



# A Self Assessment Guide For Prospective Adoptive and Foster Families

a guide to assist you in making an informed choice about becoming an adoptive or foster parent



# Introduction

Government statistics indicate that over 500,000 children in the United States spend part or all of the year in substitute care and not with their birth families. This number only continues to rise, as does the need for effective, supportive foster and special needs adoptive families. This booklet is designed to provide information and self-assessment guides to persons considering foster parenting and/or special needs adoption. The information on the following pages will help interested persons make an informed decision on whether to become a foster and/or special needs adoptive parent.

## Missouri Foster and Adoptive Parent Training (STARS)

A 27-hour pre-service Foster and Adoptive Parent training entitled STARS – Specialized Training Assessment Resources and Support / Skills is provided in 9 three-hour weekly meetings and led by a team of leaders composed of one social worker and one parent. The training will help you assess how your family meets these five competencies for successful foster parenting and/or adopting:

1. Protecting and Nurturing
2. Meeting Children’s Developmental Needs and Addressing Developmental Delays
3. Supporting Relationships Between Children and their Families
4. Connecting Children to Safe, Nurturing Relationships Intended to Last a Lifetime
5. Working as a Member of a Professional Teams

## Kansas Foster and Adoptive Parent Training (PS-MAPP)

A 30-hour pre-service Foster and Adoptive Parent training entitled Partnering for Safety and Permanence – Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (PS-MAPP), is provided in 10 three-hour weekly meetings and led by a team of leaders composed of one social worker and one parent. The training will help you assess how your family meets these twelve skills for successful foster parenting and/or adopting:

1. Know your family
2. Communicate effectively
3. Know the children
4. Build strengths; meet needs
5. Work in partnership
6. Be loss and grief experts
7. Manage behaviors
8. Build connection
9. Build self-esteem
10. Assure help and safety
11. Assess impact
12. Make an informed decision

# Characteristics of Successful Foster and Adoptive Parents:

Cares deeply about children, wants to “parent” children  Able to make and keep commitments   
 Willing to help another family  Offers love, without expecting it in return  Ability and desire to sacrifice  Is flexible, able to adjust to the unexpected/unknown  Strong family/neighborhood/church support  Tolerant of other’s mood swings, feelings and beliefs   
 Sense of humor  If married, both spouses are equally committed to foster care and/ or adoption.

## Foster Parent Beliefs and Attitudes

Every adult living in your house should complete this self-survey. Discuss the results openly and honestly. It will help you understand how you feel about fostering a child.

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
1. I need a foster child so I won't feel so unhappy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Foster children are easy to please because they are so happy to have a home.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Providing a foster home is a way to rescue children from a difficult situation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The money paid by the state for foster care will help me meet all my household expenses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. All that foster children need is a lot of love.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I can contribute to a better society by being a good foster parent.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I did a pretty good job with my children so I think I'll be good with a foster child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. My child needs a playmate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Having a foster child is a good way to prepare for adopting a child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Childhood can be a difficult time. I feel I can relate to children going through rough times.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## What can you learn from your responses?

### 1. I need a foster child so I won't feel so unhappy.

Give yourself one point if you said "disagree." If you are unhappy you should think twice about becoming a foster parent. It is not fair to the child to expect their presence to improve your mood. Speak to a counselor first. If you are able to rid yourself of depression for a six-month period, then you can consider being a foster parent for a positive reason.

record your score \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Foster children are easy to please because they are so happy to have a home.

You get a point if you said "not sure" or "disagree." While many foster children are happy to have a home, they may not be so easy to please. Some will test your patience by acting up, being sad and/or shy. Don't expect foster children to be extra grateful and obedient. They didn't ask to be put in their position and they don't owe you anything because you accept them for foster care.

record your score \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Providing a foster home is a way to rescue children from a difficult situation.

Score a point if you chose "not sure" or "disagree." Folks who have a rescue approach to foster care are likely to resist reasonable contact with the foster child's birth parents. They may also get in the way of efforts to reunite families. Remember that foster care is temporary and the goal of foster parents should be to work with agency professionals so that families are reunited.

record your score \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. The money paid by the state for foster care will help meet all my household expenses.

A point for checking "disagree." Being a foster parent should not result in financial sacrifice. However, nobody should decide to become a foster parent because they think it will help them financially.

record your score \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. All that foster children need is a lot of love.

A point for those who said "disagree." While a lot of love is a nice thing to provide, foster parents also must have good parenting and communication skills and an understanding of their role as foster parents. Being patient, consistent and following through on rules and expectations are all important. Love is great, but it takes more than a loving attitude to be a successful foster parent.

record your score \_\_\_\_\_

**6. I can contribute to a better society by being a good foster parent.**

If you said “agree” give yourself 2 points. Score one point for “not sure.” A good foster parent can put the needs of the child, the child’s family and society ahead of personal needs. Viewing oneself as providing a necessary service to the child and to society is a positive reason for becoming a foster parent.

record your score \_\_\_\_\_

**7. I did a pretty good job with my children so I think I’ll be good with a foster child.**

A point for those who “agree” or are “not sure.” Having been a successful parent indicates that you have certain skills and personality traits that make you an effective parent. Wanting to use these talents to help out as a foster parent is a plus.

