



What to Expect: Home Study Process

General Information

- * A Baltimore City Department of Social Services (BCDSS) home study is means of educating and assessing prospective resource families to determine if they are ready and able to meet the often complex physical and emotional needs of children in foster care. BCDSS utilizes the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) home study model.
- * BCDSS accepts home study applications from prospective providers who live in Baltimore City or within a 10-mile driving distance from 3007 E. Biddle Street Baltimore, MD 21213 (distance does not apply to relative/child specific caregivers).
- * To initiate a BCDSS home study please call the **Welcome Line 410-685-8231** or visit us online at www.bmorefostercare.com to request an application and enroll in pre-service training.
- * To find out more about the BCDSS home study process please watch the BCDSS Information Meeting video on you tube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHqnmkI-KS0> or sign up for a virtual Information Meeting by calling the **Welcome Line 410-685-8231**.
- * The home study process typically takes between 60-90 days to complete however it cannot exceed 120 days.
- * Couples (spouses/partners) must each complete all BCDSS home study requirements independently including pre-service and CPR & First Aid training.

Home Study Requirements

1. Pre-Service Training

Applicants will be required to complete a minimum of 27 hours of pre-service training. BCDSS utilizes the Parent Resources for Information Development and Education (PRIDE) training curriculum.

- * Trainees must have a valid email address and access to a computer, laptop or tablet.
- * To enroll in a PRIDE training class please call the **Welcome Line 410-685-8231**.

2. CPR & First Aid Training

Applicants will complete a CPR & First Aid class.

- * Classes may be taken in-person or on-line.
- * Some, but not all CPR classes include First Aid. If First Aid is not in the title of the training, it is not included, and you will need to register for a separate First Aid course.
- * Applicants are responsible for the cost of the class.
- * Online CPR & First Aid classes are offered through the following:

- * American Red Cross
- * American Heart Association
- * National Safety Council
- * National CPR Foundation

3. Identification Verification

Applicants, adult household members (age 18 and above), and frequent visitors (adults in the home 2+ times a week) will be requested to provide at least one form of government issued photo identification.

Valid forms of photo identification:

- * Driver's License
- * State ID
- * Military ID
- * Passport

Applicants (only) will also be asked to verify their age (over age 21) and citizenship (US citizen or permanent legal resident).

Valid forms of citizenship verification:

- * Passport
- * Birth Certificate
- * Resident Alien Card

4. Financial Stability

Applicants must have sufficient income and financial stability to provide reasonable living conditions for their own family group without depending upon the reimbursement for basic foster care. Applicants must have income or resources to make timely payments for shelter, food, utility costs, clothing, and other household expenses.

Monthly Household Income

Applicants must provide copies of at least one of the following:

- * Last 2 consecutive pay stubs (if paid every 2 weeks)
- * Last 4 consecutive pay stubs (if paid weekly)
- * Last SSI/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 as part of the total household income (these items will only be considered along with at least one of the documents listed above):

- * Adoption/custody & guardianship subsidy
- * Child support and/or alimony payments
- * Child's SSI or SSDI payments

Monthly Household Expenses

Applicants will be requested to provide copies or estimates of all the following that apply:

Provide **copies** of the most recent statement or bill for items in Column A

Column A	
Mortgage or Rent	
BGE	
Water	
Cable/Internet/Phone	
Cell Phone	
Auto Loan	
Auto Insurance	
Child Support	

Estimate the monthly amount spent for items in Column B

Column B	
Transportation	\$ <i>Estimate</i>
Medical	\$ <i>Estimate</i>
Child Care	\$ <i>Estimate</i>
Entertainment	\$ <i>Estimate</i>
Food	\$ <i>Estimate</i>
Clothing	\$ <i>Estimate</i>
Education/Tuition	\$ <i>Estimate</i>
Donations	\$ <i>Estimate</i>

5. References

Applicants will be asked to identify three people to provide personal references.

