



What to Expect: BCDSS Home Study

General Information

- * A Baltimore City Department of Social Services (BCDSS) home study is an opportunity to:
 - ✦ gather information about prospective resource parents;
 - ✦ evaluate prospective resource homes & families for safety, security and overall health;
 - ✦ educate and prepare prospective providers to meet the often complex physical, emotional and developmental needs of the youth in foster care.
- * BCDSS accepts home study applications from prospective resource providers who live in Baltimore City or within a 10-mile driving distance from 3007 E. Biddle Street Baltimore, MD 21213 (distance does not apply to relative/child specific caregivers).
- * The home study process typically takes between 60-90 days to complete however; it cannot exceed 120 days.
- * Steps to initiate a BCDSS home study:
 - ✦ Register for an Information Meeting
 - ✦ Sign up for a Pre-Service Training Class
 - ✦ Submit a BCDSS Home Study ApplicationCall the **Welcome Line 410-685-8231** or online @ www.bmorefostercare.com
- * Couples (spouses/partners) must both attend an Information Meeting and jointly complete all home study requirements.

Home Study Requirements

1. Pre-Service Training

BCDSS utilizes the *Parent Resources for Information Development and Education (PRIDE)* training curriculum. Applicants will be required to complete a minimum of 27 hours of pre-service training.

- * Trainees must have a valid email address and access to a computer, laptop or tablet

2. Identification Verification

Applicants, adult household members (age 18 and above), and frequent visitors (adults in the home 2+ times a week) will be requested to provide at least one form of government issued photo identification.

Valid forms of photo identification:

- * Driver's License
- * State ID
- * Military ID
- * Passport

Applicants (only) will also be asked to verify their age (must be 21 or over) and citizenship (US citizen or permanent legal resident).

Valid forms of citizenship verification:

- * Passport
- * Birth Certificate
- * Resident Alien Card

3. Financial Stability

Applicants will be asked to verify their ability to regularly meet their financial obligations (monthly household income must be equal to or greater than monthly household expenses).

Monthly Household Income

Applicants must provide copies of at least one of the following:

- * Last 2 consecutive pay stubs (if paid every 2 weeks)
- * Last 4 consecutive pay stubs (if paid weekly)
- * Last SSI/SSDI statement
- * Last retirement and/or pension statement
- * Most recent 1099 (if self-employed)
- * Notarized statement of earned income or financial support (from financial source)









In addition, the following may be considered as part of the total household income (these items will only be considered along with at least one of the documents listed above):

- * Adoption/custody & guardianship subsidy
- * Child support and/or alimony payments
- * Child's SSI or SSDI payments

Monthly Household Expenses

Applicants will be requested to provide copies or estimates of all of the following that apply:

Provide copies of the most recent statement or bill for items in Column A

Column A	
Mortgage or Rent	
BGE	
Water	
Cable/Internet/Phone	
Cell Phone	
Auto Loan	
Auto Insurance	
Child Support	

Estimate the monthly amount spent for items in Column B

Column B	
Transportation	\$ Estimate
Medical	\$ Estimate
Child Care	\$ Estimate
Entertainment	\$ Estimate
Food	\$ Estimate
Clothing	\$ Estimate
Education/Tuition	\$ Estimate
Donations	\$ Estimate

4. References

Applicants will be asked to identify three people to provide personal references.

- * Only one refence may be a family member
- * Personal references will be interviewed and asked to complete a *BCDSS Reference Form*

5. Marital Status

Applicants who are currently or previously been married, divorced, separated or widowed will be required to provide copies of all that apply:

- * A marriage license (if currently married)
- * All divorce decrees (decrees from all previous divorces)
- * All spousal death certificates (certificates from all deceased spouses)
- * A notarized separation affidavit

6. School Verification

Applicants will be asked to provide a copy of the most recent report card or progress report for all children (over age 5 and under age 18) who reside in the home.

- * BCDSS will review school records to assess attendance, punctuality, grades and behavior

7. Pets

Applicants will be required to provide current rabies vaccination records for pets in the home.

