reference are in hand, your licensing worker visits your home before training begins.

This isn't an inspection to catch you out. It's so that if something needs attention, like a water hazard, a safety fix, or a change to a bedroom, you find out now, while you still have months to take care of it.

No surprises. That's the whole point.

Step Two: Training, Paperwork, and Getting to Know You

Once you're approved for class, North Carolina requires 30 hours of training. We typically break that into ten weekly sessions of three hours each, from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Schedules can vary by location, but the training always totals 30 hours.

Classes are often hosted by a partner church. Sometimes those host churches provide a meal before class or even childcare during it, because we know exactly what a weeknight looks like when you have a family.

What Happens Alongside Training

While training is underway, we're also working through:

- Background checks and fingerprinting
- MARS training (Medication Administration in Residential Settings)
- A fire inspection of your home
- A 16-page foster parent questionnaire for each parent

That questionnaire is more personal than the page count suggests. It asks about your background, where you come from, and how you handle conflict and hard seasons. It isn't a test. It's how we come to know you well enough to place a child in your home with real confidence.

Visits and Interviews

- Three home visits total are required, including the first one
- One office visit for interviews. We talk with everyone in the family, including your children.
- Additional visits may be scheduled depending on your family's situation

If that sounds like a lot of attention, it is. We'd rather know you well than know you quickly.

Step Three: Submission and State Review

When training, visits, and paperwork are complete, your licensing worker compiles everything into a roughly 20-page licensing document, gathers all required state documentation, and submits the packet to the state of North Carolina.

From there:

- The state has 30 business days to review your submission
- If corrections are needed, resubmission can add another 30 days

Then comes the part nobody loves: waiting. It's a good season for prayer, and for getting a bedroom ready.

So How Long Does This Really Take?

Four to six months, start to finish, and a good portion of that timeline is genuinely in your hands.

Your licensing worker will move as quickly as you're willing to move. Some families turn in every form by the last night of class. Others take their time, and that is completely fine. There is no penalty for going at the pace your family actually needs.

This isn't a race. It's preparation.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long does it take to become a foster parent in North Carolina?

About four to six months from application to state approval. Much of the timeline depends on how quickly the family completes paperwork and training.

How many hours of foster parent training does North Carolina require?

Thirty hours. Through BCH, this is typically delivered as ten weekly three-hour classes, though the schedule can vary by location. Sometimes a host church provides a meal or childcare.

Do I have to be a church member to foster through BCH?

BCH is a Christ-centered ministry, and a pastoral reference is required as part of the application. We'll talk with you about your faith and your church home during the process.

Can I adopt a child I foster?

Sometimes, but adoption is never the goal of foster care. Reunification with the child's family always comes first. Families who feel specifically called to adopt should explore the adoption process directly.

How many home visits are required to become a licensed foster parent?

Three at minimum, including one before training begins. More may be scheduled based on your family's circumstances.

Do both parents have to complete the foster parent training?

Yes. Every adult in the home completes the references, questionnaire, and all 30 hours of training. If two adults live in the home, both are named on the same application. Single adults foster with us as well, and they complete these same requirements.

What is MARS training for foster parents?

MARS stands for Medication Administration in Residential Settings, the certification required to safely administer medication to children in your care.

What happens after I'm licensed as a foster parent?

Your licensing worker stays connected with your family. Licensing is the beginning of the relationship, not the end of it.

Taking the First Step

You don't need to have it all figured out. You don't need a perfect house or a perfect family. You need a willingness to begin a conversation.

Reach out to our foster care team to get started, or join an upcoming information session.

For Pastors and Caseworkers

If you're walking alongside a family considering foster care, feel free to share this guide directly. You're welcome to link to it from a bulletin, a newsletter, or an email.

Questions about how your church can support foster families? We'd love to hear from you.

Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina

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