

# AZDCS Orientation

**0:04** **Jesse**

Hi, I'm Jesse.

**0:05** **Rosanna**

And I'm Rosanna.

**0:06** **Jesse**

Welcome to the Arizona Department of Child Safety, Foster Care, and Adoption Orientation Video. We'll be your hosts as we get you started on your foster care journey.

**0:16** **Rosanna**

We are so excited that you are interested in learning more about being a caregiver to Arizona's children. During this video, we'll provide you with information about **fostering children, providing kinship care, and starting the adoption process**, and most importantly, tips on **how to select an agency** to help support and guide you throughout your adventure.

**0:35** **Jesse**

Before we begin, we just want to say thank you for taking the first step to help Arizona children in need. The incredible support that foster, kinship, and adoptive caregivers provide for children is what makes communities special. The children of Arizona deserve someone caring like you to help them during a difficult time in their life.

**0:54** **Rosanna**

Now, let's go to Chanetta who is going to give us some important information to help you make the decision on the type of care you want to provide.



# Important Items to Know

## 1:06 Chanetta

Chanetta,  
AZDCS  
Assistant  
Legislative  
Liaison

By far, the greatest need for foster homes in Arizona is for **children aged 13 to 17, followed by children aged 9 to 12**. While we do need families willing to take infants, we really need families for school-aged youth and sibling groups. During the licensure process, your licensing specialists will support you in identifying an age range of children to provide care for. We hope this information assists you with making that decision. Children come into foster care through no fault of their own. They have been temporarily removed from their families and are in need of a safe and loving home. The children of Arizona are the responsibility of all of us, and you could be the difference in a child's life.

## 1:56 Jesse

Throughout the rest of this orientation video, we will go through the **details and important information to know about foster, kinship care, and adoption including licensing, certification, and expectations of caregivers**.

## 2:09 Rosanna

Umm, Jesse, before we move on, one quick question: what's the difference between foster, kinship, and adoption?

## Jesse 2:16

Oh yeah, it's ... actually ... it might be better if we get Chanetta to tell us.

# Types of Care

## 2:25 Chanetta

**Foster care is a temporary arrangement with the goal of reunification.**

5 Types of  
Foster Care

There are five types of foster care:

- **Unlicensed Kinship:** providing care to a kinship member without a license.



- **Licensed Kinship:** providing care to a kinship member under a state-issued license.
- **Licensed Foster Care:** providing temporary care to children who are not related to the licensee.
- **Licensed Respite Foster Care:** providing short-term care in your home for children who have been placed in another foster home.
- **In-Home Respite Care:** providing short-term care for children in someone else's licensed foster home.

All foster caregivers must go through the state licensing process to provide care for children they are not related to.

**Adoption is a *permanency* decision that is made at the *end of a case*, which is different from providing foster or kinship care. Adoption is a permanent legal decision approved by the court that **makes you the child's legal parent and gives you the *same rights and responsibilities* you have for a biological child.****

### 3:38 Rosanna

Thanks, Chanetta. Now let's move on to the next chapter, where we'll learn more about the requirements and expectations for foster parents.

### 3:46 Jesse

And I know just the person who can help us out: an actual foster parent will help explain some of the details and important information about foster care.

## Foster Care

### 3:59 Jermaine

Jermaine,  
Foster Caregiver

Hi. My name is Jermaine. And I've been fostering children for five years. Foster caregivers do invaluable work every day by providing love and support for children during a difficult time in their lives. I can tell you from firsthand experience, it's an endlessly rewarding role. But there's also an incredible amount of work that requires being a part of a team and total commitment and passion for helping children.



It is expected as a foster caregiver, that you treat the children in your home as though they are family, while understanding that they are with you on a temporary basis. **Foster caregivers support the plan to help reunify children with their families. AZDCS promotes shared parenting, which allows foster caregivers to partner with and support birth parents.** This helps children feel more comfortable in your home. When children are removed from their homes. They don't stop loving and worrying about their parents, and their parents don't stop loving and caring about them. ***Shared parenting allows them to remain connected, safely.***

The safety of you and your family is very important, but **AZDCS does expect and encourage you to have at least minimal contact with the child's birth family.** Ways to engage with birth parents can include **sending notebooks back and forth, phone calls or video calls between visits, and sharing updates like photos or schoolwork between visits.** Each of these things helped reinforce a healthy shared parenting experience. You may also want to reach out to other members of the child's family, like a sibling, to help maintain their family connection.