- * Pets must also be licensed or registered as required by state and/or local law/ordinance
- * In Baltimore City, all dogs and cats over 4 months old must be licensed
- * For more information on pet licensing in Baltimore City visit: <http://www.petdata.com/for-pet-owners/blt>
- * All pets in the home must demonstrate a gentle, non-threatening temperament/nature
- * Pets should be regularly groomed, including clean trimmed nails and proactively treated for fleas & ticks as recommended by the American Canine Association <http://www.acainfo.com>

8. Background Clearances

Maryland requires background clearances for all applicants, adult household members, frequent household visitors (adults in the home 2 or more times a week) and back-up providers. BCDSS conducts the following background checks:

Required Background Clearances					
	MD Judiciary Case Search	Sex Offender Registry	Child Protective Services	State & Federal Criminal (CJIS)	Child Support Clearance
Applicants	●	●	●	●	●
Adult Household Members	●	●	●	●	
Frequent Visitors	●	●	●	●	
Back-Up Providers	●	●	●	●	

The following felony convictions will automatically result a home study denial:

- * Child abuse or neglect
- * Spousal abuse
- * A crime against a child(ren)
- * Child pornography
- * A crime of violence including rape, sexual assault or homicide
- * Human trafficking

The following felony convictions (dating back 5 years) may result a home study denial:

- * Physical assault
- * Battery
- * A drug related offense

9. Medical Examinations

Applicants and all household members will be required to complete medical examinations to verify that all household members are free of communicable diseases and have no mental or physical health problems that may impair their ability to care for or live with foster children.

- * The physical exam must be current (within a year) and documented on a *BCDSS Medical Form* (there are separate medical forms for adults and children)

- * The initial medical shall include the analysis of tuberculosis tests or X-rays
- * In accordance to COMAR (07.02.25.04), *if a household member has symptoms or history of physical or mental health problems which may prevent a foster child from receiving proper care or which might be communicable or injurious to the physical or emotional health of a foster child the department shall require an individual to provide a written document by the examining physician stating the health problem poses no threat to foster children*

10. Resource Provider Agreement

Applicants will be requested to read, sign and agree to adhere to the terms of the *Resource Provider Agreement*. The Home Study Worker will review the agreement containing information regarding expectations, confidentiality, discipline and emergency preparedness.

11. Home Visits/Family Interviews

BCDSS will conduct interviews with all household members over the course of three to five home visits. Biological and adopted children who do not live in the home will likely be interviewed by phone. BCDSS may also request to interview other people who know or have worked with the applicant(s).

12. Back-Up Provider

BCDSS resource providers are asked to identify at least one person who is willing to provide support and/or temporary care for the foster children in their home. A back-up provider should be a responsible and trusted friend or family member who is able to assist when the resource provider is unavailable or in the event of an emergency.

Back-up provider requirements:

- * Must be at least 21 years old
- * Sign and agree to comply with the terms of the *Back-Up Provider Agreement*
- * Complete and pass background clearances
- * Home Health Assessment (respite optional; only required for back-ups who would like to provide short-term care in their own home, otherwise foster children must be cared for in the resource provider's home)

13. Walk-Thru Home Assessment

BCDSS will conduct a safety assessment of the applicant's residence. BCDSS must be able to access all rooms/areas (ie drawers, closets, containers, etc) of the home, regardless of ownership/occupancy (ie roommates, property owners, renters, relatives, friends, etc).

14. Fire & Health Inspection

A fire & health home inspection will be conducted by the Fire Department, Health Department and/or another agency contracted by BCDSS. The inspection standards are determined by our partners, in accordance with state law.

15. Home Study Report

Once the home study is complete, BCDSS will prepare a comprehensive report addressing the prospective resource family's readiness and anticipated ability to meet the needs of the youth in foster care.

