

Upbring Foster In Texas
Lutheran Social Services of the South
Guide for Foster Parents

Our Mission Statement

To break the cycle of child abuse by empowering children, families, and communities.

Our roots go back to 1881 when the German Evangelical Lutheran Bethlehem Orphan Asylum Association incorporated in New Orleans, Louisiana. The charter purpose was to support orphans and half-orphans. In 1926 in Central Texas, Lutheran church leaders formed the Lutheran Aid and Orphans' Society. Its purpose was to care for orphans and the elderly. Both agencies were blessed with growth over the years as they strived to meet the needs of children, elderly and the poor. Then in January 1993, they merged to become Lutheran Social Services of the South, Inc. LSS annually serves nearly 35,000 children, elderly and poor in Texas and Louisiana regardless of religious beliefs, ethnicity, gender or age. In April 2015, we remained true to our core and emerged with our new brand which is Upbring: Foster in Texas. Upbring continues to provide innovative programs and services for children including foster care, adoption, education, residential retreatment, and community services.

Tell me about the Upbring foster care/ adoption program through CPS:

Upbring works with Child Protective Services (CPS) to find temporary foster homes or permanent adoptive homes for children who have been victimized in their biological homes through abuse or neglect. Upbring works with children from ages 0 – 22 of all backgrounds and ethnicities. Upbring offers 2 different types of foster care services listed below. A foster parent can offer all of the services if they meet the various qualifications. All foster parents begin serving as basic or moderate foster parents and may advance beyond that as experience, training, or interest allows.

UPBRING Foster Care Services:

Child Care Services

Parents provide services that meet a child's basic need for shelter, nutrition, clothing, nurturance, socialization and interpersonal skills, care for personal health and hygiene, supervision, education, and service planning.

Treatment Services

In addition to child-care services, a specialized type of child-care services designated to treat and/or support children with:

- **Emotional Disorders**
- **Intellectual Disorders**
- **Autism Spectrum Disorder**
- **Primary Medical Needs**

What does CPS do?

CPS serves as the child's conservator, or parent, throughout their time in foster care. They are the ones primarily responsible for the child's well being and safety. They offer Upbring a contract to work with the children in their care and provide foster homes for them. CPS's main goal is to heal the family and reunify the children. If this proves impossible, CPS will begin to look for relatives or adoptive families. About 60% of children are reunified with their parents, and the other 40% will go to relatives or to adoptive families.

How does a child or family become involved with CPS?

A report or "referral" is made to CPS through their toll free hotline number (800-252-5400) regarding a child that may be abused or neglected. The person making the report can remain anonymous. It is important to note that all doctors, teachers, and social workers are mandated reporters. This means that this population is required, by law, to make a report if abuse or neglect is suspected. This includes our current foster families. If Upbring suspects abuse or neglect in a foster home, we are required to report it.

After the report has been made, CPS will visit the home and investigate the concerns. If they feel the child is in immediate danger, they will remove the child that day. If they feel that the family can remain intact, they will provide additional services and plans to keep the children safe, but the children will remain in the home. CPS will continue to supervise this family to ensure they are abiding by the plan.

After a child is removed, CPS will ask the family if they have any relatives that may take the child. CPS prefers to keep the children with some part of their family if possible. If a relative does come forward and is appropriate, they will allow them to take the child. If no relative is available, or if there are concerns about appropriateness, CPS will ask that the child be placed in a foster home. This is when Upbring is contacted.

CPS will call or email all the agencies in the area that provide foster care to see if anyone has a home for the child. Upbring receives these referrals for foster care services regularly, usually several in one day. Upbring will collect all known information regarding the child and then search through our families to see if any family is a match for this child. The child is sometimes placed that same day or in a few days following depending on the emergency nature of the situation.

CPS offers services and creates a plan for the biological family to work on in order to regain custody of their children. Depending on their compliance and involvement, they may or may not have their children returned to them.

What are the children like?

The children involved in foster care vary tremendously, but it is important to recognize that these children have experienced trauma and disruptions in their biological family. The children may have developmental delays, emotional disturbances, and behavior problems. These issues are

primarily due to the abuse and/or neglect the child has experienced. You will learn more about the challenges these children face and how to best serve these special children in your STAR pre-service training.