- * One personal reference should be a family member.
- * One personal reference should be a close friend/colleague.
- * The third personal reference can be either family or a close friend/colleague.

6. Marital Status *(if applicable)*

Applicants who are currently or have previously been married, divorced, separated or widowed will be required to provide copies of all that apply:

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

7. School Verification *(if applicable)*

Applicants will be asked to provide a copy of the most recent report card or progress report for all children (over age 5 and under age 18) who reside in the home.

- * BCDSS will review school records to assess attendance, punctuality, grades and behavior.

8. Pets *(if applicable)*

Applicants will be requested to provide current rabies vaccination records for pets in the home.

- * Pets must be licensed or registered as required by state and/or local law.
- * In Baltimore City, all dogs and cats over 4 months old must be licensed.
- * For more information on pet licensing in Baltimore City visit: <http://www.petdata.com/for-pet-owners/blt>.
- * All pets in the home must demonstrate a gentle, non-threatening temperament/nature.
- * Pets must be regularly groomed, including clean trimmed nails and proactively treated for fleas & ticks as recommended by the American Canine Association <http://www.acainfo.com>.

9. Background Clearances

Maryland requires background clearances for all applicants, adult household members, frequent

household visitors (adults in the home 2 or more times a week) and back-up providers. BCDSS conducts the following background checks:

Required Background Clearances					
	MD Judiciary Case Search	Sex Offender Registry	Child Protective Services	State & Federal Criminal (CJIS)	Child Support Clearance
Applicants	●	●	●	●	●
Adult Household Members	●	●	●	●	
Frequent Visitors	●	●	●	●	
Back-Up Providers	●	●	●	●	

The following felony convictions will result a home study denial:

- * Child abuse or neglect
- * Spousal abuse
- * A crime against a child(ren)
- * Child pornography
- * A crime of violence including rape, sexual assault or homicide
- * Human trafficking

The following felony convictions (dating back 5 years) may result a home study denial:

- * Physical assault
- * Battery
- * A drug related offense

10. Medical

Applicants and all household members must have a recent **physical examination** (conducted within 12 months) from a licensed health care professional. Physicals must be documented on a *BCDSS Medical Form*.

- * The initial medical shall include the analysis of **tuberculosis tests** or X-rays for all household members over age 12.
- * If caring for infants (0-1) and/or children with special medical needs (any age), all household members over age 12 must provide verification of an up-to-date annual **flu vaccine** (within a year) 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 over age 12 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 must verify up-to-date **immunizations** unless there is a medically documented exemption.
- * In accordance with COMAR (07.02,05.04), *if a household member has symptoms or history of physical or mental health problems which may prevent a foster child from receiving proper care or which might be communicable or injurious to the physical or emotional health of a foster child the department shall require an individual to provide a written document by the examining physician stating the health problem poses no threat to foster children.*

- * Applicants and all household members must disclose current mental health and/or substance abuse issues and provide information on their physical and mental health history, including any history of drug or alcohol abuse or treatment.

11. Home Visits & Family Interviews

During the home study BCDSS will conduct interviews with all household members over the course of three to five home visits. Biological and adopted children who do not reside in the home can be interviewed by phone. BCDSS may also request to interview other people who know or have worked with prospective providers.

12. Back-Up Provider

BCDSS resource providers are asked to identify at least one person who is willing and able to provide support and/or temporary care for the foster children in their care. A back-up provider should be a responsible and trusted friend or family member who is able to assist when the resource provider is unavailable or in the event of an emergency.

Back-up provider requirements:

- * Must be at least 21 years old
- * Sign and agree to comply with the terms of the *BCDSS Back-Up Provider Agreement*
- * Complete and pass background clearances
- * Home Health Assessment (respite/optional; only required for back-ups who would like to provide short-term care in their own home, otherwise foster children must be cared for in the resource provider's home. All household members must also complete and pass background clearances)

13. Home Health Assessment

During the initial home visit the home study worker will conduct a safety assessment of the applicant's residence. BCDSS must be able to access all rooms/areas of the home (ie drawers, closets, containers, storage, etc) regardless of ownership/occupancy (ie roommates, property owners, renters, relatives, friends, etc).

