



## **How to Host a Foster Care & Adoption Info Meeting**

[www.EmbraceMinistry.org](http://www.EmbraceMinistry.org)

**What is an Info Meeting?** An Info Meeting is an opportunity to share details about the foster care (and adoption through foster care) licensing process, how child protective services functions in your community, information/statistics about the waiting child population, and opportunities to volunteer. The purpose of this meeting is to educate and recruit new foster and adoptive families. In some areas it may be possible to partner with child placing agencies or Child Protective Services to host this event. This 1.5 - 2 hour gathering could take place on a weekday evening or Saturday morning.

**Who should attend?** This meeting is for individuals, couples and families interested in fostering, adopting through foster care or supporting foster/adoptive families. Children 12 and under should not attend as they may cause a distraction in a lengthy meeting and some material presented (about abuse and neglect) may be inappropriate for younger listeners.

**How should we promote this event?** This event should be open to the public, but specifically promoted in local church bodies. You may ask your church, as well as other local churches to announce the info meeting during announcements and have information placed in the church bulletin. Social media, online calendars and local newspapers are also excellent outlets to spread the word for the event. Child placing agencies and your local Child Protective Services office may be willing to help promote the event to prospective foster/adoptive families as well.

**How can child placing agencies and other child welfare organizations be involved?** Families who feel compelled to seek more detailed information about fostering may appreciate the opportunity to meet and ask questions of a few child placing agencies at your event. You may wish to set up a small exhibit area and invite a few faith based CPAs (Child Placing Agencies) to set up a table with information. Agencies should be willing to have a representative man their booth and answer questions. Other organizations such as support groups, foster parent associations, CASA (court appointed special advocates) and children's advocacy centers may also be available to attend and exhibit.

**What materials/topics should be presented?** The info meeting should include enough detail about the requirements to become licensed, the removal and placement process, and what foster parenting really looks like that attendees leave with enough information to make an informed decision about if they wish to become a foster parent, or if this isn't the right path for their family. You may also incorporate a video (i.e. ReMoved Part 1 or 2) to convey the reality of foster care. Below is a list of topics to include in this 1.5 - 2 hour presentation:

- The urgent need for foster and adoptive parents in your area
- Biblical mandates to care for orphans
- How investigation, removal and reunification process works in your state
- Common causes for child removal
- Statistics/demographics about the age/race/needs of children in care
- Requirements and process for licensing (age limitations, background check, room space, homestudy, paperwork, etc)
- What is expected of foster parents
- What is expected of biological parents seeking reunification
- How a child's extended family can be involved in a case
- How abuse, trauma and drug exposure can affect a child's behavior/development
- How adoption through foster care works
- What support/resources are available to foster parents through their agency/state
- What support/resources are available to foster children through their agency/state
- Visitation, reunification and termination process
- The role of caseworkers, agencies, CASAs, attorneys and foster parents
- Walk through a "typical" example of an investigation, removal, foster care and reunification or adoption
- Ways to pitch-in and support foster/adoptive parents

A charismatic, well-spoken person should "MC" the event including welcoming guests, introducing speakers and moderating the panel discussion. It will be helpful to use a projector and slides during the presentation with photos of children and graphs to help convey statistics. Avoid reading directly from bullet points listed on slides or creating an atmosphere that feels more like a lecture than an interactive program. Providing guests with a handout and pen allows them to take notes and jot down questions. Seating should be set up in rows facing the front of a meeting room with a/v equipment for the presentation.

**Example agenda for the meeting:** (this example takes place on a Saturday morning)

**8:00 - 8:45 am** set up, exhibit area open for exhibitors to set up

**8:45 - 9:15 am** registration open (make sure to gather detailed contact information for all attendees in order to follow up with them), exhibit area open

**9:30 - 10:15 am** powerpoint presentation

**10:15 - 10:30 am** Q&A

**10:30 - 11:15 am** foster/adoptive parent discussion panel

**11:15 - 11:45 am** dismissal, exhibit area open

**11:45 - 12:00 pm** tear down

**What should a panel discussion look like?** Begin by inviting 1-2 seasoned foster or adoptive parents or couples, a foster alumni or adult adoptee, and a caseworker or other social work professional (therapist, CASA, etc.) to participate in the panel. It's helpful to consider diversity when inviting participants. Consider the age, marital status, race and adoption experience of panel participants to provide a richer, more well-rounded view of the foster/adopt process. Encourage your panel participants to be honest, positive and encouraging in their answers and responses. Children should not participate in the panel discussion. Some families are so excited about sharing their story they may go into too much detail during the introductions, so we suggest the MC introduce each participant. Below are a few questions you may consider asking your panel. In some cases there may be a specific family you direct a question to, or simply open up a question for discussion by all panel members.

#### Questions for Foster/Adopt Parents

- Was your goal in becoming a foster parent to adopt a child?
- What was the most helpful part of your licensing training?
- What challenges have you faced as a foster/adoptive parent?
- How has fostering affected the other children in your home?
- How do you cope when a child leaves your home to return to their family?
- Are there any helpful tips you would offer new foster parents?
- What have you learned about yourself as a parent through this journey?
- What has surprised you most about the children you've cared for?
- Can you share about the importance of support for foster/adoptive families?

#### Questions for Foster Alumni/Adoptees

- What was your first placement like?
- What would you encourage families to understand from your perspective?
- How was your experience transitioning into a new school/community/church?
- How did your foster/adoptive family help you understand what was happening?
- What is your relationship like with your birth family?

#### Questions for Professionals

- What is your role in the foster care or adoption process?
- What are the biggest barriers for new foster or adoptive families?
- Which resources have you found most helpful to children and families?
- How do you determine success in a foster placement or adoption?

**How should we follow up with attendees?** Use the contact information gathered from attendees to follow up with them one week after the meeting. Assign an informed volunteer the task of organizing contact information, thanking them for attending and replying to any questions they may have. Keep their contact information to share upcoming events your ministry may offer such as respite or training.