Who will help me?

Upbring assigns a (FSW) Family Services Worker to your family to help you through the entire process and visit your home. This FSW usually has from 10-12 families depending on the number of children each home has. This small number of families allows Upbring to respond promptly to concerns and support each family in times of crisis and need.

Who will visit my home?

Upbring will have visits in your home at least one time per month. CPS may visit the home monthly as well, but this will depend on the county and the actual worker. The child is also assigned an Attorney Ad Litem to represent the child's wishes in court. This person may visit the child at school or in your home prior to each court hearing (usually quarterly). The child may also be assigned a CASA, or Court Appointed Special Advocate, worker. Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) is an organization that trains community volunteers to become involved in a CPS case and speak in court as to the child's best interest. Not all cases have a CASA worker. The judge is the one that appoints such a worker.

In addition, the child in your home may need therapy, and the therapist usually has sessions in your home. This is intended to be a convenience for you rather than having to take the child to each session. Also, the child in your home may need Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services and they may visit the home to work with the child as well.

By becoming involved in foster care, you must understand that CPS and Upbring are to have full access to these children at any time. Unannounced visits will be made to your home in order to ensure that each foster home is safe and following all requirements. You will need to be open and flexible to visits and interactions with a variety of professionals.

What are my responsibilities as a foster parent?

The intention of foster care is to allow the child to maintain as much of a normal life as possible within a family. This is far superior for the child's emotional well being and health compared to institutions. Upbring expects that these children will be a natural part of your family and be afforded every opportunity they deserve. The children in foster care and your biological children should always be treated equally.

There are ongoing requirements you will be required to maintain as part of your verification. Most training are required to be updated annually. There are opportunities to complete trainings via webinar. The children will also require the completion of required paperwork such as documentation of doctor's visits, medication logs, monthly reports, etc.

Will I have the ability to choose the types of children, ages, etc that are placed in my home?

Absolutely! Upbring does not want to place children into a home that is not comfortable with the age of the child or any issues the child may have. It is the intention of every placement to be successful and if the foster parents are not 100% ready for a child, the chances of success diminish.

It will be important for you and your family to discuss the types and ages of children you will prepare to bring into your home. The wider the range of options, the easier it will be for Upbring to find placement. Many families would like to maintain the existing birth order of the children in their home or have decided against certain behaviors in children. These restrictions are completely up to you and Upbring will only approach you about children that fit into your preferences. You can change your preferences at any time. However, it is important for you to understand that the more narrow your criteria for children, the longer you could be awaiting placement.

What types of foster homes does Upbring currently have the greatest need for?

At this time, Upbring has a great need for families who will accept teenagers, ages 12 to 18, larger sibling groups of three or more, pregnant adolescent girls who will be available to work with the teen and her infant, primary medical needs children, and are families open to children with Emotional/Behavioral disorders. There is also a need for families open to sibling groups who range in ages from 0 to 22 years old. If your family is open to accepting these types of children or needs, you will likely receive placement quicker.

Is there any financial assistance available?

Yes. As a foster parent, you will receive a daily reimbursement rate for each day the child is in your home. This reimbursement is a non-taxable income and is meant as a reimbursement of natural expenses of having an additional child in your home. Foster care is not meant to be a profitable experience. It is to assist you with necessities like clothes and food, but also to help with extra expenses like sports, music, dance, etc. The rate you receive depends on the needs of the child but the minimum is \$27.07 per day.

All children in foster care are covered by Star Health through the Superior Health Network. You will not be adding these children to your personal insurance policies. It would be wise to begin looking for doctors and dentists that will accept Star Health in your area. To view available physicians, go to www.fostercaretx.com

Upbring offers a one time \$150.00 reimbursement per child for clothing, if they are initially entering foster care. This is a grant funded program through a third party.

Infants and toddlers can qualify for WIC assistance.

***** You need to ensure that your family can financially manage the addition of another child as the reimbursement rate does not cover all the expenses. The care of infants can be very expensive, especially when daycare is required during the day. After school care of school age children must also be considered.***

How do placements work?

