



Friends Guide Book on Foster Care

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Introduction:

This guidebook is about supporting Friends staff to place children in family environments through *Foster Care Services*. The ideal place for a child or young person to live is within safe family based care. *Friends* aims to ensure that all children are able to live in a supportive and safe family environment.

The objective of foster care is to provide a family environment for children that are unable to live with their biological family. It must be developmentally appropriate for all children, and is most important for younger children.

In some instances no one who is related to the child will be able to care for him/her, but strangers may be willing to raise the child for either a short or long period of time. In such a case, you need to follow this Guidebook.

Foster Care

Friends views institutional care, such as orphanages or transitional homes, as an absolute last resort for children.

Foster care programs help identify and train local foster parents who take children into their homes. Families who care for children receive training and support, and are often provided access to doctors, therapists, and other community resources to meet the needs of the children.

Children eligible for foster care are any children who have no known suitable relatives to care for them, however it is a priority to place children under six years of age with a Foster Care family and not in a transitional home.

For every child, the length of stay in foster care will vary.

- Some children will enter foster care for a short length of time, before returning to their families.
- Some children will begin in short term foster care before transitioning into long term foster care
- Some children will remain in foster care until their foster care family can adopt them.
- Some children will remain in foster care until another family can adopt them.
- Some children will remain in foster care until they are old enough for independent living.

Steps of Foster Care

The purpose of this Guidebook is to safely place children in Friends Foster Care programs. The following steps will be detailed and should be followed:

1. Identify the child
2. Identify and assess the family
3. Prepare the family
4. Prepare the child
5. Supporting the placement
6. Follow Up
7. Case closure

1. Identifying the Child

Every child has different needs and reason for being separated from their families and this drives the type of foster care they should be provided with.

The best interests of the child should always be considered prior to foster care placements.

Where possible children should be consulted prior to placements and asked their wishes.

2. Identifying and assessing the Foster Care Family

Foster care families are referred to FI programs through:

- Outreach workers
- Local authorities
- Hospitals (abandoned babies)
- Police
- NGO partners
- and self-referred through willing families themselves.

Families are selected if they fit within the minimum standards and can provide for the child:

- Only one child may be fostered at any time unless the children are siblings
- Foster care parents must be over 30 and under 55 years of age
- If the foster parent has other children, they may not be of the same age as the foster child (they may be older children)

Any Government assessment forms must be used alongside Friends family assessment forms.

When assessing the living environment of Foster Care families the following things must be taken into account:

- That the foster care family are locals to their country
- The physical environment
- Income of the family
- History of the family
- Overcrowding

- Emotional- how the foster parents interact with each other and any other children they have.
- What their reasons are for wanting a foster child
- Economic situation

3. Preparing the Foster Care Family

Foster care families are provided with several levels of support through Friends programs, depending on the needs of the family and the child. The support given should be assessed by the case manager and could include:

- **Economic Support**
- **Training and Coaching Support**
- **Preparation for Separation**
- **Peer Support**

4. Preparing the Child

- When a child is entering foster care they should be given a medical examination.
- The process for children entering foster care should be gradual
- All foster care placements should be done in the best interests of the child and this should be clearly explained to the child, where possible.

5. Placement

Short term foster care

Definition: Short term foster care is the placement of a child for a short period of time with a family willing to take care of them until they are able to return to their live with their own family.

Short term foster care is used to provide temporary care while parents get help sorting out problems, or to help children or young people through a difficult period in their lives. Often children will return home once the problems that caused them to come into foster care have been resolved and it is clear that their parents are able to look after them safely.

Long term foster care

Some children in short term foster care cannot return to their biological family because they remain unwilling or unable to care for them, or they are unable to be identified. In these cases children may transition into long-term foster care.

6. Follow Up

Follow up is very important for children placed in Foster Care. While children are in Foster Care families they are technically still the responsibility of FI and therefore their care and protection is always the responsibility of the case manager and the program.

At a minimum physical home visits by the FI case manager for children in short term foster care must be conducted weekly.

Long Term Foster Care Follow Up:

Follow up frequency and approach will depend on a child's individual needs and circumstances.

Case managers should try to involve local authorities, schools and other NGOs in monitoring the child in Foster Care's well-being.

All follow up must be recorded on the child's case management record

7. Case Closure

For every child the move on from foster care may be different.

- Children may transition into long-term foster care until they are old enough to move out on their own
- Some may be adopted
- Some may need support to move on from short term foster care placements to live independently (please see Independent Living Guidebook).

7 Tips of Foster Care!

1. THINK! Family care for every child!
2. THINK! Is the family well informed about how to look after a foster child?
3. THINK! Has the child been properly informed about what foster care is?
4. THINK! Does the child's family understand what foster care is?
5. THINK! Is there any extra support that a family could use to provide for a child?
6. THINK! Is there any additional support a child needs before going to foster care?
7. THINK! Follow up and continue support!