

**“So you want to be a Teaching Parent?”**  
**Frequently Asked Questions for Prospective Teaching Parents**  
**Boys and Girls Country of Houston, Inc.**

Over the past 38 years, we have had the privilege of working with many incredible Teaching Parents, singles and couples, in child care ministry. If you are thinking about this wonderful area as a career, we applaud you! For those new to the child care field, it is the hardest work and the best job you will ever have! For those who are already in the field, and thinking of changing your service location, you already know that the most important determinant of your success is whether or not you “fit” with the organization and whether that organization “fits” with you.

In the dialogue below, we have attempted to address some of the most frequently asked questions at Boys and Girls Country -- and our response to those questions. We hope this initial “conversation” will help you as you ponder your decision.

**SPIRITUAL**

**Are you a Christian organization?**

Yes. We seek staff members who are Christians, and who are led by God to be a part of this ministry. Teaching Parents and the children they raise here attend local churches (several denominations) and church attendance is a requirement on Sundays. Residents in the cottages are also actively involved in their church youth group.

**Are you affiliated with a particular denomination?**

No. As an organization, we are non-denominational, accepting and loving all Christians -- residents and staff -- wherever they are in their spiritual journey. The theological diversity of our staff and the diversity of our residents is one of our greatest joys and strengths, one of our biggest challenges, and one of our biggest opportunities to grow in our faith.

**Does each Teaching Parent couple get to pick the church their cottage attends?**

Yes and no. When new Teaching Parents arrive, they are required to attend the cottage church where residents are involved. Only if a cottage needs a new church based on the changing spiritual needs of that cottage, is a change recommended. Then the entire cottage family (Teaching Parents and residents) visit several churches in order to make their decision as a family. Once the choice is made, regardless if there is a change in staff members, the cottage is committed to this church for several years. This enables the children who live in the cottage to become a part of the church community and experience stability in their “church home” as they grow in their faith walk.

**RESIDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

**Why are the children placed with you?**

The majority of our residents come to live with us when their guardians (parents, grandparents, or legal guardians) ask for help. There is typically a crisis in the family; crises may involve divorce, desertion or abandonment, drugs and alcohol, mental illness, abuse or neglect, physical illness, the death of a parent, or other family problems.

**What is the profile of the children who live there?**

In Texas, children are rated on the level of treatment needed based on their demonstrated problems. The levels are basic, moderate, specialized and intense. The basic level children have the fewest demonstrated problems and then behaviors escalate up to the intense level children

who typically need the most intensive psychiatric treatment and care. Boys and Girls Country serves children who are at the basic and moderate levels. Children ages 5 to age 19 live on campus. The minimum placement is for two years -- two years is requested because our data indicates that the longer a child stays at Boys and Girls Country, the better their long term success. Children are of average intelligence, able to attend public school, and must be capable of living in an open, community setting.

**Do parents or families have to pay?**

Guardians and families are asked to contribute toward a child's care based on their income and size of family; however, no child is ever turned away because their family cannot pay for their care. Admission to Boys and Girls Country is based on need, not financial resources.

**How many children are on your campus?**

Boys and Girls Country can serve a total of 88 children at any one time -- 48 boys and 40 girls. They live in eleven cottages (8 children each).

There is also a College and Career Program, and a separate College and Career campus for those residents who have graduated from high school and for whom we remain financially and emotionally responsible. Immediately after high school graduation, graduates enter the College and Career Program, attend college, go into the military, or attend technical school/training programs. Until they are fully launched into a successful adult life, they have "a bed to come home to" at Boys and Girls Country, and we are responsible for them.

**How long may children stay at the Home?**

We are a place for kids to grow up. Children who stay the longest are typically the most successful. On average, our residents stay four years; however, many residents grow up with us and are a part of our College and Career family, and then our alumni family. Many alumni "come home to visit" while on military leave or to share news of a new baby or a new job. Like all parents, we take the long view; we want to be involved in children's lives from the moment they arrive until they are young adults and able to "do life" successfully on their own.

