

What to Expect BCDSS Home Study

Baltimore City Department of Social Services (BCDSS) Home Study Overview

A home study is used to both assess and prepare prospective foster parents to ensure they are ready and able to meet the often complex needs of children in care.

Spouses and partners, who reside in the same home, must both complete all home study requirements.

The home study process typically takes 60-90 days to complete and cannot exceed 120 days.

How to Learn More



BCDSS Home Study Standards

Pre-Service Training

Applicants shall complete a minimum of 27 hours of pre-service training (PRIDE) consisting of 5 in-person/virtual classes and 4 online, independent, clusters.

- * Applicants must each have an email address and access to a computer, laptop, or tablet with a working camera.
- * To learn more about the BCDSS home study process or to sign-up for BCDSS Foster Parent Information Meeting please contact the **Welcome Line** at **410-685-8231** or bcdss.fostering@maryland.com.

CPR & First Aid Training

Applicants shall complete a CPR and first aid training course virtually or in-person.

- * If first aid is not in the title of the course, it is not included, and you will need to register for a separate first aid class.
- * Suggested CPR and first aid virtual classes:
 - ↳ American Red Cross: <https://cpraedcourse.com>
 - ↳ American Heart Association: <https://cpraedcourse.com>
 - ↳ National Safety Council: nsc.org
 - ↳ National CPR Foundation: <https://www.nationalcprfoundation.com>

Identification & Citizenship

Applicants shall provide at least one form of government issued photo identification to verify identity, age (at least 21 years old) and US citizenship or permanent legal US residency.

- * Valid forms of photo identification:
 - ↳ Driver's License
 - ↳ State ID
 - ↳ Military ID
 - ↳ Passport
- * Valid forms of citizenship verification:
 - ↳ Passport
 - ↳ Birth Certificate
 - ↳ Resident Alien Card

Financial Stability

Applicants must demonstrate that they have sufficient income and financial stability to provide reasonable living conditions for their household.

* Monthly Household Income

Applicants must provide copies of at least one listed below:

- ↳ Most recent W-2
- ↳ Consecutive pay stubs for the last four weeks
- ↳ Last SSI or SSDI statement
- ↳ Last retirement and/or pension statement
- ↳ Most recent 1099 (if self-employed)
- ↳ Notarized statement of earned income or financial support from financial source

In addition, the following may be considered along with at least one of the above:

- ↳ Adoption or custody and guardianship subsidy
- ↳ Child support and/or alimony
- ↳ Child's SSI or SSDI

* Monthly Household Expenses

Applicants shall provide copies or estimates of all monthly household expenses:

Copies of Statements	Monthly Estimates
Mortgage/Rent	Transportation
BGE	Medical
Water	Childcare
Cable/Internet/Phone	Entertainment
Cell Phone	Food
Auto Loan	Clothing
Auto Insurance	Education/Tuition
Child Support	Other Expenses

Personal References

Applicants will be asked to identify three personal references.

- * Only one reference can be from a family member.

Background Clearances

BCDSS conducts the following background clearances for applicants and all adult household members 18 and over:

Background Clearances	
Child Protective Services Clearance	Source: CJAMS
Child Support Clearance*	Source: CJAMS
FBI Criminal Clearance	Source: CJIS
MD Sex Offender Registry Search	Link: Sex Offender Registry
National Sex Offender Registry	Link: NSOPW Registry
MD Judiciary Case Search	Link: MD Judiciary Case Search

*Applicants only

- * If an individual has lived outside of the State of Maryland within the last 5 years, BCDSS will request clearances from: [Adam Walsh State Contact List](#)
- * The following felony convictions shall automatically result in a home study denial:
 - ↳ Child abuse or neglect
 - ↳ Domestic violence
 - ↳ A crime against a child or children including child pornography
 - ↳ A crime of violence including rape, sexual assault, or homicide
 - ↳ Human trafficking
- * The following felony convictions, dating back 5 years, may result in a home study denial:
 - ↳ Physical assault
 - ↳ Battery
 - ↳ Drug related offense

Medical

Applicants and all household members will be asked to complete a physical examination from

a licensed health care professional that indicates that the applicant(s) can care for a foster child. Physicals must be current (within the last 12 months) and documented on a BCDSS medical form.

