



Safe Families *for* Children

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## Safe Families for Children Organization

- What is it?

### **Safe Families for Children Mission Statement**

Safe Families for Children (SFFC) extends community support by hosting vulnerable children and strengthening their families in crisis through a network of volunteers motivated by compassion.

The SFFC movement is based on the perspective that the safety and health of our community children are the responsibility of each one of us and that parents are the key to providing long term safe environments for their children.

*We cannot fix poverty, homelessness and the ills of this world. But we can impact lives one at a time. Safe Families for Children is winning the battle one child at a time.*

- Who They Help

When crisis strikes, many of us rely on relatives and our church family for support. But for some parents, there isn't a safety net. Often problems such as drug addiction, domestic abuse, incarceration, or illness can be debilitating, making it impossible for parents to care for their children. With the changing economy many more families are experiencing financial crisis, unemployment, and homelessness. During such crisis, children are especially at-risk for neglect or abuse as their parents struggle to cope with crushing circumstances and emotions.

Safe Families for Children strives to meet three objectives:

1. **Child Welfare Deflection:** Safe Families provides a safe alternative to child welfare custody, thus significantly reducing the number of children entering the child welfare system.
2. **Child Abuse Prevention:** Providing an overwhelmed and resource limited parent with a safe, temporary place for their child without threat of losing custody. By offering support, the goal is to avert potential abuse/neglect episodes.
3. **Family Support and Stabilization:** Many parents struggle because of limited social support and unavailable extended family. Many Safe Families Volunteers become the extended family that a parent never had.

Hallmarks of a Safe Family Model:

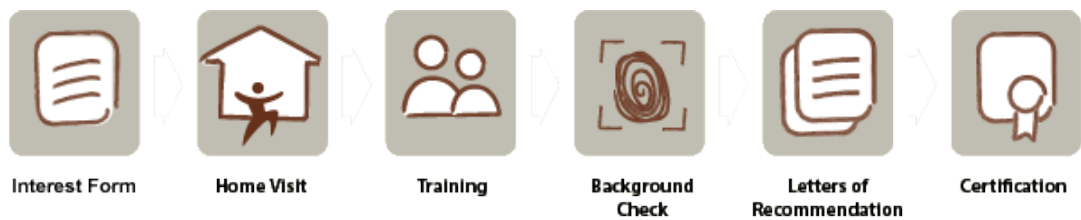
- Biological Parents maintain full custody
- Volunteer families are extensively screened and supported
- Six-week average length of stay (ranging from two days to a year)
- Average age of child in SFFC care is 4.5
- Close working relationships between Safe Families, the local church, and the referring organization
- Commitment to reunite the family as soon as possible

How it Works

Safe Families is only successful when it is embraced and adopted by the local church. Churches of all sizes are necessary to provide for vulnerable children within our communities. Following are a few of the opportunities churches have embraced when adding Safe Families to one of their existing ministries or adding an entire new ministry at their church. There are four steps to certify your church as a Safe Family Church:



Once the church has become a Safe Family Church you can recruit and train families in your church or local area to host children or find other ways for them to get involved with the ministry. There are six steps to complete before being a certified Safe Family and in some cases training can only take a few weeks to complete.



## Frequently Asked Questions

### *Can the host family adopt the child?*

The goal of the Safe Families project is to reunite children with their biological parent in a home that is more stable and healthy, in part, because of the contribution of the Safe Families intervention. Currently, 85% of all families in the project come back together, often in the most stable environment they've ever known. If, however, the biological parent loses legal custody of their child(ren), we urge host families to contact an agency other than Safe Families about the possibility of fostering or adopting.

### *How long does a child usually stay with a host family?*

The average length of stay is about six weeks, but placements usually last from two days to a year. The Safe Families team makes every effort at the time of placement to estimate the length of stay. Factors include the severity of the family's crisis, the willingness and ability of the biological parent to address the issues involved in the crisis, among others.

### *What is the background of the children placed in a Safe Family?*

These are normal children coming from sometimes very difficult circumstances. Each child will respond to the situation differently, depending on their personality and coping skills. Some may show little response to the circumstances in their lives, while others may be deeply affected. Please note that the children placed by Safe Families are not believed to be victims of abuse and neglect. If they were, they would instead have become wards of the state and not eligible for this project.

### *What ages of children does the Safe Families outreach serve?*

While the Safe Family for Children Project can provide placements for newborns through adolescents (0-18), there will be a concentration on the younger and most vulnerable children (ages 0-6).

### *What type of contact will the host family have with the biological parent?*

Biological parents maintain full custody of their child, and are encouraged to participate in decisions regarding their child's care while they address whatever issues led to the instability in their lives. Our aim is to facilitate a partnership relationship between volunteers and the biological parent(s), in which the host family becomes a kind of "extended family" for the family in crisis. We encourage host families to maintain a relationship with the family even after the placement ends, if possible.

***What type of situations do the children come from?***

The children come from families that are experiencing a crisis of one sort or another. Such crises might include financial problems, unemployment and homelessness. In other cases, children come from families in which the parent needs time to heal physically or emotionally, or is recovering from a drug or alcohol addiction. Some children come from families in which the mother is being abused. Still other families are thrown into crisis when a parent is remanded to a correctional institution for a period of time. While these and other kinds of crises are traumatic, they also offer the opportunity for positive personal and familial transformations. Acceptance of the child into SFFC is based on whether a family is available to care for that child when placement is being requested. Some Safe Families are able to accept sibling groups and parenting/pregnant teens.

***Will a child in the Safe Families project typically have a lot of behavior problems?***

Possibly, but not necessarily. Trauma can influence a normally well-behaved child to behave poorly, and can influence a child with behavior problems to behave better. Some children may display behavioral problems as a result of the chaos in their lives, while others may astound us with their calm and composure. It's impossible to predict how the child will behave.