**AZDCS strives to keep sibling groups together. You may amend your license to help keep siblings together as siblings may not always come into care at the same time.** Helping children in care is a gift not only for the children but for yourself. **You are *not alone* in this journey. You are *part of a team*** that successfully engages children and their families to ensure safety, strengthen families and achieve permanency.

**6:00 Rosanna**

Wow. I don't know about you, but I want to be a foster parent now.

**6:04 Jesse**

I don't think you can be a foster parent when you're a kid. Remember, you have to be 21. Actually, there are a few more requirements and expectations for foster parents. Another AZDCS friend, Theresa, is going to tell us all about it.



# Foster Parent Expectations

## 6:22 Theresa

Theresa,  
AZDCS Program  
Supervisor

Foster care provides a temporary home for children in the custody of the state who are not able to safely live with their current family. **The primary goal of foster care is to reunite children with their family**, and foster caregivers are expected to assist with that reunification process. This requires you to follow the case plan that is created by the Arizona Department of Child Safety and be an active participant in meetings that involve the child in your care. This may include school meetings or court hearings, doctor's appointments, and more. Finally, you're expected to be an advocate for the children in your home, ensuring that their needs are met.

### Basic Licensing Requirements

The following are the basic licensing requirements to become a foster parent.

- You must be at least 21 years of age and be present in the United States legally.
- You can be single, married, or in a relationship.
- If you're married, both parties of the marriage must complete all licensing requirements.
- The department welcomes diverse families regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion.
- You have to pass the FBI and local criminal background check and have a Level 1 fingerprint clearance card issued by the Department of Public Safety.
- In addition, you have to successfully complete the foster parent training, participate in an extensive interview process with your licensing specialist, pass a home safety inspection, and be medically qualified by a healthcare professional.
- You will also have to be able to meet your own living expenses without relying on the stipend provided by the state to ensure that you are able to care for the children who may be placed in your home.



**Timing** The length of the licensing process depends on how quickly you and your agency complete the training, paperwork, and inspections. **The average time frame from intake to licensed is four to six months.** Please understand that **much of the process is self-driven and will be determined by timeliness in completing and submitting paperwork, obtaining a Level 1 fingerprint card for all adult members of your household, or any home modifications that may be needed to pass the life safety inspection.** As a licensed foster parent, you must continue meeting the licensing requirements for as long as you are licensed. Any changes to your home or living situation must be reported to your licensing agency.

The children that come into care come from diverse backgrounds that may be different from your family. We understand that your family has their own cultural and religious practices and encourage your family to include the children in your cultural activities. The child may have their own as well, and the responsibility lies with the caregiver to assist the child in getting their spiritual and cultural needs met. This is a great opportunity for your family and the child to get to know each other.

**Cultural Differences**

It will also be important for your families who engage with your team to best support meeting that child's needs. This will include **supporting the religious beliefs, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and cultural practices of the children and youth placed in your home. A child in your care may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning of their sexuality.** Your team can assist in identifying training, support and understanding of other religions, cultures and backgrounds to ensure you can provide the best care for the child.

It is also important to know how to communicate and discipline the children in your care. Children in foster care have experienced significant trauma in their past, and **physical punishment of any kind is not permitted.** Even the threat of physical punishment goes against AZDCS practices. Instead, structured discipline and positive reinforcement are used to teach children how to change their own behaviors. Your licensing specialist, along with the child's team, will be there to help you navigate and gain these skills as you go through your journey.

**Immunizations**

AZDCS understands and respects that you know best when it comes to immunizations for your children. However, due to department policy, **children ages 0 - 5 and/or with certain medical conditions may not be placed in the home where the biological or adopted children in the home have not been immunized.** This will be part of the discussion with your licensing agency about your licensing parameters.