record your score \_\_\_\_\_

**8. My child needs a playmate.**

A point if you “disagree”. Being a foster parent is about caring for others and contributing to society in general. Your need to have a playmate for your child should not be a significant factor in your decision.

record your score \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Having a foster child is a good way to prepare for adopting a child.**

A point if you checked “agree” or “not sure.” Being a foster parent will help you determine your suitability to be an adoptive parent. Be careful, however, about becoming overly attached to a foster child and assuming that you will be able to adopt a foster child. While adoption is occasionally possible, it should not be your primary purpose for becoming a foster parent.

record your score \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Childhood can be a difficult time. I feel I can relate to children going through rough times.**

A point if you selected “agree” or “not sure.” If you were a foster child or experienced other significant hurdles, you indeed “know what it’s like.” Even if you didn’t have a difficult childhood you feel able to understand how troubling childhood can be. This will increase your skills as a foster parent. Be cautious, however, if you feel your childhood experiences have left you angry, depressed or resentful. Strong negative emotions from your own childhood could hinder your efforts to be a positive parent figure. If you feel you have such difficulties to a significant degree, you should seek personal counseling before becoming a foster parent.

record your score \_\_\_\_\_

## How did you do on the survey?

With a possible score of eleven, (remember you could get two points on item six) compare your total to the scale below.

### Total Score - What it Means

- 9-11 Your beliefs and attitudes suggest you will be a successful foster parent.
- 5-8 You are a good candidate for being a foster parent but should think about some of your beliefs and attitudes. Can you accept the other point of view?
- 4-7 Your beliefs and attitudes are not consistent with being an effective foster parent. Do you hold these beliefs firmly or do you feel you understand the need to modify some of your beliefs and attitudes? Examine your position closely and see if you can accept the need to change your thinking in some areas.
- 0-3 Think again about your reasons for becoming a foster parent. Talk over your belief system with a professional in the field of foster care. If you can see the areas where you need to change and can make changes, you may be a good candidate for being a foster parent in the future.

## What are the best reasons for becoming a foster parent?

The best reasons are those that do not involve intense personal needs such as feeling lonely or wanting the self-satisfaction of “saving” a child. If your reasons are based on calm thinking and knowing that you can be a positive influence in a child’s life, you are on the right track. It is OK to want to express love and feel that you will be doing something worthwhile for a child. The key idea is that your actions are for others rather than to fill a personal need. If you can say, “my life is good, I’m a reasonably happy person and I care about others,” then being a foster parent is an enrichment of an already fulfilled person. This makes for a foster parent who can make logical choices, be reasonably objective and keep the child’s welfare as the number one priority.

On the following page is a list of beliefs and attitudes that people who are interested in becoming foster parents may have. If your thoughts are most like the person in the left column, you are likely to have a positive foster care experience. If you are more like the person described in the right column, you should think things over and perhaps talk to a professional counselor before applying to be a foster parent.

## You are Ready!

I care about children and want to share my good fortune.

I am kind and loving but can be firm when it's required.

Foster children have had it tough. I want to make their life a little easier and more fun.

I didn't have children. By being a foster parent I can share my home and give my time and attention to a worthwhile cause.

I did a good job as a parent and know how to work with children. I'd like to use my skills to help other children.

As a foster parent, my job is to make this child feel comfortable and accepted in my home. I know that someday the child will leave and that's OK.

## Think it Over!

I am depressed and think I could feel better if I had a child to fuss over.

I just love children and don't feel they should ever be disciplined, scolded or punished.

These children have been abused and neglected – I want to protect them from their birth family members.

I didn't have children, and I feel that having a foster child will fill a lonely void in my life.

I don't know much about children, but I believe that if you just love them enough everything will be OK.

These poor children have been mistreated and I want to protect them or even adopt them so their family never hurts them again.

# Motivations for Considering Adoption

Every adult living in your house should complete this self-survey. Discuss the results openly and honestly. It will help you understand how you feel about adopting a child.

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
1. I want a playmate for my birth child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. A child would fill up my emptiness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I am well off, so I could give many things to an adopted child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. All these children really need is love.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I just love kids and want to add one more to our family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I just want to cry when I think of those poor children who do not have a family. I'll just take one in.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My religion tells me to reach out to those less fortunate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Our marriage is shaky and a child will bring us back together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Since we can't have birth children, I guess we might as well adopt..	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. There's no difference anyway Adoptive parenting and birth parenting are the same.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I know I have a lot to learn about parenting these children but I want to begin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. I want to adopt but my spouse is unsure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Things to Consider When Reviewing Your Motivations:

- Adoption is a lifelong experience, not a one-time event.
- Adoption is not about pretending the child was born to you, but about celebrating adoption as an equally valid way to build a family.
- Adoption is a distinct form of family building which includes the same challenges as parenting children born to you as well as added challenges and joys unique to adoption.
- Parenting is NOT a do-it-yourself project.
- Adoption support before, during, and after placement is a crucial element of adoption success.
- Advocacy is the act of maximizing all types of resources for children, such as educational, medical, and social, among others.
- There are skills to learn, tools to develop, and resources to be accessed that can help you become a better parent and advocate and to cope with parenting challenges.
- Reaching out for information and support does not need to be painful, nor does it mean you are an inadequate parent.
- Your peers are often the best sources of information and support.

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This guide is an excerpt from the book, **Foster Care Children: A Guide For Parents**

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