

Easy Reference To Foster Care



EASY REFERENCE TO FOSTER CARE

A PROJECT OF
THE FOX VALLEY WISCONSIN
FOSTER CARE COORDINATORS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER TO FOSTER PARENTS	1
FOSTER CHILDREN – WHERE DO THEY COME FROM.....	3
YOU, THE FOSTER PARENTS	4
RESPONSIBILITIES	5
You and the Social Worker as Partners	
Confidentiality – The Responsibility of Keeping Mum	
Child Care: Medical, School, and Home	
Maintaining Records	
Vacation Authorization	
Other Authorizations	
Sharing Information	
RIGHTS AND EXPECTATIONS	12
Information	
Training and Education	
Regular Communication with the Social Worker	
Application Rights	
THE FOSTER CHILD	16
REASONS FOR PLACEMENT	17
PLACEMENT CONSIDERATIONS	18
Matching	
The Pre-placement Visit	
ADJUSTMENT TO PLACEMENT	20
NEEDS OF THE FOSTER CHILD.....	22
Education	
Health and Medical	
Emotional Support, Individualized Discipline and Guidance	
Religious Training	
Recreation	
Safety	
Permanency Planning/Concurrent Planning	
TERMINATION OF PLACEMENT	29
Reasons	
Preparation for Leaving	
The Foster Child	
You and Your Family	
Giving Notice	
The Foster Family Responsibility	
The Agency Responsibility	

THE CHILD'S BIRTH FAMILY.....	32
LEGAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BIRTH FAMILY.....	33
VISITS AND COMMUNICATION.....	34
THE AGENCY.....	37
SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCIES PROVIDE	38
Services and Financial Aid	
SOCIAL WORKER COMMUNICATION	39
FINANCIAL INFORMATION.....	40
BASIC MAINTENANCE RATE	
INITIAL CLOTHING ALLOWANCE	
SUPPLEMENTAL MAINTENANCE RATE	
EXCEPTIONAL RATE	
FREE LUNCH PROGRAM	
INCOME TAX	
FOSTER PARENT INSURANCE	
A LAST WORD	43

Dear Foster Parent:

What is foster care? Put simply, it is giving someone else's child a secure and loving place to grow up. Because every child needs that so much, your job as a foster parent is very important. It is a special job, and it takes special people to do it. It also carries a very special reward – the reward of knowing that you are really helping someone who needs you very much.

Children are like you and me; they have feelings, worries, and fears. (In the case of the foster child, perhaps we should put that, FEELINGS, WORRIES, and FEARS!). Most foster children have lost out on two things every child needs desperately: The need to feel he or she belongs to a loving and reliable adult, and the need to feel that he or she is a worthwhile person, a person worthy of love.

Supplying these needs may be the most satisfying thing you do with your life. It may also be the hardest. Worthwhile things are often hard, aren't they? But often they bring the best rewards.

When we remember back that far, we remember that growing up is hard, even given a good family life from the beginning. For foster children who, for one reason or another, have been separated from their natural parents and who may never have had a secure home life, it is even harder.

Sometimes the road toward a loving and trusting relationship with a foster child is a very long one, and always it is bumpy, with lots of ups, downs, ruts and turns. The child who needs love and security so much may seem to push it away at every turn by unlovable behavior.

He or she may express this need by showing anger, rebellion, distrust, fear or depression. Sometimes you may wonder if the child you are trying so hard to help will ever get over being anxious and depressed, or defiant and loud, or lonely and shy – or ever show anything more than indifference.

But you will remember that the child carries a heavy load. He or she has a past you cannot change and perhaps a loyalty to parents who have failed him or her. There are feelings of grief because of separation. The child is probably confused about who he or she is, and about what has happened. Often the child has the feeling (not deserved, but nonetheless strong) that somehow, in some way, he or she is to blame.

Nearly always, a foster child comes burdened with fear from past experiences and with fear of what may happen in the future. Children learn to love and trust adults from having repeated good experiences with them. For a child whose past experiences with adults may have ranged from confusing to terrible, the building of trust and confidence may take a long, long time. No wonder this child may be slow to respond to the warmth you give.