**Firearms** Foster caregivers may own firearms and other weapons. However, **all guns must be stored in a locked container, unloaded and have a trigger lock. Ammunition must be locked and stored separately. All other weapons must be made inoperable or safeguarded.** Conversations such as immunizations and firearms are part of life safety inspection preparation. Your agency will complete a preliminary inspection to advise you on the requirements to be successful when the state performs the official inspection.

**10:53 Rosanna**

That may seem like a lot of rules and work. But it's all there to help protect Arizona's children.

**10:59 Jesse**

Yeah. And know that AZDCS staff members and your licensing agency – your team – are here to help guide you through every step of the process.

**11:08 Rosanna**

Let's check back with Jermaine and hear about his experience after getting licensed and the support he got from AZDCS.

## *A Foster Parent Experience*

**11:14 Jermaine**

The licensing process was pretty easy. The main thing that it did was allow me to learn things about myself that I did not know before then. I think my biggest fear was that I wasn't going to be good enough to take care of this kid. I really discovered that I didn't have to be perfect. And I didn't have to get everything right, I guess in my eyes. What I needed to do was bring my best self to the table and make myself available to this kid that just needed someone. And that was enough.

Flexibility in preferences is a key part of being a foster caregiver. When a child is first removed from their family, we may not have all the information on the child's individual needs. Caregivers are often resources in learning more about the child and their needs.



Remember that children in foster care have experienced trauma.

**Children come into foster care through *no fault of their own*.**

They've been removed because they could not safely remain in their homes. Removing a child from everything familiar to them is traumatic. Sometimes children who've experienced trauma may not be able to express their feelings with words, so they may express themselves through their behavior. **Often children with the most challenging behaviors are the ones who *need our care the most*.**

When the time comes for a child to reunify with their families, saying goodbye can be challenging, but it's a moment that should be celebrated. It's an opportunity to continue to support that child and their family's continued success. **Remember, foster care is not a permanent arrangement. And when it's time for the children to move on, foster parents need to know how to manage grief in their own household.**

Attachment is a good thing for both you and the child. If the child can attach and trust you, they'll be able to do the same with others in their lives. And this leads them to a healthier future. **You'll always remember the time these children spent in your home. Some families even under the children and their impact by creating a wall for each child's artwork or their names or handprints.**

There are many financial supports available for foster caregivers. Please note that the funds may not cover the entire cost of caring for a child in foster care. **All children in foster care have medical, dental, prescription insurance and are provided with behavioral health services.** In addition, children ages zero to five in foster care are eligible for WIC, and school-aged children qualify for free school lunches. **Licensed foster caregivers receive financial reimbursement for each child they're caring for. Some basic supports might include child care assistance when needed, clothing personal allowances, and special funds for events such as graduation.**

In addition to the financial supports available to foster families, there are other supports that are available as well. **Clothing resources, support groups, ongoing training, 24-hour behavioral health crisis line and foster parent liability insurance are also available.** Warm Line is another support. It is a free and confidential telephone service staffed by peers who offer support and compassion for callers who need help. It can be with anything from behavioral health problems, or just if you need someone to talk to.



Remember when you become a foster parent you become a part of a team and the members of your team include the child in your care, you the foster parent, the birth parents, the family members, AZDCS case managers, licensing specialists, the behavioral health providers, the Foster Care Review Board, Court Appointed Special Advocates (also known as CASAs), the courts and the attorneys. You'll get to know all of these people very well. And they are incredibly valuable and supportive during and after your foster care training.

**15:13 Jesse**

Well, that wraps up our section on foster care. If you have any more questions about becoming a foster caregiver, check out [azdcs.gov/foster](https://azdcs.gov/foster).

**15:27 Rosanna**

Alright, next up, we're talking about kinship care.

**15:31 Jesse**

That's right. In Arizona, nearly half of children in foster care reside in kinship care.

**15:37 Rosanna**

And we have a special speaker to help explain some of the finer details of kinship care. Say hi to Tene.

