

# 10-Steps to Start Foster Care in your Region in India

*A guide for ground-level implementers:  
governmental and civil society*

Dear friends,

This guide is a response to the question we have been asked again and again, “how do I start foster care in India?” We aim to answer this question in a practical way and walk with you through the foundational thinking needed before you actually placing children and families.

**We hope that after reading this guide you will feel confident, informed and ready for your journey working in the field of foster care. This is just the beginning...**

We’ve kept each step to only one page length so that this information is helpful but not overwhelming. Each page will have “must know” questions that we believe you should know before moving to the next step.

The information following is interpreted and reproduced for the benefit of all stakeholders who are involved with child protection. It is not a government-approved summary.

The 10 steps have been designed using on-the-ground experiences and practices in India from 2011 to present day.

Please send any comments, suggestions or requests to [if0216@cerikids.org](mailto:if0216@cerikids.org) or [info@alternativecareindia.org](mailto:info@alternativecareindia.org).

Kind regards,

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The Centre of Excellence in Alternative Care of Children

*This document is written considering the Model Guidelines for Foster Care, 2016 notified by the Government of India, Ministry of Women & Child Development on 11 November 2016, the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act 2015, the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Rules, 2016 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, ratified by India in 1992).*

## 10-Steps to Start Foster Care in your Region in India

These 10 steps are in sequential order for your convenience and clarity. Jumping from one step to another without completing the first will leave you unprepared and without pieces of knowledge which might effect your movement forward.

1. Prepare yourself;
2. Frame foster care in your local culture/ traditions
3. Check your beliefs
4. Know the field
5. Conceptualisation of a plan
6. Begin action planning
7. Conduct an awareness campaign
8. Get yourself technically set up
9. Practice self-care and have fun!
10. Get ready for the next chapter

## Acronyms used in this document

CWC	Child Welfare Committee
DCPU	District Child Protection Unit
DCPO	District Child Protection Officer
ICPS	Integrated Child Protection Scheme
JJ Act, 2000	Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000
JJ Act, 2015	Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIAC	Non-Institutional Alternative Care
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

## History of child protection in India

The National Policy for Children 1974 was the first policy in India concerning the needs and rights of children in an overt and stated way. In 1999, India ratified the United Nations Convention on Child Rights and enacted the Juvenile Justice Act (Care and Protection of Children) 2000, making the first move to have a comprehensive Act for the children. Thereafter, policies, national plans and schemes began to develop ending in the landmark Integrated Child Protection Scheme in 2009. In each of these legislative documents, there was increasing demand for the rights of children and for family-based care of children.

Various studies and research have revealed the harmful effects on a child without parental care or placed in institutional care. The world's focus on family-based care came in the form of United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children 2009. Being signatory to UNCRC, 1992 and Optional Protocols, India also realised its mandate to make all efforts to care and protect the future generation and in 2015 Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act was enacted and Model Foster Care Guidelines were notified in 2015 and then revised in 2016.

In order to create an entirely new system of care and protection for children, one must take a systems approach. This 10-step approach equips you with all the tools and knowledge to do it. Laws are made for regulating the lives of people, but let us not underestimate the power of people and CEAC believes in the power of people, who are powerful and necessary to bring change in the country. If foster care is truly to take root in the country, it will start with leaders like you that lay the groundwork for the child protection stakeholders for years to come.

## Foster care in India

The Model Guidelines for Foster Care, 2016 were notified by the Government of India's Ministry of Women & Child Development on 11 November 2016; this is the revised version to the Model Guidelines for Foster Care, 2015. The new Guidelines further define the concept of Group Foster Care and strengthen the provisions of foster care for the children of India.

The Guidelines derive strength from Section 44 of the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act 2015 (the Act), Rule 23 of the JJ Rules (the Rules), 2016 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

The States/UTs are at liberty to adapt or adopt these Guidelines to suit their socio economic and geographic needs.

