



Safe Families *for* Children

Sharing God's Love with Families in Need



A ministry of
Bethany Christian Services

Bethany Christian Services is a Christian, nonprofit organization that serves children and families on five continents. Bethany was first established in 1944 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and has more than 80 offices in 34 states.

Bethany's Safe Families for Children™ is provided in partnership with the Safe Families for Children Alliance, www.safe-families.org.



Safe Families *for* Children

Thank you, we sincerely appreciate your interest in our ministry and welcome you to become part of the family, the Safe Families for Children™ family!

Imagine being in a desperate situation, perhaps a medical emergency, such as learning you have cancer and needing treatment. Imagine facing financial crisis because of extended unemployment or foreclosure and being unable to provide food or shelter for your children. What would you do? Who would you call for help while you remedied your situation? You may know many people, such as family members, close friends, or someone in your church family, you could rely on.

Now imagine you have *no one* to call. Imagine there is *not* one person in your life who is willing or able to help. If you are like me, that can seem impossible. However, there are countless parents, who, if they lost a job or their home, had a medical emergency, needed drug or alcohol treatment, or were experiencing other types of crisis, would have no one to call.

We, the church, are called to love our neighbor as ourselves, to care for the most vulnerable in our society, to welcome a stranger, to give a cup of cold water, and to assist the poor and lonely in their distress. Across our nation Safe Families for Children volunteers, people like you and me, are opening their homes and hearts to strangers and their children. They are lending a listening ear, offering grace and acceptance without judgment to people in need.

I am blessed to be part of such a movement. Bethany Christian Services is blessed to be part of the movement. Won't you join us and be a blessing to "one of the least of these" today... right in your own backyard?

Sincerely,

Tim Nolan
National Director Safe Families for Children
Bethany Christian Services
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Safe Families *for* Children

Safe Families for Children™ (SFFC) helps parents experiencing a temporary crisis by providing a loving Christian family with whom their children may stay until the crisis has passed.

FAMILIES HELPING FAMILIES

When a crisis strikes, many people rely on relatives or friends for support, but some families have no safety net. Problems such as postpartum depression or unemployment can hit suddenly and be debilitating. Children may then be at risk of neglect or abuse without some kind of support for the family in crisis.

Now, parents experiencing a temporary crisis can ask SFFC to find a Christian host family for their children (newborns through age 17) to stay with while the parents address the issues that led to their situation. There is no charge for SFFC. Volunteer Host Families are motivated by compassion and are not financially compensated.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Host Families include singles, married couples with or without children, and empty nesters who make room in their hearts and homes for children in need. SFFC volunteers can have a powerful, positive impact on the lives of others while practicing biblical hospitality, extending the love of Christ to people in need, and sharing their faith—all from their own homes!





Safe Families for Children

HOW DOES SAFE FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN™ WORK?

Referrals to SFFC come from a variety of sources, including schools, hospitals, state child protection agencies, churches, and social service organizations. Sometimes, parents call us directly for help. SFFC Family Coaches work quickly to contact an available Host Family.

Volunteer Host Families undergo an extensive screening process, receive training, and agree to host children at their own discretion. The average length of stay is 31 days, but it could be overnight or, in some cases, one year depending on the individual circumstance. Most children who live with Host Families are 6 years or younger.

SFFC is not adoption or foster care. Parents maintain full custody of their child and are encouraged to participate in decisions regarding their child's care while they address the issues that led to the crisis.

It is important that children and parents maintain their relationship as much as possible. Parents are encouraged to remain actively involved in their children's lives during their time with a Host Family and are also encouraged to develop relationships with other families who volunteer to help in various ways through the SFFC ministry. SFFC Family Coaches and volunteers also maintain contact with the parents to encourage them on their path to stability.

SFFC has a proven record of safely and successfully helping families recover from crisis. Currently, 85% of all families served by SFFC are reunited, often in the most stable environment they have ever known.



SINCE SFFC BEGAN IN 2002, IT HAS HELPED PEOPLE IN A VARIETY OF SITUATIONS:

- Parents facing eviction and homelessness
- A mother who couldn't find childcare when her sudden illness required surgery
- Children whose mothers were undergoing drug rehabilitation
- A teen being rejected by her parents because of an unplanned pregnancy



Opportunities to Serve

SFFC is only successful when entire communities come together to support both the Host Family and the family being served. Volunteers are needed at every level to help provide for the needs of our children.

As a Host Family caring for a child in your home, a Family Friend standing alongside a family offering wisdom and guidance, or providing essential support through material goods, you will impact your community for good and potentially help a family chart a course to sustained health and success. You can get started today.

Volunteer opportunities in your area may include:

Host Families

Volunteer families willing to open their homes to children in crises and provide a safe and loving atmosphere for them on a temporary basis.

Providing Resources

Most children come to SFFC with very few supplies and possessions and Host Families are not reimbursed for any expenses they incur. Therefore, the donation of items including (but not limited to): diapers, formula, cribs, car seats, strollers, and clothing is essential.

Family Friends

Volunteers willing to provide care of children while Host Families or parents being served run an errand; befriending a parent in crisis who needs a listening ear; accompaniment to a medical appointment, or transportation. A volunteer who also becomes like a mentor to a parent in crisis.

Mentors

Mature Christians serving in a mentoring role to connect with the family being served; assisting with and addressing the circumstances that led to their crisis.



Professional Services

A comprehensive network of professionals willing to provide services on a donated or discounted rate for the support of children in crisis and/or volunteer families. Doctors, dentists, hair-care professionals, handymen, and house cleaners are just a few examples.

Support Groups

Groups of individuals providing prayer, encouragement, and support to Host Families and the family in crisis. Examples include play groups, coffee talks, burger night, etc.

Family Coaches

Volunteers who help facilitate the co-parenting relationship between the SFFC Host Parent and parent being served during a hosting arrangement. Their primary focus is ensuring the well-being of the child(ren) while coordinating communications between various agencies, Host Family, and the family being served.



Frequently Asked Questions

Can the host family adopt the child?

The goal of the SFFC is to reunite children with their parent in a home that is more stable and healthy, in part, because of the contribution of the SFFC 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 parent loses legal custody of their child(ren), we urge Host Families to contact a social services agency 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 31 days, but hosting arrangements can last from two days to one year. The SFFC 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 served by SFFC?

These are 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 SFFC 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 SFFC.

What ages of children does SFFC outreach serve?

While SFFC can provide hostings for newborns through adolescents (0-17), 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 parent(s)?

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. SFFC aims to facilitate a partnership relationship between volunteers and the parent(s), in which the Host Family becomes a kind of "extended family" for the family in crisis. Host Families are encouraged 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 a hosting is being requested. Some Host Families are able to accept sibling groups and parenting/pregnant teens.

Will a child in SFFC 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 be exceptionally calm and composed. It's impossible to predict how the child will behave. Remember, it is the crisis of the parent(s) which trigger a referral, not difficult behaviors of a child.