

What is I/DD Foster Care or “Specialized” Foster Care?

Six things you should know.

Typically, children who are going into I/DD foster care need a higher level of care than what a non-specialized foster providers can give.

Sometimes, when people hear the word “specialized,” they think it refers to medical foster care. While some of the children in specialized care may have medical needs, typically, the kids in these types of homes have significant emotional and behavioral challenges. Here are a few things to know about specialized or I/DD foster care:

1) Specialized foster providers are specially trained to care for children with high needs. They are often asked to complete more pre-service training hours than required for a more traditional foster home. They will also be asked to complete ongoing training hours per their certification requirements as a specialized foster home.

2) Specialized foster providers should familiarize themselves with trauma-informed care and how trauma affects the development of a child. Knowledge is power, and the more a foster family knows, the better equipped the foster parents are at being able to provide intentional nurturing, discipline, and care for children.

3) Some of the children in specialized foster care have had multiple disruptions and placement moves. Children in need of specialized foster care may have struggled to live in other homes, or may be at risk for hospitalization, placement in a residential setting, or may be transitioning out of a residential setting into a family home environment.

4) The reimbursement rate is sometimes higher than traditional foster care. Specialized foster care requires more out of a foster family than more traditional care. Because of this, the rate of reimbursement may be higher and is determined by the specific support needs of the child.

5) Agencies may limit the number of children allowed in a specialized foster home. Due to the support needs of children in specialized foster care, the number of children allowed in a foster home may be set lower than is allowed in a traditional foster home. This is intentionally done for the family to be able to better meet the individual needs of the children in their home.

6) There is a great need for families who are willing to become certified and approved. One struggle that certifying agencies face is the challenge of approving families who desire to foster high-needs children with behavioral and emotional challenges.

It is challenging to be a specialized foster provider, but also extremely rewarding. It takes a tremendous amount of patience, resilience, creativity, resourcefulness, humor, and love. Foster parents who choose to provide care to higher needs kids can make incredible differences in their lives.