

# Foster Care

## Discussion Guide



## Let's review

*At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room. And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.*

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so listen and be prepared to hear a different point of view. Remember, you do not need to share your political affiliation; this is a discussion and exchange of ideas, not politics.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

**The "Table-it" Rule:** If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

## Let's begin

- Take five minutes to review the [Executive Summary](#) and walk through the brief. Highlight the main point of each section and key statistics.
- Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two minute reaction** to the Brief:
  - Introduce yourself, and share what "lens of care" did you wear when reviewing this Brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
  - What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the Brief? What matters?

## Spread the word: facts to share during your discussion:

- In the United States, more [than 400,000 children](#) are in foster care on a given day.
- State agencies spend about [\\$30 billion](#) on child welfare purposes annually.
- Roughly 5% of children in the U.S. are placed in [foster care](#) at some point during their childhood. This rate is similar to the global rate.
- [According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System's \(AFCARS\) latest report](#), the average age of foster children is 8, and about 30% of foster children are between 1 and 5 years old.
- A recent study reported that within the United States, there were [615,000 victims of maltreatment](#) (under age 18) in 2020.

- According to the [National Youth in Transition Database](#), almost 30% of former foster care youth experience homelessness by age 21.

## Let's discuss

*Below are questions for the group to consider and discuss, or choose your own.*

- **Community:** What are the foster care rates in your community? Are there accurate reporting/databases in place to measure these rates in your community? Are there community programs to support foster children? Are there community efforts to support more foster families? What programs exist in your community that provide support to specific needs of foster youth?
- **Government:** What are the current child welfare programs and services within your community? What are the state-specific requirements families or individuals must meet in order to become a foster parent? What are the state-specific steps of removing a child from their home?
- **Business:** What are local community efforts to reduce the need for foster care? What are local programs or efforts to support foster families and foster youth?

## Let's act

1. **Take it local.** Talk to neighbors, friends, and family about their experiences in understanding the foster care system. Do you know anyone in the foster care system? Do you know any local foster families?
2. **Explore local policies related to the foster care system in your community.** What [models, programs, and projects](#) of foster care exist in your state? What are the foster licensing requirements [in your state](#)? What services exist? Has your state enacted a [bill of rights](#) for foster parents or children?
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. What community programs exist to support foster youth?
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on foster youth, child welfare. Visit the [State Foster Care Information Websites](#) for more information on your states' foster care system. Does your state partner with any local nonprofit organizations for services?
5. **Establish a relationship with your legislators.** It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).
6. **Consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed in your local newspaper.** Learn how on [The Policy Circle website](#).

## Next Steps for Your Circle

- **Post a Recap:** Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present, and share planned actions from group members. Designate who will post a meeting recap on your circle page.
- **Decide your next meeting topic.** Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting? Suggestions include:
  - [Crime & Safety](#)
  - [Healthcare](#)
  - [K-12 Education](#)

- **Dive Deeper into the issues.** If this is an area you would like to pursue further, consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [influencing policy](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness. Don't miss our [latest events](#) that help you dive deeper on this issue and more.