## Key definitions in the Model Guidelines for Foster Care:

“Foster Care” means placement of a child, by the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) for the purpose of alternate care in the domestic environment of a family, other than the child's biological family, that has been selected, qualified, approved and supervised for providing such care;

“Group Foster Care” means a family like care in a fit facility for children in need of care and protection who are without parental care with the aim to provide personalised care and a sense of belonging and identity.

*Please see our At-A-Glance Overview of the Model Guidelines for Foster Care and for Group Foster Care for more information.*

*You can find both documents on our website at [www.alternativecareindia.org](http://www.alternativecareindia.org) or email us for copies at [info@alternativecareindia.org](mailto:info@alternativecareindia.org).*

## Step 1 - Prepare yourself

In order to explain foster care to anyone else, you should be comfortable with it yourself. If you do not feel confident about the concept of foster care we believe that you will find it difficult to convince or empower anyone else.

We know that everyone is busy, but for this first step, please take the time needed to learn about:

- the concept of foster care;
- the laws/ schemes about foster care;
- existing models of foster care in India or in relatable South Asia, African, Latin or Pacific countries.

While learning the context of foster care for yourself, ask the following questions:

- How foster care is/can relate to my organization or me?
- How foster care is/can fit into child protection system in Indian culture?
- How foster care can fit into child protection in my district or State?
- How foster care can fit into your area of work professionally and personally?

If you answer these questions and gain the knowledge, you can give both technical and heart-felt answers to any potential foster families, children, government officials, colleagues, friends or family members. Your confidence means their confidence.

Please know, starting something new requires courage, hard work and determination to face the challenges and network of dedicated people behind you for support and encouragement.

### “Must Know” Questions

If your answer to this question is ‘no’, do not forward until you can honestly answer ‘yes’.

- Do you understand the concept of foster care and have a definition memorised?
- Have you read the 2015 Juvenile Justice Act (Care and Protection of Children) Act?
- Have you read the most recent Foster Care Guidelines from the Ministry of Women & Child Development and feel you can discuss it with anyone?
- Can you answer questions like “foster care is a western concept” or “foster care makes sense but Indians are emotional and attach to a child and could not leave the child after living together”?

## Step 2 - Frame foster care your local culture/ traditions

Social science research shows that personal connection to a concept helps in better understanding and acceptance. Because of this, one of the most important things you can do is speak to large number of people about foster care. Awareness is key. But how?

The first and foremost step is to speak informally within the community and from important platforms. This starts a chain reaction of discussion and debate.

You might hear things like, “foster care is a western concept” or “foster care makes sense but Indians are emotional and get attach to a child and may not leave the child after living together.” These are all valid concerns and needs to be answered correctly and confidently to gain their confidence. *Please contact us for support in answering these questions.*

The key to introducing any new concept in India is to not be afraid of dissent. In India, dissent scares us. However, for social change to occur it must occur. This means that is someone says, “foster care will never work in our country”, their discussion of the topic means that it is at least on their radar. This is all that is needed in the beginning.

The difficult part of introduction the concept has often been the need for someone to feel connected to the idea. We find that without a local story or existing connection to the concept of foster care, you will have difficult sharing the concept. The following page contains a local story of connection to foster care in Udaipur Rajasthan. This is just one example of many that you could used including Maham Anga, Foster Mother to Akbar the Great | Yasoda, Foster mother to Krishna and Raj Malhotra (Amitabh Bachchan), his wife Pooja (Hema Malini) foster parents to Alok (Salman Khan) in the film Babhban (2003) just to name a few.

The following page shares a local connection to foster care in the city of Udaipur, Rajasthan, India.

### “Must Know” Questions

If your answer to this question is ‘no’, don’t move forward please until you can honestly answer ‘yes’.

- Do you know at least two local examples of foster care that you can confidently share with your target audience?
- Can you relate those examples to 2016 foster care and the need for “safer” measures in our ever-developing world?