But understanding and experience helps. You will be helped by understanding your particular foster child's background and personality, and by learning that, while immediate personal satisfactions from your foster child may be few, the long-term satisfaction of watching him or her grow can be great.

And, too, you know that you are not alone in your responsibility and concern for the child; the agency and the birth parent, shares it with you. Your social worker will be interested in what you have to say about your child, in sharing the bad times as well as the good, and in supplying information and encouragement as needed.

We hope that this booklet will help, as well. It contains information you will need about such things as your relationship with the agency, with the child's birth parents, your responsibilities for the child, and, we hope, some encouraging words to help you continue day to day in giving love, approval, and a feeling of belonging to the foster child.

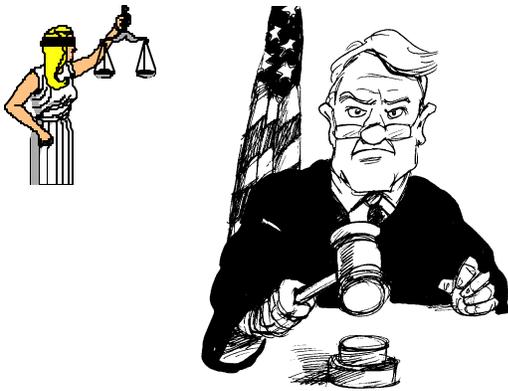
We thank you on behalf of the child. You are engaged in helping someone grow up, and that is probably the most important thing one person can do for another.



FOSTER CHILDREN: WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

Foster children come to our attention through various routes. Some examples are: A child who has been abandoned, a child who is a victim of abuse or neglect, a child whose parent is missing, incarcerated or hospitalized. Or, a child who has committed a delinquent act.

Wisconsin Statutes (Chapters 48 and 938) spell out the circumstances under which a child may be removed from home and the legal process which must be followed.



The Juvenile Court has exclusive jurisdiction over a child alleged to be delinquent or in need of protection or services, and orders a child into foster care when emergency conditions warrant immediate action.

The court may place a child in care for longer periods of time through a dispositional order, which is in effect for a maximum of one year. **Dispositional orders include conditions for safety and services for the parents and/or child, and can be specified for**

shorter periods of time or extended prior to expiration.

If necessary, the Juvenile Court will transfer legal custody of the child to the County Department of Human Services. This is done only when the child's parents refuse to cooperate with the treatment plan ordered by the court.

Another way in which a child can be placed in a foster home is through a voluntary placement agreement. It is used to avoid unnecessary court involvement and cannot exceed six months.

With this agreement, the child's parent or guardian agrees to the placement of the child by an agency, and has the right to remove the child at any time.

Major decisions, such as consent to marry, surgery, enlistment in the armed services, or placement in special education programs, however, are still made by the legal guardian. In most cases, a child's birth parent continues to be the legal guardian. Consent of the parent or guardian for the above decisions is obtained by the agency.

YOU, THE FOSTER PARENTS

YOU, THE FOSTER PARENTS

RESPONSIBILITIES

YOU AND THE SOCIAL WORKER AS PARTNERS

A really vital part of the child's care is given to you, the foster parents. Your part is the day-to-day, everyday care including feeding and clothing, health care and training, education and encouragement, and most important of all, the warmth and affection of family life that will help them grow *inside*. (This booklet contains more discussion of these things in Section II, Needs of the Foster Child.)

You and the social worker representing the agency, with your common goal of helping the foster child to grow in maturity and happiness, will both benefit by close consultation with each other.

As you can imagine, an open relationship between you, the social worker, and the birth parent help all four – you, the worker, the birth parent, and the child.

You, as the foster parent, may know what the child is thinking and feeling about him or herself, family, and other concerns in his or her life. It is important to share this information with the social worker.

