

Therapeutic Foster Care



Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) is a unique program designed for youth with serious emotional and behavioral needs who need more than traditional foster care can provide.

In this course, you will:

- Understand what TFC is and why it matters.
- Learn the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved, from case managers to resource parents.
- Explore the program structure, including training, referrals, and supports.
- Discover the goals and outcomes that make TFC successful for youth, families, and the community.

By the end, you'll see how TFC creates stability, promotes healing, and prepares children for a safe and permanent future.

Click "*Start Course*" to begin.

THERAPEUTIC FOSTER CARE

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Therapeutic Foster Care Defined



What is Therapeutic Foster Care?

Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) is designed for youth with serious emotional or behavioral needs who can't be safely placed in traditional foster homes. Instead of an institutional setting, these young people live in a family home with specially trained foster parents who create a highly structured, supportive environment.

Each child in TFC has an individualized care plan that combines home-based support with clinical services. This model helps bridge the gap between standard foster care and more restrictive residential placements, offering a chance for youth to heal in a nurturing, family-centered setting.



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Therapeutic Foster Care - You C...



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Roles & Responsibilities

What Role Do You Play?

There are many people that need to work collaboratively to make TFC successful. Expand each tab below to learn about the various roles and responsibilities for key stakeholders.



Complex Case Managers (CCM) —

- Train SWCMs on appropriate use of TFC to support youth, families, and organizational goals.
- Use data to identify youth who may require TFC due to unmet needs in general foster care.
- Receive and accurately document pre-screen and foster care referrals from SWCMs.
- Submit pre-screen referrals to the SWA for approval and track the approval status.
- Send approved pre-screen and foster care referrals to the RRTS contractor for next steps.
- Join initial placement meetings and the 45-day meetings to provide guidance on complex cases.

Social Work Case Managers (SWCM) —

- Identify eligible youth
- Complete TFC referral application and screening
- Coordinate placement with Four Oaks and TFC families
- Make monthly visits to where the child resides
- Develop permanency plans and monitor progress
- Support reunification/transition to an identified home

Targeted Case Managers (TCM) —

- Lead person-centered care planning meetings
- Write and monitor the care plan
- Facilitate access to waiver services and supports
- Convene family and treatment team prior to placement to introduce members and initiate treatment planning
- Track progress, modify goals, manage critical incidents
- Remain involved for ninety (90) days after reunification to support the transition

Resource Parents —

- Provide day-to-day care in a highly structured setting
- Support youth's mental, emotional, and educational growth
- Build relationships with birth families

- Complete daily logs
- May access temporary respite to maintain stable placement

Parents and Caring Adults —

- Active partners in the process
- Collaborate with the care team
- Educate the care team on needs and interests of the child
- Participate in planning meetings
- Prepare to reunify with their child.

TFC is designed to support parents as much as it supports youth, building skills and connections that last beyond placement.

Other Key Roles —

- **Recruitment Retention Training and Support (RRTS):** Recruitment, training, and ongoing support of TFC Resource parents, including monthly home visits, respite services, support groups and specialized training
- **Counselors, therapists, MCO case manager, or others:** As indicated to meet the needs of the child
- **Local School System:** School social workers and teachers are frequently engaged as a resource and support system for the child
- **Foster Parent Support Group:**

Together, this network ensures the youth receives holistic support and has the highest probability of success.



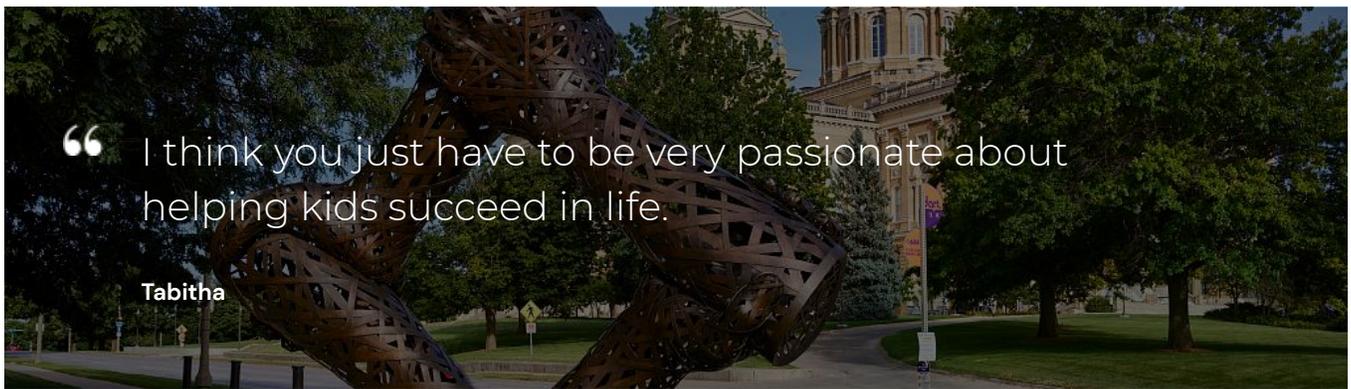
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Program Goals & Elements



Program Goals, Elements, & Metrics

TFC serves youth ages 7–17 who need intensive family-based support.

