

What to Really Expect – Resource Parent Approval Guide

Last Updated: March of 2023

First of all, welcome to this wonderfully difficult world of foster care! Thank you for responding to the needs of our community!

Disclaimer: This document does not replace or supersede the “What to Expect” document from DSS. The below advice was assembled by 4 resource parents who went through the approval process in Baltimore City within the past two years. It represents a variety of experiences and is meant to give you some parameters to guide your expectations. It cannot account for all possible scenarios. Please reach out to the Baltimore City Resource Parents Association at BaltimoreCityRPA@gmail.com, if you have any questions during the process.

General Things We Learned

- There is a lot of turnover among social workers. Don't be alarmed if your case gets assigned to someone new. That said, if you haven't been assigned a new case worker within 2-3 weeks, call a supervisor.
- The social worker helping you through the approval process (your “home worker,” HW) may exclusively work on approvals. In that case, a new social worker will take over once you are approved. Otherwise, you will keep the same one. It depends on DSS workload and personnel.
- You will likely receive the DSS “What to Expect Document” MANY times, even from the same social worker. While they are likely the same, do pay attention to the version. Sometimes rules can change in the middle of your process. (In 2022, there were at least 3 different versions circulated.)
- Your HW may or may not tell you about upcoming days off, which may impact your timeline.
- Before getting upset with your social worker, remember they are part of a bureaucracy that doesn't always make sense. Social workers do not have the authority to grant exceptions to rules. Usually, their supervisors don't either.
- Sometimes you have to advocate for yourself. Speak up if it doesn't seem like something's moving forward. Asking for a monthly update could help things stay on track.
- Consider connecting with other families in your training cohort. Some other ways to connect are through [Baltimore City Resource Parents Association](#) (BCRPA), [The Maryland Resource Parent Association](#) (MRPA), [Foster the Family Baltimore](#), or any other community you can find. Community is key and having other parents who are experiencing exactly what you are is validating.

Timeline

Note: Some will have completed their training hours before submitting an application. Others will be completing their training while going through the approval process. The below list doesn't have to happen in exactly this order but it should help you prioritize.

- (1) You submit an application to become a resource parent. This could be at the end of your training, in the middle, or at the beginning. Each situation is different. Ask your trainers during your class.

- (2) DSS assigns a HW to you, hopefully within a week.
- (3) Your HW will then schedule an in-person home visit with you, hopefully within two weeks.
- (4) The day your HW comes for the first time, you will sign your application and a 120-day clock starts ticking. Your responsibilities should be completed in the first 90 days, but aim for 60 to maximize the time your HW has to finish interviews and reports. (See below for more information on home visits.)
- (5) You begin preparing your home to meet the inspection requirements; you send in required paperwork; etc.
- (6) A safety inspector and a fire marshal inspect your home, together or separately. You and your HW will get an emailed safety report once the lead testing is done (about 2 weeks after the inspection). The fire marshal's report is sent directly to DSS.
- (7) Your HW completes at least two more home visits, in person or virtually (via cell phone); interviews you, your references, and your backup provider(s). (See below for details)
- (8) Once all of the requirements have been met, your HW writes up a home study narrative and submits it to his/her supervisor. Final approval may take 2 weeks.
- (9) Once you have been approved, your HW will document your placement preferences (see below). If your HW only does approvals, s/he will have to transfer your case to someone new. They will then want to meet you and do a home visit before adding your name to the call list. This stage can take another 2 weeks.

Note: At the 90-day mark, if all requirements haven't been met yet, you will receive an "Intended Action" letter, which says that DSS intends to deny you in 30 days if all of the requirements haven't been met—even if they are requirements outside of your control. If there are any pending items that you have any control over, now is the time to push, e.g. if DSS doesn't have the fire marshal's report yet, call/text the fire marshal and politely ask for it.