- * For all household members over age 12, the initial medical shall include the analysis of **tuberculosis tests** or X-rays.
- * If caring for infants (0-1) and/or children with special medical needs of any age, all household members must provide verification of an up-to-date **flu vaccine** (unless the immunization is contrary to the individual's health as documented by a licensed healthcare professional).
- * If caring for infants (0-1), all household members must provide verification of an up-to-date **Pertussis/Tdap vaccine** (whooping cough; every 10 years) unless the immunization is contrary to the individual's health as documented by a licensed healthcare professional.
- * All children in the household (under age 18) must have verification of up-to-date **immunizations** unless there is a medically documented exemption.
- * Applicants and household members must disclose all current and past physical and mental health issues including any history of drug or alcohol abuse or treatment.
- * If an applicant or household members have symptoms or history of physical or mental health issues which may prevent a youth in care from receiving proper care or which might be communicable or injurious to the physical or emotional health of a foster child, BCDSS shall require a written document by the examining physician stating that the health issue poses no threat to foster children. BCDSS may further request additional medical/mental health documentation or examinations of a general or specific nature.

Marital Status *(if applicable)*

Applicants shall provide copies of all that apply:

- * A current marriage license
- * All divorce decrees
- * All spousal death certificates
- * A notarized separation affidavit

School Documents *(if applicable)*

Applicants shall provide copies of the most recent report cards or progress reports for children in the household between 5-18 years old. BCDSS may request additional information from school personnel.

Pet Rabies Verification *(if applicable)*

Applicants shall provide verification that all dogs and cats in the home have up-to-date rabies vaccinations (due at 4 months old and every year after).

- * Pets must demonstrate a gentle, non-threatening temperament/nature.
- * Children in care must be supervised around pets.

Back-Up Provider Information

BCDSS resource providers shall identify at least one responsible and trusted friend or family member who would be willing and able to assist if the provider is unavailable or in the event of an emergency.

Respite Provider *(optional)*

In order for foster youth to remain with someone familiar to them and/or their caregivers, we ask resource providers to identify a trusted and responsible friend or family member who would be willing and able to provide short term/alternative care if needed.

- * BCDSS will pay for up to 7 days of respite care a year.
- * Respite providers can be approved during or after the home study process.
- * Respite provider requirements:
 - ↳ At least 21 years old
 - ↳ Background clearances for all adult household members 18 and over
 - ↳ Home safety assessment (home walk-thru)

Home Visits & Family Interviews

Over the course of three to five home visits, the BCDSS home study worker will meet with prospective resource parents individually and if applicable, as a couple, and as a family. BCDSS shall interview all household members including biological and adopted children who may not reside in the home.

Home Health Assessment

During the initial visit the home study worker will conduct a walk-thru safety assessment of the home. BCDSS must be able to access all rooms and areas of the home (i.e., drawers, closets, containers, storage boxes, bags, etc.) regardless of ownership/occupancy (i.e., roommates, property owners, renters, relatives, friends, etc.).

Fire & Health Inspection

A fire & health home inspection will be conducted by the Baltimore City Fire Department and/or another BCDSS community partner.

Home Assessment Standards

Home Safety Standards

General

- * Adequate heat, light, water, refrigeration, cooking, and toilet facilities.
- * Properly functioning smoke detectors installed on each level of the home as well as one inside and one outside each bedroom.
- * A properly functioning carbon monoxide detector installed on each level of the home.
- * At least one, readily accessible, operable fire extinguisher (check expiration date).
- * An emergency evacuation/fire safety plan posted in the home.
- * An easily accessible first aid kit.
- * A list of emergency phone numbers posted in the home.