The process begins early, about 30 days before placement, the team comes together to engage in planning. This early engagement ensures that the child’s needs are clearly identified and that services are in place from day one.

Team Collaboration

- SWCMs focus on child welfare requirements such as safety, permanency, and family composition.
- TCMs focus on mental health, behavioral interventions, and connecting to service providers.

Together, they form a dual approach that addresses both the child's safety and their clinical needs.

Identifying Services

The team looks at each child's needs and may connect them to:

- Special education supports through the school or AEA.
- Habilitation or skill-building services.
- Waiver services or Social Security benefits if eligible.
- Other specialized interventions as needed.

Success is measured not only by reduced hospitalizations or disruptions, but also by progress on individualized goals and improved permanency outcomes.



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Which of the following statements accurately describe key aspects of Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC)? Select all that apply.

- TFC aims to reduce reliance on group care or hospitalization.
- TFC measures success solely by the number of youths placed in foster care.

A typical stay in TFC lasts about six months, with strong transition supports provided.

TFC serves youth ages 7-17 and limits placements to two children per home.

TFC focuses exclusively on reunification as the only permanency outcome.

SUBMIT

CONTINUE

Training & Qualifications

Selecting Qualified Therapeutic Foster Caregivers

Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) is not a role for every foster parent—it requires individuals with specialized skills, deep empathy, and a strong foundation in youth development or therapeutic practice. TFC resource parents are carefully selected for their professional experience or demonstrated expertise in working with high-needs youth, including backgrounds in social work, education, behavioral health, or related human services fields.

To prepare for the complex needs of the children they serve, resource parents complete rigorous training through the Core Teen curriculum and the National Training and Development Curriculum. These modules focus on trauma-informed parenting, managing challenging behaviors, and supporting children who have experienced sexual trauma. Additionally, caregivers are trained in verbal crisis de-escalation techniques, equipping them to respond calmly and effectively during emotionally intense situations.

Eligibility requirements reflect the program's commitment to safety and stability:

- Resource parents must be at least 25 years old.
- They must have formal education in human services or substantial experience supporting youth with behavioral or medical complexities.

- Homes must not include infants or other vulnerable children, and families are limited to two or three biological or adoptive children.
- Ideally, one caregiver is available full-time or has the flexibility to provide care around the clock.

By prioritizing highly qualified and deeply committed caregivers, the TFC program ensures that youth receive the intensive, compassionate support they need to thrive in a family setting.



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Training

TFC resource parents receive specialized training to prepare them for the unique challenges of this role.



Core Training —

Core Training covers topics such as trauma-informed parenting, managing challenging behaviors, and crisis de-escalation.

Specialized Training —

Specialized Training may include areas like attachment disorders, sexual trauma, and cultural responsiveness.

Additional Supports —

Additional Supports are available when a child has unique needs. For example, if a child struggles with attachment, a therapist may coach the foster parent on strategies to support them.



Complete the content above before moving on.

Referral Process

The TFC Referral Process

Referrals to TFC follow a clear process:



- 1 Youth Identified:** The Social Work Case Manager (SWCM) identifies a youth and consults with their supervisor and the Complex Case Manager (CCM).
 - 2 Screening Approval:** The SWCM submits the referral and screening to the CCM, who reviews it and sends it to the Service Area Administrator (SWA) for approval.
 - 3 Notification:** Once approved, the CCM notifies the SWCM, Supervisor (SWS), and SWA. The SWCM then sends the foster care referral to the CCM, who forwards both the TFC and foster care referrals to Four Oaks.
 - 4 Family Match:** The RRTS team identifies a TFC Resource Family that fits the youth's needs.
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HHS Verification and court order: The SWCM reviews the match, secures court orders, and obtains any additional approvals.

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Pre-Placement Planning: A Person-Centered Service Planning Meeting is held before the youth moves into the TFC home.

7

Ongoing Support: After placement, Person-Centered Service Plan meetings continue every 45 days, or more often if needed.



Forms for Referral

Click OPEN at right to navigate to the Therapeutic Foster Care SharePoint site for additional information and access to referral documents.

OPEN

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Support & Benefits

What Support is Available?

Youth and their parents benefit from TFC in important ways.