Denial: If you reach the 120-day mark and there are still pending items outside of your control, your application will likely be denied. That isn't the end of the world because there aren't any penalties for you, except that it will add more time to the process. You will be asked to wait 5 business days and then re-apply. You will be able to keep the same HW and you won't have to re-submit anything (but s/he will). The biggest time sink is that another 3 home visits will have to be completed within the new 120-day period. Expect a denial to add at least two months to the process and avoid it if you can! Extensions may be granted. Reach out to your HW to see if that's possible.

Top Priorities

(because of the length of time they take)

- (1) One of the first things your HW should do is to contact the safety inspector and the fire marshal because it can take a long time to get on their schedules, and it could take a long time to receive their reports. Try to get their contact information and follow up directly.
- (2) One of the first things you should do is decide on who will be your backup provider(s) and give their contact info to your home worker. Your backup provider is the only person allowed to care for your foster child(ren) overnight. (A few hours of babysitting can be done by anyone you trust.) This person will have to be fingerprinted, which triggers a background check. If fingerprinting is done at the two recommended locations, DSS can get the reports back as fast as the same day. If it's done at another location, it could take ~3 weeks for DSS to get the report. Your social worker probably won't "interview" your backup provider until the clearance is received. NOTE: fingerprinting and background clearance's

are also required of all adult household members and anyone who visits your home two or more times per week.

(3) Schedule a medical check-up and bring the form with you. Or, if you've had one recently, send the form to your doctor. You will probably also have to get a blood test for TB and some vaccines (currently, not for Covid).

(4) Choose your references and give their contact info to your home worker. Your HW will send them reference forms to fill out. These are simple, one-page sheets. Once your references return them, your HW will "interview" them. See below)

Home Visits/Inspections

In general, the people performing these inspections want you to pass. Even if they fail you initially, you will be given the opportunity to fix things and be inspected again.

DSS Home Visits

Your HW will visit your home (in person or virtually) 3-5 times during the approval process. The first time will be in person so you can sign your application. Remember, this is not Martha Stewart coming to inspect your home. The goal is to make sure your home will be a safe place for the children in your care.

Before your first visit, you should have the following in place: a designated room(s) for the intended child(ren) with a bed/crib and dresser in place for each child, an emergency escape plan, an emergency contact list, a first aid kit and a fire extinguisher.

Each HW is different, but here are some of the things you can expect your HW to ask you to do EACH visit. (Yes, they check the same thing multiple times.) >> test smoke detectors, flush a toilet, turn on a burner, turn on a faucet, open your fridge, open closet doors...

During your first visit, your HW will likely point out things that need to be improved. You have time to work on them. It will probably be about a month before your next visit. You don't have to have everything done by your second visit, but you should show that you've made progress.

Safety/Health Inspection

DSS contracts with the Green and Healthy Homes Initiative for this piece. Your home worker should contact them early on so that you can get on the list to be scheduled. This is the most extensive home inspection, lasting more than 2 hours. The inspector will swab at various locations within your home to test for lead. They will then be sent to a lab and processed, so you won't know the results for 1-2 weeks. The inspector will also test the temperature of your water, refrigerator, and freezer; the function of your stove; the placement of smoke and CO detectors; signs of a rodent infestation (no worries about having a few traps out); safe storage of hazardous chemicals; etc. He will also review various safe practices with you. If you plan on accepting small children, it would be good to have some outlet covers in place in the child's room and play areas. You should also have on hand baby gates and cabinet locks (for storing knives and cleaning supplies), but they don't have to be installed.

Fire Inspection

A fire marshal will come to assess the placement of smoke detectors, the presence of fire extinguishers, the ability to close bedroom doors, and the availability of adequate exits. This takes about a half hour.