## Local cultural example of foster care: Udai Singh

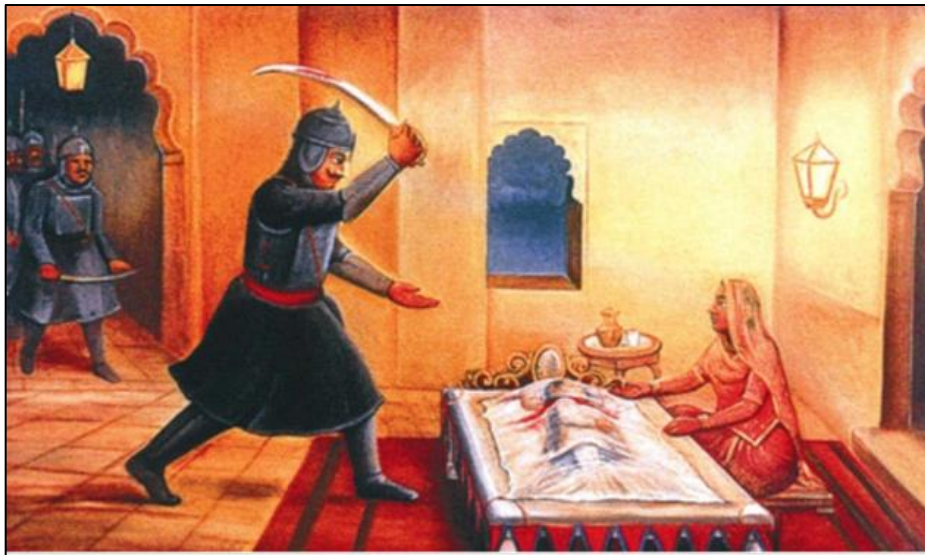
One organisation in Udaipur, Rajasthan, Foster Care India, connected the concept of foster care with the local practices by telling the story of Panna Dhai.

When social workers tried to explain the concept in Udaipur without any story telling or connections, people didn't truly understand. They called it adoption or just commented that it, "won't work here in Udaipur". So the social workers brainstormed how to approach their community until they remembered the story of Panna Dhai.

Panna Dhai was a 16th-century nursemaid to Udai Singh II, the fourth son of Maharana Sangram Singh. **She was his foster mother.** She had been given charge of young Udai Singh, breastfeeding him virtually from his birth in 1522, along with her own son Chandan (also known as Moti), who was of similar age and Udai's playmate. When Udai Singh was attacked by his uncle Bhanvir, Panna Dai sacrificed the life of her own son Chandan in order to save the life of Udai Singh.

**Udai Singh lived on to found the city of Udaipur. This means that their city would not exist without the love of a foster mother.**

After telling this story, almost everyone accepted the idea of foster care as valid. They had doubts and questions about the formalised process, but the concept now has taken root in society.





### Step 3 - Check your beliefs

Many of those tasked to work on foster care in India think: “foster care wouldn’t be allowed in my home”, “this is a western concept and won’t work in India”, or “Indian families are too emotional to care for a child.”

All doubts are genuine and needs to be answered professionally and confidently. Don’t force upon others your own beliefs. Give them time to explore more on the topic. Let them come back to you once satisfied. The most crucial and important point to remember, have faith in the concept of foster care and be confident and knowledgeable about the topic.

For example, if you join an organisation and are tasked to work on foster care after training, you may think to yourself, “the concept is okay but I live in a joint family and could never foster myself.” Or, “I’d foster but I know that my entire family would treat the child horribly”. These are all valid concerns and means that you are probably not ready to become foster parent. However, we all have our own contribution to make and perhaps yours is to work on the system and find the others who can foster.

Be honest to yourself and work hard to understand the concept on your own terms.

#### “Must Know” Questions

If your answer to this question is ‘no’, don’t move forward please until you can honestly answer ‘yes’.

- Do you believe foster care can work in this country?
- Can you list at least two examples of foster care in India?
- Do you understand how you feel about foster care in relation to your faith?

