

How to Host a Foster Parent Night Out



The Need: While being a caregiver for our community's foster children is a rewarding experience, it also presents challenges. An opportunity for foster parents and relative caregivers to get an evening or afternoon break from the children in their care is so appreciated!

Volunteers Needed

- Childcare volunteers for various age groups.
For this demographic, we recommend a child to volunteer ratio of 2:1 or 3:1 at the least. This is especially true for younger ages or if there are children attending with behavioral needs (see "Registration" below for tips on how to obtain this info ahead of time).
- Meal volunteers
If you are serving dinner or lunch, these volunteers will be in charge of prepping, serving and cleaning up the meal.
- Set up & clean up volunteers (if needed)

**TIP: It's recommended to have a lead volunteer for each age group who stays with the group across both volunteer shifts, is familiar with the schedule and special needs of the children, knows where first aid kits are, and can answer volunteers' questions. This point person can also find the central event organizer in case of a medical emergency. Then it's up to your central event organizer to seek medical attention, call a parent, or communicate an incident report to parent if needed.*

When to Host the Event

Date: According to feedback from previous church-hosted Foster Parent Nights Out, Saturday evenings are the most desirable time for foster parents/ caregivers to get a break. Although, any time that would allow them the choice of a date night, time for self-care or even just the opportunity to run kid-free er-

**TIP: Be sure to provide some time prior to each volunteer shift to meet with volunteers to quickly debrief the schedule, behavior concerns, etc...*

**TIP: It's also useful for the two shifts to overlap, even just 5-10 minutes, so that the first shift volunteers can quickly bring the incoming volunteers up to speed.*

An example volunteer shift schedule: If you're hosting a 4-hour event in the evening 4-8pm, volunteer shifts might be broken up into two shifts:

- 1st shift— 3:45-6:15pm
 - 2nd shift—5:45-8:15pm
- (See sample schedule that explains overlap)*

Volunteer & Safety Policies

- Your volunteers will need to abide by the same church policy/liability as your children's ministry volunteers.
**We can provide a sample children's ministry volunteer policy upon request*
- For the Foster Support Faith Alliance to advertise your event, your volunteers must also receive some training in trauma-informed caregiving.
**We can provide training material and a 30-minute training video.*
- Consult your children's ministry Director to find out the following childcare policies:
 - ⇒ Restroom trips and diaper changing
 - ⇒ Ratio of volunteers to children (*although, we'd recommend increasing it to 1:3 or even 1:2 for this population)
 - ⇒ Security within the building
 - ⇒ Teen helpers
 - ⇒ Filing an incident report
 - ⇒ Whether volunteers can bring their own children with them

Setting up Event Space

This event can be done either using multiple rooms in your church building or with all children together in one large gym (as long as you're able to separate the young children from more rambunctious older children)

Here are some things to consider in planning the use of your space:

1. Divide up your space and time into various activity stations and provide a variety of different types of activities (*see "Activities" below*).
2. Conduct an audit of your childcare space for safety and security from the lens of children who are unfamiliar with the boundaries of your space and could have a tendency to run.
On Sunday mornings you might keep the classroom door open because your students know not to leave the classroom. But for this event a physical boundary might be necessary to keep children contained in the room.
1. For game/craft rooms, break up large spaces with tables, dividers, or activities. Ask, "Is this space big enough for kids to run or be too rambunctious?" If the answer is yes, then they probably will do it.
2. If rotating between various areas of the church for activities, please remember that this is introducing a time of transition and an opportunity for runners to escape. You might want to keep such transitions to a minimum- especially with preschool-age children who might not be familiar with the practice of staying in a line and not running off.
3. Try to limit the noise and commotion in your space. Make sure the space is large enough for the number of people in it, possibly avoid playing music in the background of an already noisy room. If room allows, consider a "Quiet Room/ Area" for children who might become over-stimulated.
4. Consider the location of restrooms and be prepared that if they are outside of the space you're using for childcare, it will require 2 volunteers to take children to the restroom (in case one has to chase after a "runner," you'll still have one volunteer staying with the children in the restroom).

Activities

1. Offer plenty of diverse activities so that there's something for everyone:
 - Crafts
 - high energy gym games
 - *We can provide a list of group gym games upon request.*
 - board games and other quiet activities
 - Quiet room/space
 - Movie and/or meal



2. Recognize that attention spans might be shorter than your average Sunday school population. If children are rotating between stations, think through whether volunteers will stay at each station or rotate through with the same group of kids.
3. When planning developmentally appropriate activities, use ones that are intended for ages younger than your attendees.

Often children who are trauma-exposed function at a younger age emotionally and/or developmentally than their chronological age. If choosing an activity for 5-year-old attendees, you might want to choose a craft that a 3-year-old could easily complete.
4. A short movie is a great way to break up the time and allow the kids a time to rest. Be sure to have a back-up activity selected for children who aren't able to sit still for the movie.