**TEACHING PARENTS**

**Who are the most successful Teaching Parents at Boys and Girls Country?**

We have spent a lot of time trying to profile our successful Teaching Parents, however, that one profile still eludes us. The truth is that our successful Teaching Parents come from many walks of life, are different ages, and have totally different personalities. The common theme is that they see their job with us as a ministry; many express their "calling from God" to do this work. Others have ministered to children in other ways (teaching, youth ministry, foster parent, parent, etc.) and have not been able to accomplish the long term goals they wanted for children. For them, Teaching Parenting has met their needs to see long term success.

In an attempt to profile our employees, we developed "Ten Characteristics" of the most successful Boys and Girls Country employees, in any of our jobs here. The Ten Characteristics are: Compassion, Professionalism, Good Ethical and Moral Character, Excellent Communication Skills, Positive Attitude, Team Orientation, Integrity, Dedication/Dependability, Creativity, and Endurance.

If you have these qualities, you've got the foundation.

**Do Teaching Parents have children of their own?**

Yes. We believe that people who want to work with children most often have children of their own. Many couples come to Boys and Girls Country when their children are already in college or successful young adults. We accept applications from prospective Teaching Parent couples who have from one to three children. Ideally, children are age 5 or older. We use the term "ideally" because it is much harder for a Teaching Parent couple with younger children to meet the demands of the job. Having said that, we will tell you that we have had many excellent Teaching Parent couples, including some presently, who have younger children and who fulfill their roles in a remarkable way.

We ask Teaching Parents who want to add to their families as they come to Boys and Girls Country, or after they arrive here, to wait at least two years in order to learn the job, bond with the children in their cottage, and make life easier for themselves and for us! Having children of their own does not change the number of children placed in the cottage. Eight resident children live with the Teaching Parent family, regardless of how large the Teaching Parent family may be. Our families have 10 to 13 members living in their cottage.

**What is the schedule for a Teaching Parent?**

Teaching Parents work eight days on, and four days off. Shift work or hourly work is not available for the Teaching Parenting position at Boys and Girls Country. We are a family model. We are looking for 24 hour parents -- people who are present when kids go to bed, and who get up with their children in time for breakfast before school starts.

We are committed to making sure that our Teaching Parents have time off for rest and recuperation. The four days off are routinely scheduled and only in very unusual circumstances would Teaching Parents be asked to work (for extra pay of course) on their days off. There are a few things that are mandatory whether you are working or on duty, such as the annual Spring Festival on a Saturday in April or May, or the annual Children's Awards Banquet, but these events are rare. We know that living in a cottage produces stress that only rest, sleep, and a fresh perspective -- away from the cottage -- can remedy and rejuvenate, and we want to make sure you get just that!

**PETS****May Teaching Parents bring pets?**

Yes. We allow Teaching Parent families to bring outdoor pets. This has been one of our hardest decisions -- and one that was made many years ago. Due to the cleanliness standards when 10-14 people live together, and the fact that many children have allergies to pets, we cannot allow indoor pets. The exception to this rule is made for fish -- which several children and staff have owned.

**STAFF CHILDREN****May Teaching Parents home school their own children?**

Another hard decision -- made many years ago. In earlier years at Boys and Girls Country homeschooling was allowed, but it created many challenges. With the emphasis on a professional Teaching Parenting role, the ongoing training and education required, and the busy schedule we keep, home schooling is not possible.

This also fits our philosophy about staff children. At Boys and Girls Country, we encourage staff children to be an integral part of the campus community. We encourage their participation in

public schools which makes them eligible for academic recognition, monetary rewards, trips and scholarships. With few exceptions, staff children are given the same opportunities and benefits as resident children.

**What is it like for my child to live there and how will he/she be treated?**

Of course there are ups and downs, but overall most staff children love living at Boys and Girls Country. Many older staff kids feel they are part of their family's ministry. Others just enjoy the activities and the opportunities they receive here.

**NEW FAMILIES**

**Do you advise newlyweds to consider becoming Teaching Parents?**

No. We believe that newlyweds should be newlyweds -- focusing on each other and their new relationship, not the demands of a family of 10! We require all Teaching Parents to be married a minimum of two years -- to each other -- before they enter our pre-service training program. It has been our experience that couples who have an established relationship, and who have practice and experience working together as a team, bring the kind of relationship and foundation needed to manage a cottage and build eight additional relationships with children.