14. Fire & Health Inspection

A fire & health home inspection will be conducted by the Fire Department, Health Department and/or another BCDSS community partner. The inspection standards are determined by inspection agencies, in accordance with state law and local policy.

Health, Fire & Safety Standards

BCDSS Home Health Assessment Standards

During the initial home visit, BCDSS will conduct a walk-thru home health assessment to ensure that at a minimum the home has the following:

- * Adequate heat, light, water, refrigeration, cooking and toilet facilities
- * Properly functioning lithium battery smoke detectors installed on each level of the home and one near all sleeping areas
- * Properly functioning carbon monoxide detectors installed on each level of the home and one near all sleeping areas
- * At least one operable fire extinguisher that is readily accessible
- * 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 children must have access to a working phone while in the home)
- * Access to windows and doors that easily open and close
- * 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

Fire and Health Inspection Standards

A fire and health inspection will be completed by a BCDSS partner. The following are some, not all, of the inspection standards:

General Standards

- * In accordance with COMAR (07.02.25.04): *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*
- * 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
- * Each foster children's sleeping and living quarters shall have provisions for privacy, study and storage (clothes, toys and personal possessions)
- * Homes with only one bedroom will not pass a home inspection (restricted applicants *may* qualify for an exception to care for infants under two years old; a plan must be made to move the child into their own space by their 2nd birthday)

Bedrooms

- * Bedrooms where foster children sleep must have two ways in and out; a door and a standard size window (measuring at least 20 x 24)
- * Bedrooms where foster children sleep may not have a pass through to another area/room
- * Bedrooms where foster children sleep must measure approx. 80 sq. ft (one child)
- * Bedrooms where foster children sleep may not have a skylight
- * Bedrooms where foster children sleep may not have a fireplace
- * Bedrooms where foster children 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
- * Resource providers must sleep within earshot of the foster children in the home
- * If sharing a room, children must be the same gender and close in age (w/in 4 years apart)
- * Children under the age of 2 may sleep in the same room as their parent (foster youth) or the resource provider however there must be an available space for the child to transition into no later than their 2nd birthday
- * Foster children over age 2 may not share a bedroom with an adult (incl. foster youth 18+)
- * No child, of any age, may share a bed with another adult or child

- * All children must sleep in their own, age appropriate, bed, crib or pack & play (stacked bunk beds and trundle beds are not permitted)
- * Infants must sleep in an approved/certified crib or pack 'n play in accordance with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for safe sleep (cribs are preferred)

Firearms

- * Applicants must follow all federal and state laws pertaining to registration, permits and maintenance of firearms (copies of required permits/licenses must be provided)
- * All firearms and ammunition must be stored in a locked room or locked container that is inaccessible to children (ammunition must be secured & stored separately from weapons)
- * For more information visit the MD State Police Licensing/Fire Arms Division:
<http://mdsp.maryland.gov/Organization/Pages/CriminalInvestigationBureau/LicensingDivision.aspx>

Window Blind Cords (Angel's Law)

- * All window treatments (venetian blinds, mini blinds, vertical blinds, roman shades, draperies, etc.) with hanging cords must be secured using a mounted cord wrapper (cordless blinds are preferred)

Potentially Dangerous Household Items

- * All potentially life threatening, or injurious household items must be kept in a safe location that is inaccessible to small/vulnerable youth (ie 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 at least 4 ft. high
- * Swimming pools must have their methods of access through the barrier equipped with a safety device, such as a bolt lock
- * Swimming pools must be equipped with a life saving 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 foster children. Smoking is prohibited in the foster family home as well as any vehicle used to transport foster child(ren)