A Sample Activity Rotation might look like this:

- Classroom activities (crafts, board games, etc...)
- Gym time
- Dinner
- Movie
- Gym time again

5. If moving between various spaces in the building (i.e. moving from gym time to classroom time, to a dinner location), please be conscious of security issues and how volunteers might keep all children together

**Tip: preschool children pose the greatest "flight risk" when moving from space to space, so you might want them to stay in their classroom other than one gym session to burn off some energy. Our previous hosts have also found that it works much better to bring dinner to the preschool-age children in their classroom.*

Registration

1. An online registration form is the best way to get all of the information you might need in providing care for kids attending

You can see a sample registration form using Google Forms [HERE](#).

Please be sure to include the following information on your registration form:

- Child's Name & age
- Parents name and at least 2 emergency contact numbers
- Allergies
 - * *You may want to include the basic menu for the night and instruct parents that if children are unable to eat what's on the menu, they will need to provide their own food*
- Is child potty-trained? (please note if they need bathroom break reminders)
- Any behavioral concerns volunteers should know about (i.e tendency to run, behavioral issues, needs assistance with toileting or eating, etc....)
- (If children are being split into age groups) Is there any reason child should not be in designated age group (i.e. emotional immaturity, necessary for child to stay with a sibling, etc...)?

***You will also need to provide a waiver form for parents to sign (either online or in person) that gives you permission to seek medical attention in the case of emergency and absolves the church of liability.**

2. Once you receive the registration information, be sure that each volunteer has access to the list of children, as well as any special concerns listed on their registration.

***Tip:** if you have a child that might have higher behavioral needs (i.e. a runner, extreme difficulty with transitions, etc...) you might have a volunteer assigned to keep an eye on this particular child- giving them more one on one care.*

3. Use nametags for both children and volunteers. Diaper bag labels with names are also useful.

****Tip:** Diaper bags are another consideration for preschool age children moving from room to room. Many of these preschoolers are not yet potty-trained and so diaper bag transportation should be taken into consideration.*

4. Be sure to check children in when they arrive and make sure that an approved adult checks them out when they leave.

Making sure children connect to the correct caregiver is vitally important with this population that often has connections to both bio parents and foster parents.



Publicity

- Your event can be advertised on the Fostering Together Facebook pages, groups, and potentially in an email to local foster parents. (Your event must be inclusive to be advertised through Fostering Together).
- The Foster Support Faith Alliance will also advertise your event, as long as volunteers have received some basic trauma-informed training (*again, we have training material available*).
- Other licensing/support agencies might be willing to advertise. Email maneill@ugm.org for contact emails.

More Info/ Tips

1. **Best practices for safety, caring for children, easing transitions etc.. Can be found in our separate “Trauma-Informed Childcare Training” Hand-Out.**
2. No identifying photos are to be taken of kids currently in foster care (regardless of whether foster parents give permission).
3. Sample schedules are available below for either layout: using one large space or numerous small spaces.
2. Be sure to provide a high-protein snack later in the evening between dinnertime and pick-up. Many times kids are too excited to eat much at dinner and then blood sugar crashes before the night is over.
3. If you want to further encourage these foster parents, you might consider collecting small gift bags, gift cards, or maybe raffling off a date night experience to give foster parents who attend. This also provides a way for your congregation to still be involved in the event even if they cannot volunteer.



Foster Caregivers Night Out Sample Schedule (multiple spaces)

	Elementary	Preschool	Nursery
3:45 pm	Shift #1 Volunteers Arrive – Meet with Heather inside gym		
4:00 pm	Play in youth center during check-in	Play in room during check-in	Play in Nursery
4:25 pm	Transition to Next Activity		
4:30 pm	Gym Time	Craft Station – In room	
4:55 pm	Transition to next activity		
5:00 pm	Craft Station – 3 rd Floor <i>Travel up stairs and over sky-bridge to center staircase</i>	Dinner (in room) + bathroom break / diaper check	Gym Time <i>(optional)</i>
5:25 pm	Transition to next activity		
5:30 pm	Dinner (Fine Center) + bathroom break <i>Travel down center stairs to 2nd floor and cross skybridge to Fine Center</i>	Gym Time	Dinner in Nursery <i>(dinner team brings dinner to nursery volunteers)</i>
5:55 pm	Transition to next activity Shift #2 Volunteers Arrive – Meet with Heather inside gym		
6:00 pm	Game + Toy Station – 3 rd Floor, south rooms <i>Pull games + toys from closets and return/cleanup by 6:25pm</i>	Science Activity (in room)	Play in Nursery
	6:05 pm -- Shift #1 Volunteers Leave		
6:25 pm	Transition Time		Play in Nursery
6:30 pm	Science Station – Meet in Room 183 <i>(Next to Youth Center)</i>	Game + Toy Station	
6:55 pm	Transition Time		
7:00 pm	Pre-Movie Snack & Bathroom Break		Nursery Gym Time
7:10 pm	Movie Show Time		
7:25 pm	Elementary Movie in center room of 3 rd Floor. Kids seated at tables/chairs. Movie on projector.	Gym Time	Return to Nursery
7:35 pm	Transition Time	Final Bathroom Break / Diaper Check	Nursery Play Time / Cleanup
7:40 pm	Return to Youth Room for Parent pickup	Parents begin picking up	Parents begin picking up
8:00 pm	All Kids Picked Up – Volunteers assist with any additional cleanup		
8:15 pm	All Done!		