

Leave a Legacy,

Foster a Child

A Guide to Becoming a Foster Parent

FAMILY
SERVICES
Legacy

A silhouette of a family consisting of a man, a woman, and a child. The man is pointing towards the right, the woman is kneeling, and the child is standing between them.

A FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY





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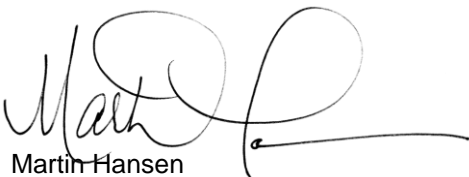
1. Introduction

If you and I were to find ourselves talking to each other in an informal setting, maybe standing in line at the DMV, or after church in the foyer, or waiting to pick up kids after school, I would inevitably talk to you about the seldom-discussed world of foster care. It's a world that I get to experience every day. Children, through no fault of their own, find themselves in the most difficult and scary situation of their young lives. They are removed from their parents and homes. At the same time that these sad and uncertain events occur, other parents are readying their homes and families for the arrival of new children, some who are temporarily theirs and others who will become their own children permanently. It is amazing. It is gratifying. It can be shocking. It is sometimes sad. Serving as a foster parent is perhaps one of the most unselfish and unique ways that individuals can help their fellowmen. It is a great pleasure for me to be able to experience this world and to have the privilege of introducing foster care to you.



If you have found your way to this guide you represent a special and small percentage of our population. You represent people who are willing to take children into the home, who have made the job of parenting a priority, so much so, that you want to offer your skills and abilities to the community at large. Foster parents like you have a different sort of heart. Your heart aches when you see a child suffering. You feel compelled to act because you cannot tolerate that a child be left in an abusive or neglectful situation. Foster parents also tend to be a grateful group of people. They like to share their blessings, and their space, literally. You feel like if you have an empty bedroom, why not fill it with someone who could really use it. There truly are not many people like you around anymore. It is always amazing to me to encounter such special and willing parents.

I hope that you will find these pages of great benefit to you as you begin your journey to becoming a foster parent. If I could tell you one thing about becoming a foster parent it's that the hard work is well worth it. If you have come to this point it has been because you have had success with children, possess certain characteristics and strengths, and because you have desires to grow your family and to serve other people. Please know that we are here to help in any and all ways. We love what we do and we know that you will love it too.


Martin Hansen



2. The Process

Becoming a foster parent requires several steps. We will help you take each step and orient you so that the process is clear. These steps are required by the state of California to ensure that all individuals who desire to become foster parents are properly instructed and prepared. At Legacy our process and education is second to none. The process includes the following:

- 1. Receive a brief orientation-**This can be done in person or over the phone. Orientation is designed to help you make an informed decision. Before you commit yourself to the process, you should know what that entails. We present a general overview, but more importantly it includes a question and answer period where you can ask about those things that are important to you and your family. Typically, we assist in filling out applications at orientation.
- 2. Provide an application, basic budget information, and background disclosure-** once you have decided you would like to be a foster parent you will fill out some basic paperwork. Our staff will process your paperwork and confirm that you meet the qualifications.
- 3. Complete a physical and TB Test-** The state of California requires that all foster parents have a health assessment as well as a TB test to be completed by your doctor. The Health assessment is a simple screening to make sure that one is physically fit to be a foster parent and that they are free of any actively communicable diseases.
- 4. Pass a Background Check-** We will pay to have you and your spouse fingerprinted. Each person over the age of 18 that lives in your home must be fingerprinted. The fingerprints will be matched up against the FBI database, the Department of Justice, as well as the California Child Abuse Index. Once cleared you are able to continue to the next steps.
- 5. Complete 12 hours of training-** We are happy to provide to you free of charge 12 hours of foster care preparation classes which are typically divided into 2 or 3 class sessions in order to fit around your busy work and family schedules. This is a requirement of the State of California. We have designed our training to be interactive, fun, and informative. When you leave training you will have the necessary foundational training to begin fostering children.
- 6. Complete additional paperwork during training-** One of the reasons our training is so important is because you will receive additional documents that allow you to lawfully serve as a foster parent. We cover many helpful topics such as the laws that govern foster care, the reimbursement process for families who are serving as foster parents and many other important topics. We also answer questions and assist you in the process of understanding the sometimes confusing paperwork that has to be completed.
- 7. Be Certified in Child and Adult CPR/First Aide-** Each person who serves as a foster parent will need to be certified in child and adult CPR and First Aide. We can assist you in obtaining this certification. A CPR/First Aide certification lasts up to two years.
- 8. Have a home inspection-** We love visiting our families in their homes. Prior to receiving children into your home we will provide to you a list of the necessary aspects any foster care home must demonstrate before children arrive in the home. After you know what we will be looking for in a home inspection we will come to your home to complete the inspection. Many people worry they must live in perfect and luxurious homes. This is not true. We will assist you as you ready your home for the reception of children.
- 9. Home Study-** A home study is comprehensive biography of the family that is applying to certify. It is completed through a series of at least two interviews whereby a social worker develops and documents an understating of the just who your family is, and what your goals of foster care are. More importantly, we work to develop an understanding of your strengths and weaknesses, as well as the types of behavioral problems you may not be willing or able to work well with. We then use this tool throughout the certification process to help properly match children to their placement homes.



