



STATE OF WISCONSIN

# Foster Parent Handbook



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# WELCOME TO FOSTER PARENTING IN WISCONSIN

This handbook is intended to give basic information about foster care in Wisconsin to newly-licensed foster parents and to serve as a refresher for experienced foster parents. In it, foster parents will find an overview of the foster care program, information about what is expected of foster parents, a discussion about the care of children in foster care, an explanation of the critical need to work cooperatively with birth families, and an emphasis on the importance of foster family self care. This handbook also provides additional tools and resource lists if foster parents want to learn more about a specific topic.

It is important to understand that this handbook is **not** intended to replace Wisconsin foster parent licensing requirements included in state statutes, Ch. HFS 56, Adm. Code, "Foster Home Care for Children," or Ch. HFS 38, Adm. Code, "Treatment Foster Care for Children." Foster families should always consult the State of Wisconsin's licensing rules for specific information about licensing standards. Appendix 2 in Section 6 of this Handbook contains a web link to access Ch. HFS 56, Adm. Code, if foster parents want to review licensing requirements.

Throughout this document and referenced documents you will find references to the Department of Health and Family Services and the Department of Children and Families. On July 1, 2008 the Division of Children of Families split from the Department of Health and Family Services to become a part of the new Department of Children and Families formed. It will take time for the new Department to convert all forms, Administrative Codes, and references in all documents so you may still see the Department of Health and Family Services referred to.

Also, it is important to know that each licensing agency has the authority to create policies that outline additional requirements beyond the State's minimum standards. In addition, tribes have the authority to establish tribe-specific standards for licensing foster homes. Because licensing agencies have this flexibility, foster care services might look a little different from agency to agency, tribe to tribe, or county to county. It is always a good idea for foster parents to first check with their licensing agency if they have a question about something.

We have an immense appreciation for all that foster families do. The hard work and commitment they provide do not go unnoticed. In fact, we all know that without dedicated and caring foster parents, the foster care program in Wisconsin could not provide the safety and stability that the children who come into care need so much.

**Thank you for providing hope, guidance, and assistance to  
Wisconsin's children and families!**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services would like to thank the following developers and contributors to this handbook, especially those who wrote letters of personal experience that bring this handbook to life.

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***We would like to extend a special thanks to all the foster parents, state, county, tribal and private agency staff, birth parents, and former youth in care who provided information and comments to the handbook committee.***



**JIM DOYLE**  
**GOVERNOR**  
**STATE OF WISCONSIN**

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May 2008

Dear Foster Parent:

On behalf of the State of Wisconsin, thank you for making the commitment to be one of Wisconsin's foster parents. We have enormous respect and admiration for the foster families in our state who provide safe and stable homes for children in need.

This Foster Parent Handbook was created to help you as you begin and continue your journey as a foster parent. Developed with input from foster parents and foster care staff, it includes explanations of foster home licensing requirements, recommendations for working in the foster care system, and insights and reflections from foster parents, foster youth and birth parents.

As adoptive parents, Jessica and I know firsthand that parenting can be a rewarding - and challenging - experience. Foster parenting brings its own unique rewards and challenges. If you have a question, look it up in this Handbook, contact your licensing agency or foster care coordinator, or contact the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center at 1-800-974-8074. We all want to ensure that you have the resources, support, and assistance you need to provide safe homes for children.

Thank you for being such an important resource for our children. Whether you care for children for a short time or forever, you have made a lifetime of difference.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Jim Doyle in black ink.

Governor Jim Doyle

Handwritten signature of Jessica Doyle in black ink.

First Lady Jessica Doyle



Jim Doyle  
Governor

Karen E. Timberlake  
Secretary

**State of Wisconsin**  
Department of Health and Family Services

May 2008

Dear Wisconsin Foster Parent:

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible work you do as foster parents and say thank you for all of the time and effort you put into caring for children in foster care in Wisconsin. No matter how long you have fostered, you have made a difference in the life of a child.

Having been a foster parent and a social worker, I understand the demanding nature of fostering - from agency expectations to increasing needs of children to keeping children connected to their families. As the Secretary Designate of the new Department of Children and Families created by Governor Jim Doyle, I am committed to providing you with the resources and skills necessary to meet the needs of the children placed in your home and to take care of your family.

This Foster Parent Handbook is one step in providing you with more information and resources to support you in your work. I hope you will use this Handbook to learn more about foster care in Wisconsin as you care for children in our state. We will continue to look for ways to increase your ability to meet the needs of children in foster care.

Thank you again for all that you do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Reggie Bicha".

Reggie Bicha, Secretary Designate  
Department of Children and Families