## Kinship Care

**15:44 Tene**

**Tene,  
Kinship  
Caregiver**

My name is Tene, and I'm Imani's aunt. I became her foster kinship caregiver 11 years ago. Kinship foster care is when a child is removed from their family by AZDCS and placed with relatives or individuals who have an existing relationship with the family. **Most relatives start out as kinship foster caregivers and then decide to become licensed to gain access to additional support.**

My niece was immediately placed with me after being removed from my sister. Unfortunately, my sister was unable to successfully reunify with Imani. So when Imani became available for adoption, I adopted her and this is a decision I've never regretted.



There are some important differences between kinship foster care and community foster care. Kinship foster caregivers often already have the child placed with them by AZDCS and have a blood or significant relationship with the family or child prior to placement. **Kinship caregivers may be licensed or unlicensed, but either way, they work with the team to follow the safety plan created by AZDCS. A kinship caregiver who chooses to get licensed will go through the same process as a community foster caregiver and maintain licensing compliance through ongoing inspections by a licensing agency and AZDCS.** Being placed with and cared for by a relative or another familiar adult helps children stay connected to their relatives, culture and community. It may also reduce the amount of trauma experienced by the child.

Whether a kinship caregiver or not, reunifying children with their birth parents remains the number one priority of kinship caregivers and AZDCS. It's important for the team to maintain a relationship with the birth parents and help support them during the process to have their child returned to them. As a kinship caregiver, this is sometimes challenging, based on your relationship and personal history with the child's birth parents. And becoming a kinship caregiver may have an impact on other family members and your relationship with them. But becoming a kinship caregiver has been one of my proudest accomplishments. And I hope my story helped others take their first step.

**18:08 Jesse**

Aunts, you gotta love them.

**18:10 Rosanna**

Being placed in kinship care can be less traumatic for children in foster care since they already know the person or people they'll be living with.

**18:17 Jesse**

And kinship care doesn't require getting your foster care license. But doing so does come with some benefits. Salina is going to take us through some of those benefits and the requirements and expectations of kinship caregivers.



# Kinship Foster Care

**18:36 Salina**

Salina,  
Program  
Manager

Only once a kinship foster parent becomes licensed will they receive the same benefits and support as licensed foster parents, including an increased amount of financial assistance each month per child in your care to help pay the costs for caring for the child. **You'll also have the support and training of a licensing agency** to help you through the processes and the challenges. If these benefits would be beneficial to you and help you care for a child in your home, we recommend starting the licensure process as soon as possible.

1-877-  
KIDS-NEED-U  
(select option 3)

If you choose not to get licensed the AZDCS Warm Line is a free and confidential telephone service staffed by peers who offer support and compassion for callers who need help with behavioral health problems or just need someone to talk with.

The same general process is required for kinship foster parents as regular foster parents. **Some kinship caregivers may be eligible to receive waivers for non-safety-related licensing requirements.** If you are currently caring for the child, you may have already had a kinship home study. To become licensed, in addition, you have to successfully complete the foster parent training, participate in an extensive interview process with a licensing social worker and pass a home safety inspection. If you choose to become licensed, you must continue meeting the licensing requirements of the Department of Child Safety Office of Licensing and Regulation for as long as you're caring for children and your license is open. Any changes to your home or living situation must be reported to the Office of Licensing and Regulation and your licensing agency. Going through the licensure process may help you prepare for a situation where the birth parents are unable to make the necessary changes in order for their children to return home, and those children will need a permanent plan.

**20:25 Rosanna**

Thanks, Salina. That's sure was a lot of useful information. Not to me, because I'm only 14, but probably for the people watching this.

**20:33 Jesse**

Definitely. If you have any more questions about kinship care, check out [azdcs.gov/foster](http://azdcs.gov/foster). Next, we'll go over information related to adoption.



# Adoption

Alright, you've made it to the adoption chapter of the AZDCS orientation video. We know this may seem like a lot of information, but you're doing great.