## Step 4 - Know the field

The last 3 steps were focused on your own confidence. Next step is to feel the pulse of the community where you'll be starting foster care. This can be done by conducting a survey, organizing focus groups, or simply talking to people or speaking to those working on child protection or related topics.

It is up to you to decide as what would be the best in the community and assess what government, non-governmental, community members and children feel about foster care.

We recommend that you visualize the entire range of services in your area that are available for children, then draw them out for yourself to predict what happens to a child when they need care and protection. Then ask yourself, "how does foster care fit into this picture?"

Once you know your field, you can conceptualize to plan for actually starting foster care and working to change children and families lives.

### "Must Know" Questions

If your answer to this question is 'no', don't move forward please until you can honestly answer 'yes'.

- Do you have a good understanding of who knows and doesn't know about foster care in your district?
- Do you know who may be against foster care in your district and the reasons why?

## Step 5 - Conceptualization of a plan

Now is the time to put everything together and create a workable plan.

The first step is to create a network map of all the various stakeholders and organisations that would be related to foster care. Please use your base knowledge from the laws/ acts you've read and the reactions you've heard from the field. A network map will help you to understand the various actors and their roles which are very pivotal for your plan.

After the network map write down your plan. The format of your plan is really up to you. Be creative and use the tools that make most sense to you. For example, we drew a visual map like a googlemap from point A to point B to point C etc. because that how we envisioned the plan. Some might do a text based table or a graphical representation. Whichever format you decide, it should contain the below mentioned components in the order of your preference and necessity.

- Awareness campaign
- Training of all the potential stakeholders
- Identification of children eligible for foster care
- Recruiting for families to become foster parents.
- Internal policies/ procedures
- Clarity on compensation for foster parents
- Internal technical training on foster care processes
- Monitoring and evaluation

If you make a plan, please account from the beginning if you are planning work for only 6 months or 1 year or 5 years. If you start working with foster families and stop suddenly, the discontinuation of services can be difficult for all parties.

### “Must Know” Questions

If your answer to this question is ‘no’, don't move forward please until you can honestly answer ‘yes’.

- Have you accounted for all possible stakeholders and/or related organisations you will have to work with to start foster care?
- Do you have a visual map/ plan of how you will move forward with foster care?

## Step 6 - Begin action planning

One problem child protection workers have encountered in the developed of foster care is the experience of government and non-government workers in the field of alternative care.

An investment of your time in communicating with local government and non government workers is a necessity to build the foundation for your work. There are always few people ready to learn and grow. Identify them as they are your potential ambassadors. People often believe in a new idea when they see a model.

No matter who you are (government or nongovernment) you should reach out to others around you to learn.

Start your awareness work by taking meetings with your Child Welfare Committees, District Child Protection Unit, Sponsorship & Foster Care Approval Committee, the District Collector, NGOs working for children and the officials in the Department of Social Justice & Empowerment and Department of Women and Child Development. If you don't know where they are, please look them up on google or speak to local contacts in the field to find out the information. Meet with as many people as possible and just talk about the concept. Please be ready for criticism and doubt of the concept of foster care. This is okay, it is how social change happens.

Remember, they don't need to know all the technical details about foster care because, let's be honest, you are probably still learning. However, they need to understand the concept, be able to explain it to others and be aware that you plan to work on foster care and will be contacting them soon.

### “Must Know” Questions

If your answer to this question is ‘no’, don't move forward please until you can honestly answer ‘yes’.

- Do all key stakeholders in your network map from Step 5 know about foster care?
- Does everyone that you contacted know that you will be working on foster care and will be approaching them in the future?
- Did you make note for yourself of the potential barriers to starting foster care that you identified during this process?

## Step 7 - Conduct an awareness campaign

Now that you are ready with plan and met with key stakeholders, our hope is that you must feel confident to speak to MORE people about foster care.

Unless the community knows about foster care, we cannot expect them to become foster parents or support the system or getting involved.

An awareness campaign will depend on how much time and money you have to spend. The various options for awareness could be thorough SMS, radio-jingles, canopy events, door-to-door conversations, newspaper ads and attending events to reach the community.