Additional Information about the Process

Obstacles-Although the majority of families that come to Legacy will proceed through the certification process easily, occasionally we have to work around obstacles that may present themselves. These obstacles can delay the process of certification. Generally these obstacles fall into 3 categories:

- Criminal History
- Issues related to the home
- Finances

Criminal History- If you have had contact with the police, other than speeding tickets, these issues will reveal themselves in the fingerprinting process, regardless of how old the incident may be. We ask that any applicant who has had contact with the police let us know this in advance of being fingerprinted so that we can anticipate any additional steps that we may need to carry out. Within foster care, crimes fall into two categories:

- Exemptible - Some crimes, which are at least 10 years old, and which do not involve serious or violent offenses can be deemed “exemptible”. We will work with you to apply for an exemption if you, for example, have a DUI from 20 years ago.
- Non-exemptible - These include crimes for which the state of California will not grant an exemption. Any serious violent crime against a child, spouse, or anyone else for that matter will preclude a person from serving as a foster parent. For a complete list of exemptible versus non-exemptible crimes please call our offices.

Home Corrections

- Your home is actually what gets certified, not you the parent/s. As such, your home has to meet with certain title 22 requirements. Even with newly built homes we often find things that need to be done in order to certify a home within compliance of our governing regulations. Before making any changes to your home in the anticipation of certification, one should check with the social worker who is helping them in the process of certification, to make sure that any changes that are made will in fact meet with regulatory requirements.

Financial Abnormalities

- For the process of certification, one needs to demonstrate that they have adequate income to cover their own financial obligations. Sometimes we have applicants who would like to do foster care as a sole source of income. Fostering is not job in this sense of the word. Foster parents are neither employees nor contracts of the company. Reimbursement is provided for the care and supervision of the children who we place with you.



Transferring from another agency?

- We love to welcome new families to Legacy and hope that you will find your time with us productive, helpful, and smooth. If you are transferring from another agency we may have you fill out some additional documents in order for us to transfer your fingerprints to Legacy. You will be required to take our training and provide documents to us including your physical exam and TB test, your certification for CPR/First Aide, and other Legacy documents. We try to make this as easy and quick as possible and will work with your former agency to expedite the process. A person can only be associated with one agency at a time.



Requirements

How do I qualify to become a foster parent?

Taking into account what was mentioned in the section on the process to become a foster parent, below you will find the basic requirements to become a foster parent. A foster parent:



- Must be at least 18 years old
- Must be fingerprinted and pass the background check. This includes all other adults in the home as well.
- Must have adequate income
- Must be trained in CPR and First Aide
- Must complete 12 hours of training
- Must have adequate space in the home
- Foster Care homes must have smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, and carbon monoxide alarms
- Must have a valid driver's license, car insurance, and a working car.
- Must have a landline telephone with a phone number that works.
- Must keep weapons locked up with guns and ammo stored separately
- Must lock up medications and poisons such as cleaning supplies



Things we don't require in order to qualify

Sometimes people think they have to be married in order to be a foster parent. They think they must have a large home or a large bank account. Our families sometimes think they have to have biological children in order to qualify. We have single foster parents, some with biological children, and some without. Most of our families are considered middle income but are so generous as well as careful with their funds that they make great foster parents. If you have any questions about your ability to qualify as a foster parent please call our office and we will answer your questions.