It's good to remember, too, that nobody has all the right answers all the time. No one expects you to be more than human, and the social worker knows that there will be bad times as well as good, and times when little progress seems to be made. So feel free to tell the social worker of the developments in the child's life or behavior that you feel are significant, whether they are things that delight or dismay you.

In addition to talking with you, the social worker may sometimes talk with the child alone. Such visits can add to your mutual understanding of the child. The child's behavior may tell something of how he or she reacts to adults, and feels about having a social worker and a foster family.

The social worker is the link between the child and the birth family. A good relationship between worker and child can enable them to talk about the situation, and can help the child have a better understanding of the reasons for placement with a foster family.

The social worker, who has contact with the birth family and who can talk with the child about them, is the person who can help all of you in planning for the future.



CONFIDENTIALITY – THE RESPONSIBILITY OF KEEPING MUM

Every day, each of us makes decisions about which experiences to share in conversation with our friends. Some things we talk about readily, while other parts of our lives we may not talk about at all, considering them to be family matters.

It is important that you, as foster parents, develop a healthy sense of privacy in regard to your foster child, his or her background and birth family.



It is to be expected that friends and relatives will be curious about the child and that they may ask for specific information. Although the interest may be well-intentioned, the agency expects that you will protect the child's right to privacy.

Confidentiality, as it is called, is very important to the well-being of the child. Wisconsin Statutes state that information about and between the agency, the child, his or her parents and foster parents should not be disclosed to the community. Therefore, if someone begins asking for too much information, you may say, "I'm sorry, it's confidential."

While it is human to want to share one's experiences with friends, please remember that it is one of your responsibilities

as a foster parent to not divulge specific information about the child, his or her background, or present problems to people whose interest in the child, however genuine, is nonprofessional. Information may be needed by the child's doctor or teacher in order to better help the child. Your agency may allow you to share such information, or expect that this will be done by the social worker. Check with the social worker first before disclosing any information.

CHILD CARE: MEDICAL, SCHOOL AND HOME

I. Medical

Within 30 days after a child is placed in your home, you will need to make arrangements for a medical exam, unless the child has had one within the previous 12 months. The examination can be done by your county's Health Check Clinic or by a physician who is certified as a Health Check provider. It is always a good idea to discuss this with the social worker and the birth parent at the time of placement because, sometimes, the child should be seeing a particular physician.

When a child is placed, a medical assistance card is issued. It may take awhile before the card comes to you, but if you have need of it prior to its arrival, contact your social worker and request a number.

Be sure to tell your doctor that your foster child will be getting an MA (Medical Assistance) number. For some testing, dental work, etc., prior

authorization is needed. Some doctors and dentists will not accept MA patients; it is important to check on this, since payment is made in this manner.

As a general guide, you can assume that you will be consulting with the doctor for your foster child in any case where you would normally do so for your own children.

Some foster parents make an appointment for the new child in the family sometime within the first week or two of placement. Their feeling is that it is an advantage to both the doctor and the child to have a meeting and checkup as a basis for a pleasant relationship later when the child may need the doctor's services.

Medical Exams

All foster children, if over the age of three, must have an annual physical and dental examination, even if he or she appears to be the picture of health. It is important to see that vision is checked by the doctor at this time, as well. It is a good idea to tell the child what to expect; good information can get rid of fears.



Infants need to be seen more often for checkups through the first year. Usually, the schedule is every month for

the first six months, then every two months, or as recommended by your doctor.

If the child is under the care of a certain doctor, you may be asked to continue there. Check with the worker to see if special consultation is needed or if you are to select a doctor.

Immunizations

Even in this day of routine immunizations, many children haven't had the shots they need to protect their health. If the records you receive do not show that your foster child has had them, check on the immunization history and make arrangements for him or her to have the ones needed.

You should inform the social worker at the next visit whenever the child has needed to see the doctor for other than a regular physical exam.

Hospitalization/Surgery

If the physician recommends that your foster child be hospitalized for treatment of an illness or for surgery you would, of course want to follow this recommendation. When this occurs, the written consent of the birth parent (or legal guardian) needs to be obtained. Contact your social worker for the necessary arrangements. Foster parents should not sign for medical procedures or outpatient surgery.