Religious and community leaders are often powerful people to approach. These people often are motivated by an already strong connection desire to bring information to their respective community. The concept of foster care can be explained to them using their local context and expanded by sharing your plan.

### “Must Know” Questions

If your answer to this question is ‘no’, don’t move forward please until you can honestly answer ‘yes’.

- Have you reached at least 50 community leaders for a discussion about foster care?
- Have you used at least 3 types of social media to talk to your community about foster care?
- Have you attended at least 5 community events and presented the concept of foster care formally for a minimum 10-minute speech?

## Step 8 - Practice self-care and have fun!

As a social work professional first you must take care of yourself.

The journey to starting foster care will be full of challenges and successes and challenges. You will meet resistance; push through the resistance through your knowledge and perseverance. You need strong will power or else you get “burned-out” quickly.

An article entitled, Social Worker Self-Care - The Overlooked Core Competency the author comments, “Among the obstacles experts identify as standing in the way of self-care are a lack of energy, too many responsibilities, and the fear of appearing weak or vulnerable.”

Whatever the excuses that may come, self care should focus on a multi-dimensional approach including:

- Taking care of your physical and psychological health
- Managing and reducing any stress or tension
- Honoring your emotional and spiritual needs
- Fostering and sustaining relationships in your life
- Achieving balance in your personal and work life

Far too often we forgot to consider the above self-care “must-know” conditions.

Make a list for yourself of how you will do all the above 5 points and keep that list at your desk or in your workspace and share with at least one other person your plan for self-care. Trust us, this is a must-do in order to be able to do this work.

### “Must Know” Questions

If your answer to this question is ‘no’, don’t move forward please until you can honestly answer ‘yes’.

- Do you understand the importance of self-care?
- Have you made a list of how you will accomplish the 5 points?
- Have you found at least one other person in your life who will help you practice self-care by holding you accountable?

## Step 9 - Get yourself technically set up

Step nine asks you to think like you are assembling a new product. For example, a desk from Big Bazar or EasyDay is that is assembled at home. The first thing is to assure that all the pieces and tools are ready. This is what is required to build foster care system. If a single piece is missing, the whole structure may fall within no time and huge problems may arise during the process.

The best example is the start of foster care in Rajasthan. Once foster parents were recruited, identified and expressed their interest, we worked to match them with children. We assumed that the government would be ready to supply a list of children. This was not the case. So we ended up with parents who had opened their doors and hearts for a foster child and us having to say, “sorry, please wait another month”... then again, “please just wait one more month, the process is on-going”. Imagine the foster parents’ feeling at this point?

Some of the initial building blocks of a foster care system are pre-service training, proper assessments, risk analysis, foster parent contract and many other components. No need to know this all now but please keep these things on your radar.

The first steps include:

- Recruitment of foster parents
- Identification of children for foster care
- Creation of basic entry-level materials
- Your own internal policies/ procedures (if applicable)

You should work with your CWC and DCPU to identify both families and children in your area who are interested in foster care. Do this while creating a introduction packet for foster parents that explain the Central Government guidelines to them in simple language and explain the process. All of this information can be taken directly from the laws and guidelines.

### “Must Know” Questions

If your answer to this question is ‘no’, don’t move forward please until you can honestly answer ‘yes’.

- Do you understand in concept the basic “steps” listed above such as the pre-service training, proper assessments, etc.?
- Have you made contact with your CWC/ DCPU about the need for identification of children?
- Have you created a simple language introduction packet for foster parents?