## 20:58 Rosanna

And if you have any questions don't hesitate to reach out to AZDCS. They are super nice and helpful, and they can answer your questions in English and Spanish.

## 21:07 Jesse

In fact, Toni is one of them, and she is going to tell us some important things to know about adoption.

# Adoption Requirements

## 21:16 Toni

Toni,  
AZDCS Contract  
Administrator

Adoption is a permanent legal decision approved by the court that makes you the child's legal parent. Adoption gives you the same rights and responsibilities you have for a biological child. Children in foster care are available for adoption only after the birth parents' rights have been terminated by the court. In selecting an adoptive family for a child, AZDCS looks for a family that can best meet the needs of the child. We do not match children and families, we match families to children. Arizonans who want to adopt must meet certain criteria, and depending on the relationship with the child, may be required to be certified by the court.

### Requirements

The following are certification requirements to become an adoptive parent:

- You must be at least 18 years of age and be present in the United States legally.
- You can be single or married.
- If you're married, both parties in the marriage must complete all adoption certification requirements.



- You will have to pass an FBI and local criminal background check and have a Level 1 fingerprint clearance card issued by the Department of Public Safety.
- In addition, you will participate in an extensive interview process with an agency adoption worker, pass a home safety inspection and be medically qualified by a healthcare professional.
- Finally, you must be able to meet your living expenses.

Once you've been selected as a child's potential adoptive parent, a transition plan will be created with your team. Transitional visits begin so you when the child can get to know each other. These visits typically begin with a couple of hours and then gradually expand to full-day and overnight and weekends until the child moves in with your family. However, this is just a suggested timeline. AZDCS allows the child to guide the length of the transition time. Typically a child will live with an adoptive family for at least six months before a petition to adopt is filed with the court.

We want to make sure you know being licensed to foster is not a requirement for adoption. However, it may help you better understand the needs of the children in foster care. **If you intend to adopt, certification is the only way you can seek placement of a child who is legally free for adoption. There is no foster to adopt licensing category.** The purpose of foster care is to temporarily care for a child until the child is able to reunify with their parent. If a child is not able to reunify with their parents, the caregiver may have an opportunity to adopt the child. Relative placements are sought throughout the process, and approximately half of the children placed in foster care find permanency with a relative. Please remember that children of all ages need permanency. To learn more about children that are currently available for adoption, please visit [childrensheartgallery.org](http://childrensheartgallery.org).

**23:59** **Jesse**

Hopefully, that cleared up some questions you may have had.

**24:02** **Rosanna**

Thanks, Toni. You should also know that sibling groups and teenagers, like me, are in the most need of adoptive parents. Let's hear a firsthand experience with Keri, who recently adopted children through the AZDCS Children's Heart Gallery. And while you do that, I'm going to try first-hand experience with some ice cream.

**24:20** **Jesse**

Nice! Me too!



# Adoption Experience

**24:24 Keri**

**Keri,  
Adoptive Parent**

Hi. I'm Keri, and I adopted a sibling group of three from foster care in the state of Arizona. Which honestly, I never thought I'd say something like that. But here we are, through this journey that started with a bunch of little decisions and ended up with the biggest and best decision of my life.

My husband and I were wanting to have children and were at a point of considering different routes, whether it was going to be fertility treatment or pursuing adoption, and had no clue where to start. But as we started to do our research, we realized maybe we could take this desire we have to have kids and match it with a need here in our home state of Arizona, and I'm so grateful that we chose this route.

I didn't know that it was possible to specifically want to adopt. And I know there's many many families and a great need for families who can support reunification through foster care, but there's also a need for families who are looking to open up their homes for a permanent new addition. And for us, we thought, well, we'll go in, we'll get one kid under the age of two so they won't have too much memory of early negative experiences. But as we took the classes, and as we learned more about typical childhood development, the effects of trauma on the brain and all these amazing resources that are presented as you pursue this path, we decided we wanted to open our home to at least two kids. Then, at the last minute, my husband was talking to our licensing worker, and she said, "Okay, so two kids maybe age nine and under?" And my husband said, "I could do three!" So I said, "Sure! Threaten me with a good time!" And sure enough, we wound up on the adoption registry looking for a sibling set of three.