- Youth gain stability, structure, and therapeutic care while staying closer to their home communities.
- Parents receive coaching, support, and resources that help them prepare for reunification.

Supports may include:

- TCM guidance and oversight.
- AEA and school-based supports.
- Parent and foster family support groups.
- 24-hour crisis line.
- Ongoing community connections.
- Access to social and developmental activities for youth



CONTINUE

What are the Intended Benefits?

Youth in Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) experience meaningful advantages that support their stability and growth. Rather than being placed in institutional settings far from home, they remain connected to their communities, schools, and families. TFC provides access to therapeutic supports, crisis stabilization, and consistent educational opportunities — all within a family-based environment. Importantly, these services continue even after reunification, helping to sustain progress and reduce the risk of future institutional placements



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Transition & Aftercare

What Comes Next?

TFC is not just about placement, it's about preparing youth and families for what comes next.

As youth move toward returning home or stepping down to a lower level of care, the care team helps families plan and connect with supports. This includes coordination with schools, AEAs, and community providers.

Even after a child leaves TFC, supports continue for at least 90 days to ensure stability. SWCMs and TCMs remain involved, checking in on the family and youth, and helping navigate challenges.

Often, the bond between a TFC resource parent and a family continues. Resource parents may remain a trusted contact, just a phone call away, providing encouragement and guidance even after formal placement ends.



CONTINUE

Which statement best describes the role of parents in Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC)?

- Parents are observers only during planning meetings.
- Parents are active partners in planning and preparing for reunification.
- Parents do not participate until after reunification.
- Parents serve the same role as resource parents.

SUBMIT

True or False: Services and supports for the family are involved even after the youth returns to their intended home placement.

- True
- False

SUBMIT

What is the benefit of “early engagement” (30 days before placement)?

- It gives families time to find housing.
- It allows TFC to delay paperwork.
- It ensures services and supports are identified before placement.
- It guarantees permanency.

SUBMIT

Select all that apply: Resource parents receive which of the following types of training?

- Trauma-informed parenting
- Verbal crisis de-escalation
- Marketing and recruitment strategies

Attachment disorder coaching (if needed)

SUBMIT

Match the step to the order in which it will be taken.

⋮ Step 2	SWCM Identifies a youth and submits a referral to RRTS.
⋮ Step 4	RRTS identifies a TFC Resource Family that matches the needs of the youth.
⋮ Step 1	SWCM receives and approves recommendation and accesses court order and other approvals.
⋮ Step 3	A Person-Centered Service Planning Meeting is held in advance of the placement of the child in the home.
⋮ Step 5	After placement, ongoing Person-Centered Service Plan meetings occur every 45 days (or more if needed).

SUBMIT

Youth and parents both benefit from TFC. Which of the following is an example of support offered?

- Guaranteed adoption placement
- Parent and foster family support groups
- 24-hour crisis line
- Coaching from TCMs

SUBMIT

Scenario: A supervisor asks why a youth in their area wasn't placed in TFC. Which response is most accurate?

- The program prioritizes group care over family homes.
- Referrals are not accepted unless there is already an open home.

- Capacity depends on available homes and matching youth needs with resource parent skills.

SUBMIT

True or False: Support for youth and families ends when the child leaves a TFC home.

- True
- False

SUBMIT

Select all that apply: Imagine a youth is preparing to return home. Which of the following is part of the aftercare process?

- SWCM and TCM connect the family with schools and community services
- Resource parents remain a potential support contact

Services automatically end the day the child leaves

Families must start over with a new care plan

SUBMIT

Program Reach

TFC Program

TFC is a statewide program, meaning referrals can come from anywhere in Iowa. However, our ability to serve depends on the availability of homes and the skills of resource parents.

Matching is key: placements must align with both the youth's needs and the services available in the community. For this reason, caseworkers and supervisors are encouraged to submit referrals early and remain available for conversations about each youth's unique needs.

This collaborative approach ensures the best chance of placing children in homes that can support them effectively, as close to home as possible.



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Summary and Resources

Key Takeaways

Therapeutic Foster Care provides a safe, structured, and therapeutic family environment for children with complex needs. The program succeeds through collaboration; trained parents, case managers, therapists, and community partners all play a role.

By expanding access, reducing reliance on group care, and improving permanency outcomes, TFC helps children heal while supporting families and strengthening Iowa's trauma-informed care model.



Resources

Staff can find tools, forms, and referral checklists on the [TFC SharePoint](#). Additional questions or case-specific support can be directed to local TFC specialists.



If you have any questions, please reach out to the Complex Case Manager in your HHS Service Area or

email servicehelp@hhs.iowa.gov.

Thank you for completing this course!