## Aditya Yatri (Case Study)

*We asked Aditya Yatri to share his experiences living in an institution and then adjusting to society after the age of 18. We hoped that his story would show the importance for family and give you, the reader, more passion and examples for what family-based care is important for children.*

*His story is shared with you below in his words and unedited. It is published with his written and express permission. His respect is of the utmost importance to us.*

*We thank Aditya for sharing this very personal and sensitive story.*

*To connect with Aditya directly you can contact us at [info@alternativecareindia.org](mailto:info@alternativecareindia.org) and we'll send him your message.*



Childhood: I really don't know about my childhood, I mean where am I from? What is my original identity? Because before getting my current identity, my name and title was known as "Sunny" during the period of stay in a shelter home in Mumbai. I remember my grandmother who used to take care of me. Other information I still don't know. But the shelter home was temporary. I was transferred quickly to a child care institution (CCI). ]

We used to attend our school within the campus only. I still remember that by mistake sometimes if I did any single mistake my housemother never tolerated; she immediately beat me and often she used to refer me to other staff or elder siblings to beat me. And that was my routine if I do any mistake so either I had kept outside of the home without food. Even today I still feel bad and weird.

After 12 years the CCI transferred me into a boys hostel, the process of transferring is like shifting one jail to another, because in that process the CCI director himself came to us given instruction on the day of transfer that now you will be transferred to boys hostel for further education and if you made any mistake over there then you will be thrown away from all support.

And very horrible situation happened in my life, when I applied to the top social work school in India for my Master course and I got selected for M.A in Social Work! When I requested the CCI in-charge to support me for the course fees, his reply made me feel very bad and I tried to attempt suicide.

*continued on the next page...*



Because he told me that I was not capable enough to study in a top school. According to him only rich family's children can sustain their higher education, So it's better to drop that option and get vocational skill education and get settle in life.

I had struggled a lot to get recover the pain of losing my biological parents and family care. And coming into the CCI, I again struggled to recover from my childhood trauma and also adjustment problem with the caretakers, siblings and new friends. Although is was very hard time for me but today I took it just that was my past and now I want to change my and others future through making something different in field of child rights. I strongly feel to work for child rights to a family and family care only would be the best option for the development and actual growth of the child. Hence foster care is very important for children those are abandoned and orphan and they need of family care.

**As a being orphan child I always felt that if I would have kept in foster care so I would have got more things for my growth and development. Like through foster care i would have got the family where i can identify myself at least during the childhood through which later period I would have built strong bonding and relationship with the local community which now I am not able to identify from which community and family I am belongs to.**

Through foster care I would be also got to learn about more responsible and independent person after completing certain age in my life span than always depending upon someone unnecessarily at institutional care. As per my knowledge foster care can be give better attachment, connectivity and real family life experiences for children who need family care than institutional care. And it can be also provided longer support and especially emotional support at individual level wherever required.



## Step 10 - Get ready for the next chapter

The next chapter of your journey is the actual start of foster care in your region. Don't panic! If you've followed this guide you are already on your way.

Your next steps should be as follows:

1. Contact the Centre of Excellence for Alternative Care of Children, India or anyone else you trust with experience in foster care system development for further support.
2. Recheck your plan, self-care promise and progress on step 9 before moving forward to make sure all the 'pieces' of the puzzle are in front of you.

Although this book is meant to be an easy-to-read guide, the reality is that foster care is a highly technical process that needs safety measures, cooperation of systems and proper case management in order to be successful.

Below you will find examples of the key components needed for systematic change in the field of foster care. No matter what your role in the foster care system may be, it is immeasurably valuable to the system itself.

### The next steps for Foster Care development in India

- Wider promotion of the laws, guidelines and rules on foster care and child protection in India
- Adequate and well-planned financing for foster care,
- An effective child welfare workforce,
- Reductions in the number of children in need of alternative care,
- Supporting a range of care choices and,
- Building research and understanding on foster care

### For more information:

The Center of Excellence in Alternative Care of Children promotes, educates and builds the capacity of stakeholders in the implementation of alternative care. We offer training to government and non- governmental organizations to start, promote and implement foster care and other forms of alternative care. We also specialize in providing technical assistance in drafting of state level foster care guidelines.

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*Thanks to editors: Ms. Anu Silas, Dr. Shilpa Mehta and Ms. Hanna Sukumar*



"safer and stronger families"