How do I qualify to adopt a foster child?


The process of adoptions starts with becoming a foster parent. In fact, many of the steps required for adoption are accomplished through that process. Of course, there are a couple of extra steps that will need to be taken by parents who want to adopt. We will try to outline them for you at this point.

First, all adoptive parents are required to attend a County sponsored Foster/Adoption Orientation to learn more about County foster children and the county system. It is free, but requires a commitment of 12 additional training hours. If you know that you want to adopt, we would invite you to attend this orientation during the certification process with Legacy. This will help you prepare for the road ahead. Legacy can help you coordinate these trainings. Parents often decide at a later point that adoption is something for them. If that is the case, we would coordinate your attending the County sponsored Foster/Adoption Orientation.

Second, you will need to fill out a County application to adopt. This really starts the process. The county uses your application to start the process of you becoming adoptive parents. The application is not too difficult and Legacy can provide assistance in filling it out.

From there you are assigned a County Adoptions Social worker. This will be a social worker in addition to your Legacy Foster Care Social Worker. The Adoptions worker is assigned specifically to process your adoption. They are great people and their sole purpose is to place eligible foster children into good homes like yours. They will be a great partner for you in the process.





Third, all adoptive parents are required to have a specialized adoption home study done on their family. It is referred to as a SAFE home study. It is not much different from the home study you undergo to become a foster parent, but it follows a required format for adoptions. If you met the requirements of Legacy's home study for foster care, you should not have a problem with the SAFE home study.

In addition to the SAFE home study, the county adoptions worker will review many of the documents that you supplied to become a foster parent. These include; Criminal background check, Medical exam, Verification of employment, Reference letters, and Disclosure of financial condition. Again, if you qualified to be a Legacy Foster Parent, you should not have any problems qualifying to adopt through the county system.

Once all the process is complete, it is a waiting game. Behind the scenes, the county is preparing and submitting court reports and legal briefs that are clearing the way for the official adoption. At times it might feel like nothing is happening; but the truth is adoptions go through a complicated bureaucracy before they are official. Legacy will be there for you during this time to help communicate status and make you feel comfortable through the process.

Here are some commonly asked questions by potential adoptive parents of foster children;

Do I have to be married to adopt?

No. Adoptive parents can be single or married, male or female.

Am I too old or too young to adopt?

The general rule is that an adoptive parent must be at least 10 years older than the child they are wishing to adopt. Many grandparents or retired people are also adopting children today.

Do I have to be wealthy to adopt?

No. While independent adoptions through a private adoption agency generally cost thousands of dollars, the fee for adopting a child through Kern County Adoption Agency is approximately \$500, which is routinely waived by DHS.

Is financial and medical assistance available?

While prospective adoptive families need to be self-supporting, most children adopted through the Agency are eligible for financial assistance and Medi-Cal through the Adoption Assistance Program. Assistance is based on need and may continue until the child is age 21. The program is designed to allow children to be adopted rather than remain in foster care.



Misconceptions about Foster Care

Legacy hopes to dispel the myths that exist, the ideas perpetuated in the media, and the misconceptions some people hold about foster care by correcting and informing them based on our years of experience. We are aware of the sometimes-negative impressions people can have about foster children, and the risks inherent to being a foster parent. We truly believe that by educating people about what fostering is really like we can dispel these misconceptions. Provided in this guide are the top misconceptions we have found as we interact with our clients and the community at large.

Misconception: People are intimidated by what they believe to be a broken legal and social services system. This perception is often created by negative experiences that friends or family have had with fostering children. They "hear" bad stories about dealing with government entities such as county social workers, courts, lawyers etc. and fear having to navigate such intimidating agencies that hold power in these situations.