- * A working phone (foster youth must have easy access to a phone while in the resource home).
- * Doors and windows that are accessible and open and close easily.
- * No rodent or insect infestation.
- * No pet animal overcrowding.
- * No broken windows, doors, or steps.
- * No holes in the roof, floors, walls, or ceilings.
- * No peeling or flaking paint, plaster, wallpaper, or exposed wiring.
- * No excessive debris or clutter inside or outside the home.
- * The family living quarters shall be adequate to provide space for foster children without disrupting the usual sleeping and living arrangement of the family group.
- * A youth in care's sleeping and living quarters must have provisions for privacy, room to study, and storage for clothes, toys, and personal possessions.
- * Resource parents must sleep within earshot of youth in care.
- * All doors, including storm doors, must have thumb turn locks; double-sided key locks must be removed and covered or replaced with a thumb turn lock.
- * Window treatments with hanging cords must be secured using a mounted cord wrapper.

Bedrooms

- * Bedrooms where youth in care sleep must have appropriate furniture to keep their belongings (regularly worn clothing may not be stored in plastic containers, suitcases, or bags).
- * Bedrooms where youth in care sleep must measure at least approx. 80 sq. ft (one child).
- * Bedrooms where youth in care sleep must have two ways in and out (a door and a window measuring at least 20 inches x 24 inches).
- * Bedrooms where youth in care sleep may not have a pass through to another room or area of the home.
- * Bedrooms where youth in care sleep may not have a skylight.
- * Bedrooms where youth in care sleep may not have a fireplace.
- * Bedrooms where youth in care sleep may not have a door that leads out to a balcony unless the door is alarmed, has a thumb turn lock and is secure/safe.
- * If sharing a room, children must be the same gender and close in age, usually within 4 years.
- * Children under the age of 2 may sleep in the same room as their biological parent/foster youth or resource parent however there must be an available space in the home for the child to transition into no later than their 2nd birthday.
- * Youth in care over age 2 may not share a bedroom with an adult (including biological parents).
- * No child, of any age, may share a bed with another adult or child.
- * Infants must sleep in an approved/certified crib or pack 'n play in accordance with the Center for Disease Control guidelines for safe sleep (cribs are preferred).
- * Homes with only one bedroom will not pass a home inspection.

Firearms

- * Maryland law requires the registration of all handguns, revolvers, semi-automatic assault rifles, or semi-automatic assault shotguns.

- * All firearms must be stored in a locked storage area that is inaccessible to youth (weapons must be unloaded and ammunition must be kept in a locked storage area inaccessible to youth).

Potentially Dangerous Household Items

- * All potentially life threatening, or injurious household items must be kept in a safe location that is inaccessible to young or vulnerable youth (i.e., dangerous household supplies, chemicals, tools, sharp objects, alcohol, prescription and over the counter medications, etc).

Swimming Pools, Hot Tubs and Spas

- * Swimming pools must have a barrier on all sides, and methods of access through the barrier must be equipped with a safety device, such as a bolt lock.
- * Swimming pools must be equipped with a lifesaving device, such as a ring buoy.
- * If the swimming pool cannot be emptied after each use, the pool must have a working pump and filtering system.
- * Hot tubs and spas must have safety covers that are locked when not in use.

Smoking

- * Smoking is not permitted in the presence of youth in care.
- * Resource providers and their guests may not smoke in the home or in any vehicle used to transport youth in care.

Transportation

- * Resource providers must have reliable, legal, and safe transportation including access to a properly maintained vehicle or reliable public transportation.
- * When transporting youth in care in a privately owned vehicle, the driver must have a valid driver's license, insurance, and registration and all children must be secured in appropriate safety restraints, including properly sized and installed car seats.

Capacity

- * The maximum number of children in a resource home may not exceed 6, including those of the resource parent.

Reminder: Home studies must be completed within 120 day.