**SINGLE TEACHING PARENTS**

**Is everyone a couple? Didn't you say something about Single Teaching Parents?**

Yes. Our Home uses a model that has the Teaching Parent couple and a designated single Teaching Parent living in the cottage full-time. The Single Teaching Parent gets to know and parent the eight children when the Teaching Parent couple takes their four days off. The Single also works a schedule of eight days on and four days off. Singles work as support to another Single Teaching Parent on the second four days, and take responsibility for eight additional children.

Singles are typically college graduates who are seeking a three year (or more) experience working with children, or they may be older singles who have raised their own children and want to keep raising others. There is no one profile. Singles have the challenge of working a schedule that is different than many of their non-residential friends, and may initially struggle with isolation. It is common for single staff working here to form a strong bond of friendship. The Single Teaching Parent is a valuable third member of the Cottage Parenting team, and is often able to reach a child that no one else can reach.

**TRAINING**

**What kind of training do you provide?**

We have been told that we provide the best of all training! We provide a paid 3 to 4 week Pre-Service Training Program that includes basics such as First Aid and CPR, but also training that is specific to Boys and Girls Country. This includes Non-Violent Crisis Intervention, Normative Culture, and our Boys and Girls Country Model. During this training period, you are introduced to every employee at Boys and Girls Country, and you have an opportunity to experience the campus culture in many different cottages. We invest in our new Teaching Parents during the first month to give them all the skills, tips, resources, and relationships which they will use in future years to raise our children. We look for, and we invest in, long term career Teaching Parents. In fact, we ask you for a minimum commitment of three years!

## **BENEFITS**

### **What benefits do you provide?**

We provide medical, dental, and vision insurance. We offer long term disability, life insurance, and a 403(b) retirement plan, to which employees may contribute immediately upon employment, and to which Boys and Girls Country begins to contribute after one year of employment. We also have generous vacation/sick leave, direct deposit, and annual length of service recognition and bonuses.

Teaching Parents' living quarters were renovated a few years ago to address space, privacy, and storage needs. In addition to housing, Teaching Parents can also receive personal auto maintenance at a reduced cost (after six months of employment.)

## **LIVING QUARTERS**

### **Tell me more about the Teaching Parent apartments.**

The cottages are approximately 5000 square feet, with Teaching Parent couple and Single Teaching Parent quarters attached, but separate from each other. Teaching Parent couples have 3 or 4 bedrooms, 2 baths, as well as living and kitchen areas. Single Teaching Parents have 1 bedroom and bath. Single Teaching Parents have the opportunity to live off campus, but most live on-site.

## **FUNDING**

### **How are you funded and is your funding stable?**

Boys and Girls Country is almost 100% privately funded from the greater Houston community. The Executive Director and Development Department work with individuals, businesses, foundations, churches, and civic groups to enlist their volunteer and financial support. A forty-member board of directors is active in raising money. Some donors make monthly contributions and others contribute at special times of the year. 85% of the annual operating budget comes from contributions or special events.

Guardians and families are also asked to contribute toward a child's care based on their income and size of family; however, no child is ever turned away because their family cannot pay for their care. Admission to Boys and Girls Country is based on need, not financial resources.

## **DECISION TIME**

### **How will I ever decide if this is the lifestyle for me?**

The only way to decide if you belong at Boys and Girls Country is to talk to us by phone first, and then come for a visit. You have to "touch it, feel it, live it," and get to know us. We invite you to share our life for two or three days. We are brutally honest about what is good and bad about living in this environment -- and about our strengths and our flaws as a community. We are also candid about our challenges -- whatever they may be at the moment.

If God is calling you to this ministry and you like what you see here, you will never be more fulfilled or happy. If, however, your philosophy of life and ours does not fit, there are many other places for you to consider becoming a Teaching Parent. Every Home is different and everyone has to find the right "fit" for them.

## **FINAL COMMENTS**

If you are looking for a ministry-oriented, mission-based, “whatever it takes” approach to raise fabulous children kind of place, come to Boys and Girls Country! Miracles happen for children here every day, and we invite you to join us to be a part of the miracle-making!