The truth: While we can all think of sad or challenging fostering situations we've witnessed either with family or in the news, for every frustrating outcome there are hundreds and hundreds of successful fostering stories. Even as you read this article there are children all over the valley being cared for in the very best of circumstances by happy and satisfied foster Mom's and Dad's. In fact, most children placed in foster care have good experiences and so do their foster families. Even though courts and judges hold some measure of influence in foster care situations so do Legacy social workers and their foster families. We work very closely with county entities to insure our families are well represented and respected.

Misconception: They are afraid that the children they bring into their home will be returned to their biological families and that they will be left brokenhearted.

The truth: I think we can all agree that deciding to love someone, whether they are our biological relative or not, can, at times lead to pain and disappointment. It is true that some children are returned to their families of origin, however, their foster families, can continue forward knowing they have had a major impact on another person during the most difficult time of their young lives. If you have had a teacher, coach, neighbor, or grandparent that influenced your life for the better you can begin to see the impact you can have, even for a short time, in the life of someone who needs you. Foster children typically desire to be with their biological parents. In an ideal situation, biological parents who correct their negative behaviors would retain custody of their children. This is a blessing for everyone. With a healthy perspective foster families can learn how to accept these results knowing they have been successful and that they are loved and adored by their foster children for the rest of their lives.



Misconception: They are concerned that the children that come into their home might be violent, sick, troubled, or dangerous and may hurt or negatively impact the atmosphere in their home with their existing children.

The Truth: When foster parents apply to be certified with Legacy they are asked what race, gender, temperament, and background they prefer of the children they are hoping to welcome into their home. Foster parents are given many options in this regard. They decide what they are most comfortable with. Just like the previous questions, we often never hear about the multitude of foster children who are just like any other child who need a loving home, they are well-behaved, grateful, helpful, and cooperative. Most children who find themselves in foster care fall into this category. In the event a child has a history of difficult behavior or begins to exhibit such behaviors in a foster home, Legacy social workers will work closely with foster families to provide the maximum support needed to help foster children and parents navigate such times.

Misconception: They are worried that the certification process might reveal something negative about their background, either past police contact, or financial abnormalities. They worry they may not have a nice enough home or make enough money. They fear having to disclose these types of things on paper.

The Truth: Foster parents do not have to be wealthy or live in a large, luxurious home. They do not need to be perfect. The certification process requires transparency. Foster parents are fingerprinted just like teachers, police officers, or other professionals that work with children. This is a level of security that the state of California requires to insure that children are protected. We work hard to build relationships of trust with our families and hope that they feel very comfortable being as open and honest as possible. We appreciate parents who disclose upfront any police contact they've had so that we can begin to help them to achieve their fostering goals. Parents never need feel hesitant to apply to foster based on any past negative police history or financial abnormalities. We can better help you if we understand your concerns from the beginning.

Misconception: Single individuals are apprehensive because they feel like they may not be good parents because they have no experience with children or that they might be rejected based on their single status.

The Truth: Foster parents do not need to be married in order to become certified foster parents. We are very happy to assist single people who wish to foster children. Although we can understand the apprehensions, which come along with being a parent for the first time, you are no different than any other new parent. You have the same qualities and weaknesses of any other new parent. Legacy will work overtime to help support you as you transition to parenthood.



Misconceptions: Potential clients are concerned that their schedules won't permit them to attend the lengthy training classes, obtain documents from doctors, be fingerprinted, etc. They shop around often to find the agencies that require much easier processes to certification.

The Truth: The certification process to become a foster parent in California is essentially the same for all agencies. It involves 12 hours of training, fingerprinting and background checks, passing a physical and TB test, and the processing of disclosures and other documents. When a potential foster parent is motivated and organized this process can be completed quickly. Legacy works closely with clients to meet their needs on their schedules. We utilize all available technology to allow for the convenient and fast processing of all documents. Legacy offers trainings in segments, on weekends and evenings, so as to not overtax clients or take up too much of their valuable time. We understand the demands and pressures of work and family life and desire to make the certification process as easy and quick as possible.

