



Build Your Village



Foster parents have the privilege of providing children with a safe, temporary home while their parents work to address safety concerns and learn new skills. While fostering can be incredibly rewarding it is also filled with many challenges and stressors. Building a strong supportive network even before your first placement is key in helping your foster care experience be successful and productive.

We wanted to share some tips and tricks with you to “Build Your Village.”

1. Follow social media accounts on Facebook or other websites

- Facebook has many local foster care support groups in your area that you can connect with. These groups typically have other foster or adoptive parents sharing upcoming events, free clothing and items for children, and the ability to ask for respite care. Foster parents also use this platform as a place to vent and offer support to others who get it. Some local Facebook foster care support groups you can check out and join in your area are:

- SW Michigan Foster Parent Exchange
- SW Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Support
- Cass & St. Joseph Foster/Adoptive Parents (Specifically for Cass & St Joe Counties)
- Fostering Forward Michigan Members Only Group

- His Hands and Feet for Foster Care (Specifically for Kalamazoo and Van Buren County)
- Van Buren County Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Parents (Specifically for Van Buren County)
- Kids Belong Parent Connect (Muskegon/Ottawa & Surrounding areas) private group reach out to Jeff Steele to be added Jeff@kidsbelong.org
- Lake/Newaygo County Foster/Adopt Connect
Page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/926539411424320>
- Mason/Oceana County Foster/Adopt Connect
Page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/832950790933579>

2. Join a Support Group

- Support Groups are a place that offer a safe space to vent, share concerns, challenges, and successes, and connect with other foster parents. It is often here that foster parents can connect with someone that can be an emotional support but also, they can team up with to exchange respite care. It can be difficult for our friends and family to understand our foster care journey especially if they are not foster parents themselves. No one quite understands a foster parent like another foster parent! Many support groups are still happening even during the pandemic. The format has changed and they are typically online. To find a support group in your area visit:
<https://www.fcnp.org/support-group/>
- [Dad's only support group! Monthly on the second Wednesday.](#)
 - Some of the Facebook groups listed above are also doing an online type of supportive group you can join. Check them out!
 - If you still need help connecting to a support group in your area please contact your navigator or your licensing worker.

3. Ask for Help

- Asking for help is hard even if you are not a foster parent. Fostering can be demanding. Many neighbors, friends, and family members are probably able and willing to help you... just ask. No one can do this all alone. Some things that foster parents often need and ask for help with is:
 - Childcare-Having a few people available that you can count on to watch children either for a couple hours or maybe even a whole weekend from time to time.
 - Asking a group of family or friends to organize a meal train for your family. This is especially helpful during the first week or two when you get a new placement. Often if people cannot help with cooking, they are willing to gift you gift cards to restaurants.
 - Asking someone or a few people to be on standby that you can call in the middle of the night or any time of day to run and get some diapers, formula, or clothes for a child that was just dropped off.

-Asking your licensing worker to arrange some respite care. Many foster parents see respite as a last resort when they are completely burnt out. Respite care is something you should use before you feel overwhelmed. Respite care is provided by another foster family and can be for a few days and typically doesn't go beyond a few weeks. Please see the article linked below under *other resources you may find helpful* for more information about respite care.

-Remember to practice self-care. We already do a poor job meeting our own needs typically. Then when we add a child who has many needs it makes self-care even harder. Make sure you are making time for yourself and something you enjoy, every single day even if it is just for 15 minutes or so. Ask your partner, family member, or friend to step in for a bit so you can get that time for yourself. <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/30-ways-practice-self-love-and-good-yourself.html>

4. Utilize Foster Closets

- Children often enter foster care with very little notice and very little, if any, personal belongings. It is difficult to have everything on hand for a potential placement especially if you are licensed for a large age range. Foster parents are given a monthly stipend, but this often doesn't start until the child has been in care for a few weeks to a month and it isn't a whole lot. Instead of taking on the financial burden of providing clothing and necessary equipment, foster parents can connect with local agencies that will help them acquire these items. Some local foster closets in your area are:

-*Braden's closet-110 N Farmers St Otsego MI 269-567-0603*

<https://www.facebook.com/BradensClosetOtsego>

-*The Shack-210 S Grove St Delton MI 269-207-0761*

-*Foster Closet of Michigan-4284 Lake Street Bridgman MI-800-554-4966*

<https://www.facebook.com/FosterClosetOfMichiganBerrienCounty>

-*Christ United Methodist of Urbandale-65 W Bedford Battle Creek MI-269-965-3251*

-*Ellies Closet-1221 Coon Hollow Rd-Three Rivers MI-269-220-0967*

<https://www.facebook.com/threeriversnazarene.org>

-*Edwardsburg Foster Clothes Closet-28647 US HWY 12 Edwardsburg MI-810-288-4802*

<https://www.facebook.com/EdwardsburgCloset>

-*Calvary Bible Church-855 S Drake Rd Kalamazoo MI-269-372-1130*

<https://www.facebook.com/Calvarybiblechurchfosterandadoptionministry>

-*Lakeside Baptist Church clothing closet-2250 Denmark St Muskegon MI-231-755-1718*

-*Kids Belong Foster Clothing Closets*

Grand Haven Location: Watermark Church 13060 US 31, Grand Haven MI 49417 (hours vary email closet@kidsbelong.org for more info)

-Muskegon Location: Fellowship Church 4200 Apple Ave, Muskegon MI 49442 (Open Thursday 5-7pm)

If you don't see a closet that is available in your area, please contact your navigator and they will be able to connect you!

5. Use your navigator, foster, and licensing worker

- Your navigator is either a current licensed foster parent or they have been in the past. They understand that this foster care journey is filled with many ups and downs and want to walk with you through it! You can connect with them about questions, if you need some support, and even if you just need someone to talk to. We are here for you!!
- See yourself and the child's case workers as a team. Connect with them if you have any concerns about the child or if the child has some specific needs. They can put in referrals and connect you with resources. Sometimes foster parents are afraid to be open and honest with the caseworker if they are struggling but they cannot help unless you let them know what is going on.

Other resources you may find helpful:

Don't be scared by respite care:

<http://foster-adoptive-kinship-family-services-nj.org/dont-be-scared-by-respite-care/>

Locating foster care support groups in your area:

<https://www.fcnp.org/support-group/>

List of supportive agencies and resources:

https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-73971_7117_7658---,00.html

If you don't currently have a navigator and are interested in services please call 1-855-MICHKIDS(642-4543)

