

# Welcoming a foster child/youth to your home

As you find your own way of welcoming children and youth into your home, we are here to support you. Consider these suggestions, and ask for other ideas or help when you need it. We appreciate you!

## Take a child-centered approach to relationships

Like all children and youth, children and youth in foster care need to feel valued. We encourage you to maintain a child-centered approach to developing relationships: Be genuinely concerned about their well-being. Be curious about how to best meet their emotional/relationship needs, as well as their needs for physical safety and comfort. Be patient and remember that relationships take time.

Foster care is a life-changing experience and can be frightening for children and youth. They are experiencing separation and potential losses of family members, important friends and community connections, pets, personal belongings, and cultural/family traditions. The way you welcome children and youth into your home can ease some of that fear.

## First impressions are important

When children and youth come to your home, they are experiencing trauma. Greet kids warmly – smile and introduce yourself. Those first few days are crucial to forming a positive relationship.

Children and youth may experience a wide range of emotions. Their actions may reflect those emotions, not who they are as a person. Give them the space they need and be patient.

You are an important part of children and youth's life experience, but not a replacement parent or family. Do not speak negatively about their parents.

Establish rapport with children and youth by showing genuine interest. Ask open ended questions, such as:

- What do you need to feel comfortable and safe here? How can we make this work for you?
- What are your favorite foods so we can be sure to get them for you?
- What TV shows and movies do you like?
- Do you like music? What kind?
- What do you like to do? Do you have favorite games or hobbies?

Don't center your first conversation around the house rules. When talking about house rules, discuss these in an empowering manner – emphasizing what children and youth “can do,” as well as talk about what “we do” in the house.

When children and youth come to your home, treat their belongings with care. These belongings are an important connection to home and self.

Give children and youth options/choices about things, so they feel they have some control over their environment.

Understand and respect children and youth's need for you to use their identified pronouns, e.g., she/he/they.

Respect and learn about the cultural needs of children and youth in your care. Ask the child/youth what connections they have to their culture and how you can best support them. Ask their social worker or your licensing worker for ideas.

Respect children and youth's physical space. Don't overwhelm them with physical touch right away. Ask them if they like hugs.

### **Create an inviting physical environment**

- Have a backpack filled with care items ready to give the child/youth when they get to your home.
- Present a welcome basket filled with special treats, games, books, new pajamas, and personal care items. Remain as gender neutral as possible until you know the child/youth better.
- Have a small household welcome celebration with the child or youth's favorite treat.
- Take the child or youth grocery shopping and allow them to pick out their own foods. Consider allowing them to choose snacks they can safely keep in their room to give them some control over food.
- Go shopping with children and youth to pick out their own sheets and other items for their room.
- Make sure there is a dresser and closet space for clothing and personal belongings. Do not use bins or other temporary storage.
- Keep a nightlight in the bathroom or the child/youth's bedroom. Ask what they prefer.
- Have a bulletin board the child/youth can use in their room that is just for them.
- Make sure to have a variety of toys and activities that serve varying interests, such as age-appropriate board games, books, and puzzles. Teens may enjoy bikes, gaming systems (Goodwill is a helpful resource), an allowance that is not tied to chores, and opportunities to earn extra money. Elementary age children enjoy outdoor play space and going to parks, as well as sensory or fidget toys.