Misconception: Clients who are interested do not sometimes transition to being actual foster parents because they worry that past police contact will preclude them from being foster parents. They understand that the process for them will be longer and more intrusive so they decide not to move forward with the process.

The Truth: We often say at Legacy that in order to be an effective parent you must believe that people have the capacity to change. We expect to see progress in our agency and ourselves and we therefore recognize that each person is also endeavoring for change and betterment. With this philosophy in mind we hope that individuals who have had police contact for minor offenses will apply to be foster parents. We have the ability to petition the state for exemptions for certain kinds of past offenses and remove them as obstacles to becoming foster parents. Other offenses such as domestic violence, abuse of children, murder, rape, and other such serious past offenses will prevent individuals from being foster parents.

Misconception: Some clients also shop around with other agencies to find out how much reimbursement is available in each agency or what other "perks" there may be. They want to get the best financial and other social services packages they can find.

The Truth: Clients occasionally are concerned that they may not be able to afford to foster children; after all, taking children into your home could be costly. However, the state of California has provided funds to reimburse families who are serving as foster parents. These funds are intended to be used exclusively for the needs of children in foster care, to pay for their food, clothing, shelter, medical costs etc. There are many other services available for foster children, which our social workers are expert in accessing and understanding. The "perks" available at Legacy include social workers with smaller caseloads, who are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays. Experienced and accessible management who live in Bakersfield, honest employees who have integrity and work ethic, and long standing reputation for excellent service.

Misconception: Some potential foster parents hesitate because they aren't sure who will take care of the foster children when they are working. They figure that they must need to be a stay-at-home parent in order foster children.

The Truth: Legacy has many parents who work fulltime, both Mom's and Dad's. No preference is given to stay-at-home parents. Children in foster care may be left under the supervision of afterschool care or day care as long as the care is licensed and approved. Being a stay-at-home parent is not necessary.



Misconception: Some potential foster parents fear having to send their foster children back to biological parents that they deem as unfit. They are scared of loving children and then sending them into potentially harmful situations.


The Truth: There is a very intense process in place to prevent biological parents who are addicted, homeless, or neglectful from retaining their children until they are deemed recovered and fit. Often the process works. Sometime, it does not. A reality of foster care is that foster parents must accept this possibility. In our experience however, we have seen that foster parents with patience, perspective, and persistence can create stability for children who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in foster care. Legacy has a very well designed training program that helps foster parents understand the court process and learn how to operate within the process. We also train foster parents in how to cope with the realities of foster care service. Our social workers become a phenomenal support system intended to strengthen and assist foster parents in their service. After you have been trained and assigned a social worker you will be well prepared to be a foster parent.

Why are we publishing this information?

Becoming a parent is a big decision. Legacy believes that no one should ever take on the responsibility of raising children unless they have thought through the various demands and lifestyle changes associated with parenting. For this reason, Legacy believes we should never "sell" you on the process. While it is true that Legacy is actively looking for foster parent, we believe that normal sales tactics defeat the overall goal. The goal is to recruit "good" foster parents who are well informed about the task they are taking on. We have great respect for individuals who want to be foster parents because they have big hearts, but after careful investigation decide that being a foster parent is not a good fit for their family. This is exactly why we have created this document. Legacy wants good foster parents like you, but you need to be informed. We want to create an environment that is free from as many surprises as possible. Once you have been properly informed, and decide that fostering children is a good fit for you, we would love to start the process of getting to know you better. Fostering children starts with a relationship between the care takers. From there we will work together to help you be successful.

Next Steps

I hope that after studying this guide you have had your questions answered and your anxieties calmed. We have great faith in you and your abilities to succeed as a foster parent. At Legacy we love to guide and support. If you have any additional questions I hope that you will call our office. The next step for you is an orientation and the opportunity to fill out an application. If you wish to fill out an application now you can simply follow this link, print it off, fill it out, and either drop it off at our office or send it in via fax, scanning, or the mail. We are excited to meet you and your family and get started in this great work of fostering.


Martin Hansen



For Questions: Call us at (661) 493-7000 or visit us on the web at www.legacyfamilyservices.com