CPS will call the foster care agencies in the area to find out if they have openings for children needing placement. At this time, Upbring will collect as much information as possible about the child to better our ability to make a good match with a family. It is important to understand that Upbring and CPS may not know everything about a child when they come into care, but we will tell you everything we know at the time. Many placement referrals we receive are emergency placements, meaning that CPS needs placement that day. It is a nerve racking time for many foster parents because we are asking you to make a rather large decision pretty quickly. We usually need a solid answer within about 15 minutes. This only applies to emergency placements; we have other types of placement requests that are not as stressful. This is why it is important for you and your family to be on the same page about the types of children you will accept so decisions can be made quickly. It will also be necessary for you to provide Upbring with reliable contact information so we can reach you as needed. At the time of referral, you will have the opportunity to accept or deny placement. NEVER feel afraid to say no to a placement. Upbring will not discontinue or stop calling unless you make this request. We need placements for these children and we would rather keep looking than place a child in a home that isn't prepared for them.

Do the children ever get to see their parents?

Yes, most children will have visits with their parents. These are usually face to face visits at the CPS office in their home county for one hour every week. Most visits are supervised by CPS. It is the foster parents' responsibility to transport the child to visits. If this is not possible, CPS can occasionally help with transportation, but it is important that the foster parents remain flexible. There may also be sibling visits outside of the CPS visitation schedules.

I would like to adopt, what are my chances?

This pretty much depends on your preferences and desires. The more open you are in terms of ages and ethnicities, the more often you will be called for placement. There are currently many children waiting for adoption families and you can learn more about these particular children by visiting the Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE) website at http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Adoption_and_Foster_Care/default.asp. On this site, you are able to search through all the children currently free for adoption in Texas.

The other option is to foster a child in your home first and see how their case proceeds in court. This obviously holds a higher degree of risk in having the child leave your home, but if you are interested in very young children or babies, this is usually a risk you must learn to accept. CPS will work with the parents first to see if they are able to rehabilitate enough to care for their children and if this does not look promising, they will begin to look for relatives available to

adopt the child. CPS will always prefer to place the child with relatives before non-relatives. The relatives will have to complete a home study and background check, and if these clear, the child will most likely be placed with them. If the parents are not progressing and there are no suitable relatives, the current foster parents have “first dibs” on adopting that child. This is the benefit to fostering first.

Are there any adoption benefits available?

Yes, but it depends on the child you are adopting and if they qualify. If the child does qualify, assistance can include Medicaid benefits until they are 18 years old, a small monthly stipend, and college tuition benefits. Not all children qualify for every benefit. More information on exact qualifications can be provided if you are interested.

So what's next?

If you feel that this program will be a good fit for you, we welcome you to continue on in the process of becoming verified! There are certain requirements you will need to fulfill in order to ensure your home is safe and you are fully trained. Your progress and speed through the verification process is entirely up to you, but the process has been broken into three phases to provide you with benchmarks to work towards. If you are diligent about completing all trainings and paperwork in a timely manner, you can be verified within 3 months.

There are initial financial expenses your home will be responsible during the verification process. This includes:

- FBI fingerprint check (approx. \$45.00 per person for residents in your home over 14).
- Fire Inspection (completed by your local fire department- fees may vary)
- Health Inspection (completed by your county health department- fees may vary)
- CPR/First Aid training, to include Infant, Child, and Adult (expense incurred if taken outside Upbring).

Are there any unusual requirements?

There are some requirements that some potential foster parents struggle to complete or don't feel they agree with.

- Under no circumstances can children in foster care be spanked or otherwise physically disciplined. You will be required to sign a policy stating you understand this guideline. This does not affect the discipline you choose to use with your biological children, but if you choose to spank your children, the foster children must not be able to see or hear what is happening.
- Foster homes with swimming pools in their backyards are required to put a fence up around the pool with locks to prevent accidental drowning. If not possible, all exit doors leading to the pool must have door alarms/chimes, three locks with one high enough that only a child 10 years and older may reach, and the entire backyard area will now be considered the pool area meaning no child must be outside unsupervised.