Health, Fire & Safety Standards

BCDSS Home Assessment Standards

During the initial home visit, BCDSS will conduct a walk-thru assessment to ensure that at a minimum the home has the following:

- * Adequate heat, light, water, refrigeration, cooking and toilet facilities
- * Properly functioning lithium battery smoke detectors installed on each floor of the home

and one inside each child's bedroom

- * Properly functioning carbon monoxide detectors installed on each level of the home
- * An emergency evacuation/fire safety plan posted in the home
- * A list of emergency phone numbers posted in the home
- * An easily accessible first aid kit
- * Access to windows and doors that easily open and close
- * No rodent or insect infestation
- * No pet/animal overcrowding
- * No broken windows, doors or steps
- * No holes in the roof, floors, walls or ceilings
- * No peeling or flaking paint, plaster, wallpaper or exposed wiring
- * No excessive debris or clutter inside or outside the home

Fire and Health Inspection Standards

A fire and health inspection will be completed by a BCDSS partner. The following are some, not all, of the inspection standards:

General

- * In accordance to COMAR (07.02.25.04): *the family living quarters shall be adequate to provide space for foster children without disrupting the usual sleeping and living arrangement of the family group*
- * All doors, including storm doors, must have thumb turn locks; double sided key locks must be removed and covered or replaced with a thumb turn lock
- * Foster children must have access to a working phone while in the resource provider's home
- * Each foster children's sleeping and living quarters shall have provisions for privacy, study and storage (clothes, toys and personal possessions)
- * Homes with only one bedroom will not pass a home inspection (restricted applicants may qualify for an exception to care for infants under two years old; a plan must be made to move the child into their own space by their 2nd birthday)

Bedrooms

- * Bedrooms where foster children sleep must have two ways in and out; a door and a standard size window (measuring at least 20 x 24)
- * Bedrooms where foster children sleep may not have a pass through to other areas of the home
- * Bedrooms where foster children sleep must measure approx. 80 sq. ft for one child
- * Bedrooms where foster children sleep may not have a skylight
- * Bedrooms where foster children sleep may not have a fireplace
- * Bedrooms where foster children sleep may not have a door that leads out to a balcony unless the door is alarmed, has a thumb turn lock and is secure/safe
- * Resource providers must sleep within earshot of the foster children in the home
- * If sharing a room, children must be the same gender and within 4 years of age
- * Children under the age of 2 may sleep in the same room as their parent (foster youth) or the

resource provider however there must be an available space for the child to transition into no later than their 2nd birthday

- * Foster children over age 2 may not share a bedroom with an adult (incl. foster youth over 18)
- * No child, of any age, may share a bed with another adult or child
- * All children must sleep in their own, age appropriate, bed, crib or pack & play (stacked bunk beds and trundle beds are not permitted)
- * Infants must sleep in an approved/certified crib or pack 'n play in accordance with the CDC guidelines for safe sleep (cribs are preferred)

Firearms

- * Applicants must follow all federal and state laws pertaining to registration, permits and maintenance of firearms (copies of required permits/licenses must be provided)
- * All firearms and ammunition must be stored in a locked room or locked container that is inaccessible to children (ammunition must be secured & stored separately from weapons)
- * For more information visit the MD State Police Licensing Fire Arms Division:
<http://mdsp.maryland.gov/Organization/Pages/CriminalInvestigationBureau/LicensingDivision.aspx>

Window Blind Cords (Angel's Law)

- * All window treatments (venetian blinds, mini blinds, vertical blinds, roman shades, draperies, etc.) with hanging cords must be secured using a mounted cord wrapper (cordless blinds are preferred)
- * Window blind cord wrappers can be purchased in a home improvement store

Potentially Dangerous Household Items

- * All potentially life threatening or injurious household items must be kept in a safe location that is inaccessible to small/vulnerable youth (ie dangerous household supplies, chemicals, tools, sharp objects, prescription and over the counter medications, etc)

Pools, Hot Tubs, Ponds and Other Bodies of Water

- * Pools must be enclosed by a fence that is at least 4 feet above ground at all points
- * All doors and gates that access pools or hot tubs must be kept locked
- * Pools and hot tubs must have a secure cover (when not in use/during the off season)
- * Ladders attached to pools and hot tubs must be secured when not in use
- * At least one resource provider must be CPR/First Aid certified in each household where there is a pool, hot tub, pond and/or other body of water near by

Smoking

- * Smoking, of any type, is prohibited in the presence of foster children or in a resources provider's home, except in designated smoking areas that will not be accessed by foster children
- * Smoking is not permitted in vehicles transporting foster children