Interviews

- For references: very brief, consist of reviewing the reference forms and confirming their accuracy
- For backup providers: brief, review backup provider agreement
- For resource parents: you will first receive a "Social Summary Form" to fill out and return to your HW; s/he will then chat with you for 1-2.5 hours total, covering some of the same topics; for couples, there will be 3 parts to the interview: each person individually and a segment together; topics include childhood experiences, conflict resolution, etc. It's hard to be vulnerable, but they are not looking to find fault. Difficult experiences are often the ones that best prepare you to be a foster parent, as long as you are able to work through them. You may be asked about mental health and any diagnoses you've had, including anxiety, and whether you take antidepressants or mood stabilizers. You may need a letter of clearance from your mental health provider for any of the aforementioned items.

-Note: These interviews will likely all be virtual. Unfortunately, it was always our experience that we could not see our HW during them.

Tips

- Document everything.
- Get the name and contact info of each person who visits your home for an inspection.
- MD law now requires the use of 10-year smoke detectors that don't require battery changes. You may save yourself some unpleasant smoke detector tests if you can find ones with blinking lights that indicate they are in working order.
- If you need to do something about the cords on your venetian blinds and you don't want to screw cleats into a wooden window frame, try using two clear plastic Command strips (0.5 lb) placed at the top of the blinds so that you can wrap the cord in a figure 8. (see photo)



-Reminder that pets must be registered/licensed. Baltimore City requires that pets be licensed through the website Pet Data, which charges a \$10 annual or \$100 lifetime fee. Up to date rabies shots are also required.

- DSS will only provide a home study for backup providers who live within 10 miles of headquarters, which means that backup providers who live farther will have to commit to caring for your child(ren) in your home.
- Resource parents are required to take 10 hours of training per year. The clock begins ticking when your initial training is complete. Therefore, if a full year passes before your approval, you will have to take 10 hours of training before you can be approved.

Placement Preferences

Below is a list of characteristics that children in foster care may have (up to date as of February 2023). Your HW will ask you to select one option for each characteristic: “will take,” “will consider,” or “would not prefer.” (Remember, you always have the right to refuse a placement, even if you select “will take.”) If the characteristic doesn’t pertain to your preferred age range, choose “would not prefer.” When a child comes into care, DSS will look for the best fit. The best fit would be a parent(s) who have checked “will take” for each of the child’s characteristics. If none are available, they will start calling parents with a mix of “will take” and “will consider,” etc.

Physical

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dietary restrictions • Doctor/therapist visits 1-4 times a month • Doctor/therapist visits more than once a week • Enuresis/encopresis • Hearing Impairment • HIV/AIDS • Infant born with chemical dependency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intellectual Developmental Disorder (IDD) • Learning disability • Medically fragile • Non-ambulatory • Prenatal drug exposure • Requires in-home administration of medical treatments • Speech disorder • STI/STD • Visual impairment/blindness |
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Mental Health

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADHD • Client requires a very consistent schedule with few disruptions to daily routines • Does not display emotions in typical way (e.g. remorse, empathy) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating disorder • Self-mutilation • Struggles with age-appropriate social interactions • Suicidal threats |
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Behaviors

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chemical dependency • Chronic lying • Cruelty to animals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destruction of property • Fire starter • Gang involvement |
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- Homicidal threats
- Physically aggressive to adults
- Physically aggressive to peers
- Public masturbation
- Running away
- Sexual offender
- Sexually acting out
- Suspended or expelled, last 30 days
- Tantrums (developmentally inappropriate)
- Theft
- Truancy
- Verbal aggression

Other Characteristics

- Commercially sexually exploited
- LGBTQ
- Pregnant or parenting
- Sexually abused

Thank you for taking this step and opening your home to kids who are in some of the worst situations you can imagine. We are standing in the gap for needy children, to put them on a better path that will make a positive impact on them for the rest of their lives in one of the darkest times of their lives. You will impact society, and yourself, more than you can fathom. Thank you.

Baltimore City Resource Parents Association – Executive Committee

<https://www.baltimorecityresourceparents.org/>

And a big thanks to the BCRPA Team Members for putting this together to help others.

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