- No large, outdoor trampolines are allowed in foster homes. If you have one, they must be taken down.
- Children in foster care can never be left unsupervised. It must be pre-approved for them to walk home from school and be left home alone. Things you may do with your biological children may not be allowed in foster care.
- Any person left alone with the children must be at least 18 years of age and must complete a criminal background check (free of charge – different from the fingerprint check). This includes those individuals that have access to the children in the home more than twice in a 30 day period.
- Every item the child enters your home with and every item you purchase for the child MUST go with them when they leave your home. Even if the items the child enters with don't fit them, are dirty, or broken you must keep everything. This does not mean that the child has to use or wear these items; you can store them in the attic or garage for them. Some items for babies classify as "equipment" and you are able to keep these, such as, high chairs, car seats, cribs, swings, etc.

Common Foster Care Terminology:

Respite: Long term Babysitting/overnight care for the child in foster care.

Reunification: A goal that CPS has to reunite a parent and child

Kinship placement: Relative or person close to the child that is offered to take placement.

Permanency plan: The plan that CPS agrees to move forward on to achieve a permanent home for the child. Ex: reunification, relative placement, adoption.

Relinquish: The process a parent completes who voluntarily decides to give up rights to their child.

Terminated: This is the process where CPS and the courts order a parent's rights to be severed.

Legally Free: A child who is completely free for adoption.

Finalization/Consummation: Court hearing that officially legalizes adoption of a child in a family.

Lifebook: A scrapbook foster parents complete to document and save memories for the child in their home. Pictures, art work, etc.

Book List for Foster and Adoptive Parents

Upbring has included a list of books to help you and your foster child explore feelings and challenges due to foster care. They can easily be used as a stepping stone to more serious conversations about abuse, neglect and feelings of sadness. Most of the books are geared toward younger children ages 4-8, but the last two options are more suitable for older children.

- *Welcome Home: A Guide for Adoptive, Foster, and Treatment Foster Parents* by Christopher J. Alexander, July 1, 2005
- *Another Place at the Table* by Kathy Harrison, May 24, 2004
- *A Child Called "It"; One Child's Courage to Survive* by Dave Pelzer
- *The Lost Boy: A Foster Child's Search for the Love of a Family* by Dave Pelzer
- *A Man Named Dave: A Story of Triumph and Forgiveness* by Dave Pelzer
- *A Brother's Journey: Surviving a Childhood of Abuse* by Richard B. Pelzer
- *Wayne: An Abused Child's Story of Courage, Survival, and Hope* by Wayne Theodore
- *The Connected Child: Bring hope and healing to your adoptive child* by Karyn B. Purvis, David R. Cross, and Wendy Lyons Sunshine, April 22, 2007.
- *The Sexually Abused Child: A Parent's Guide to Coping and Understanding*, by Kathleen Flynn Mach, MSW, Family Insight Books, 1994.
- *Adopting the Hurt Child: Hope for Families with Special-Needs Kids* by Gregory C. Keck, Regina M. Kupecky.
- *Telling the Truth to your Adopted or Foster Child* by Betsy E. Keefer and Jayne E. Schooler.
- *A Child's Journey Through Placement* by Vera I. Fahlberg.
- *Finding the Right Spot: When Kids Can't Live With Their Parents*, by Janice Levy
- *Maybe Days: A Book for Children in Foster Care*, by Jennifer Wilgocki
- *The Star: A Story to Help Young Children Understand Foster Care*, by Cynthia Miller Lovell
- *A Terrible Thing Happened – A story for children who have witnessed violence or trauma*, by Margaret Holmes and Sasha Mudlaff
- *The Trouble with Secrets*, by Karen Johnson
- *Happy Adoption Day*, by John McCutcheon
- *My Abnormal Life*, by Lee McClain
- *Pictures of Hollis Woods*, by Patricia Giff
- *What is a Foster Family, Anyway?* by Martine Golden Inlay
- *Together Forever*, by Sara L. F. Barris and Doryce Penn Seltzer
- *Little Miss Spider*, by David Kirk
- *The Face in the Mirror*, by Marion Cook