Within a month of having our adoption certification complete, we were matched with the most amazing, wonderful children who are smart and talented and funny and had been through so much in their little lives.



When we first got to know them, they were ages two, three and five. And our son had been separated from his sisters because his behaviors were pretty extreme based on some of the things they'd experienced. And so, the first step was getting them to reacclimate to each other as they got to reunify in our home, and that really formed the stable base of support for them to learn and grow and move on with their lives.

There are moments when they're playing on a playground and laughing and doing normal kid things that feel so rewarding because I know where they came from and what they've been through, and I can see that it hasn't impeded the joy that's in their hearts.

When you adopt a child from foster care through the Arizona Department of Child Safety, you can expect a lot of support from the staff members and other organizations. In addition, you'll find all kinds of support groups to help you along through the journey of adoption. **When adopting a child through AZDCS, there's little to no cost. You may receive an adoption subsidy, which is based on the child's needs and health benefits.** That's something we were completely surprised to learn. You will also be able to participate in the sibling information exchange program and confidential intermediary program through the courts to provide a contact between parties of adoption so you can stay anonymous. Finally, you may be eligible for a federal tax credit for adoption-related expenses.

As you've heard, being an adoptive parent takes work. In the upfront, with planning and paperwork and ongoing, to be a successful parent to your adoptive child. But it has been the greatest blessing of my life. I am so glad I made the decision to adopt. I hope you'll consider doing the same.

**28:24 Jesse**

Wow! What a great story.

**28:26 Rosanna**

And who knew there were so many support programs for adoptive parents?

**28:30 Jesse**

I didn't, and the people watching probably didn't either. You can visit the Children's Heart Gallery to learn more about adopting a child from foster care through AZDCS. Now that we have all the information about foster care, kinship and adoption, we're excited and ready to go. It's time to pick a foster or adoption agency. So Rosanna, which one should they pick?



**28:52 Rosanna**

Whichever one has the best ice cream?

**28:54 Jesse**

Maybe not the worst strategy. But, we have Joseph here to tell us more and give the viewers some pointers on picking the agency that's right for them.

**29:05 Joseph**

**Joseph,  
Licensing and  
Adoption  
Specialist**

Hi. My name is Joseph and I'm a licensing and adoption specialist. AZDCS contracts with a number of licensing agencies, but the agencies may vary by county. It's important to find an agency that is contracted to work in the county where you live. Choosing your licensing agency is the beginning of a long-term, mutual relationship. They'll be asking you a lot of questions and diving deep into your family core values and history while frequently visiting your home.

**Selecting an  
Agency**

Every agency has different philosophies, requirements and restrictions that make their support of your family unique. If you haven't selected an agency yet, **AZDCS has created a digital experience that will help you find the agency that is the perfect fit for you at [azdcs.gov/GetStarted](https://azdcs.gov/GetStarted)**. For answers to your questions about selecting an agency or in general support through your foster and adoption journey, **call us at 1-877-KIDS-NEED-U (1-877-543-7633)**.

**30:08 Jesse**

There are so many great agencies to choose from in Arizona.

**30:12 Rosanna**

The AZDCS website is a good place to start to find the agency that is right for you.

**30:17 Jesse**

Congratulations! You've just watched the AZDCS foster, kinship and adoption orientation video. Before you go, Rosanna and I want to thank you for being generous with your time and spending it learning how to help foster children in Arizona.



AZDCS and the licensing agency partners are here to help you through the process of becoming a caregiver to help children in foster care. If you have any more questions, please don't hesitate to reach out. We hope you continue the journey to become a caregiver of children in foster care. You'll have an incredible impact on the life of Arizona children in need, and they will change your life for the better. Visit [azdcs.gov/foster](https://azdcs.gov/foster) for more information.

**31:00** **Jesse & Rosanna**

Thanks!

**You have completed the AZDCS  
Foster, Kinship and Adoption Orientation Video.**

*Thanks!*