Emergency

In the case of an acute medical emergency – for instance, if your child were injured in a serious accident – where you can't reach the agency or

child's legal guardian immediately, the doctor should be told of the child's foster status. The doctor can then decide whether the emergency is so acute as to require proceeding with the consult of the guardian. You would then notify the agency as soon as possible.

Dentist

Even pre-school children need dental attention, and your foster child, if over age three, should have teeth checked about every six months, or more often if your dentist recommends it. Again, as in the case of the "healthy" trip to the doctor, it is often helpful to the child if he or she meets the dentist under painless circumstances first.



II. School

A child's school life looms large to the child, and is, in fact, a big chunk of his or her life. Therefore, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant is very important to the child.

Adjusting to a new school and a new home at the same time can be difficult. And often, foster children begin their time in a new school with some difficult problems. Sometimes school records are incomplete so that little information is available about their ability, achievement, or progress. Occasionally, too, teachers or principals may be insensitive to the special feelings of

foster children about their status. There are many ways that you, as foster parents, can make the situation a little easier.

If the child is placed in your home during the summer, your worker will contact the school so that former school records can be obtained and any necessary testing arranged. Arrangements for tutoring can be made ahead of time, if they are necessary. You will undoubtedly want to accompany the young child to school on the first day. An introduction to the teacher as "my foster daughter" (or "son") helps establish her or her identity and your concern.

Before enrollment, a meeting with school personnel, your worker, and the birth parent to summarize the child's past experience and set future goals could be helpful.



Other ways to try to see that this important area of the child's life goes well are:

1. Keep abreast of your child's progress through scheduled meetings with the teacher, and plan ways of helping with problem areas.
2. Look for areas of interest and talent and encourage your child to participate in appropriate activities.

3. Become involved in school functions, such as PTA, field trips, serving as teacher's aide, and so forth.
4. Show an interest in your child's schoolwork and offer help when it is needed.
5. Involve the birth parent whenever possible.

III. Home (food, clothing)

Since you probably already have a family and experience in feeding them nutritiously, meals will present no problem for you unless the child won't eat. Occasionally, because of nervousness, depression, or lack of experience with varieties of foods, a child will at first eat very little and cause his or her foster parents to worry. Try not to. Chances are when the child feels a little more at home, he or she will begin to rediscover an appetite. In the meantime, it is a good idea to serve simple foods which are familiar to most children.



Be relaxed about table manners, too. Remember that there will be time to consider this later when the child is more relaxed and has had a chance to observe the way your family does things. Don't make an issue of clean plates, or eating food the child doesn't want. It is better to keep things simple and friendly, and to **realize that things**

at the table will probably improve as the child becomes more familiar with new surroundings. If problems do persist, notify the social worker.

Clothing needs will vary with the age of the child. An initial clothing allowance is available to children newly placed in foster care who do not have sufficient clothing. If this is the case with your placement, you will want to consult with your social worker to find out if the child has clothing at home which can be obtained or if you need to purchase clothing for them. Always keep your receipts for documentation and reimbursement. In addition to the initial clothing allowance, the monthly rate for the child includes an amount for purchasing clothing. Foster children need help learning to like themselves. How they dress can be a factor in that self-image. A good rule for any age child is to dress them the way you would your own children, or the way school classmates are dressed.

Maintaining Records

One of your duties as foster parents is to keep, during the time the child is in your care, a confidential record of information concerning the child. The agency is required to provide certain information about the child and his or her family to you. This form, HFS 37 (Information to Foster Parents) will contain, at a minimum, the following information:

1. The child's name
2. The child's birth date
3. The name of the person or agency to be notified in an emergency

4. The date the child was received for care
5. The person or agency placing the child
6. The name of the physician to be called in an emergency
7. Medical information about the child while in your care, such as height and weight progress, medical examinations and immunizations, allergies, medicines taken, illnesses and accidents, including the dates of each
8. The name of the dentist and the dates the child was seen
9. The name of the school and grades attended

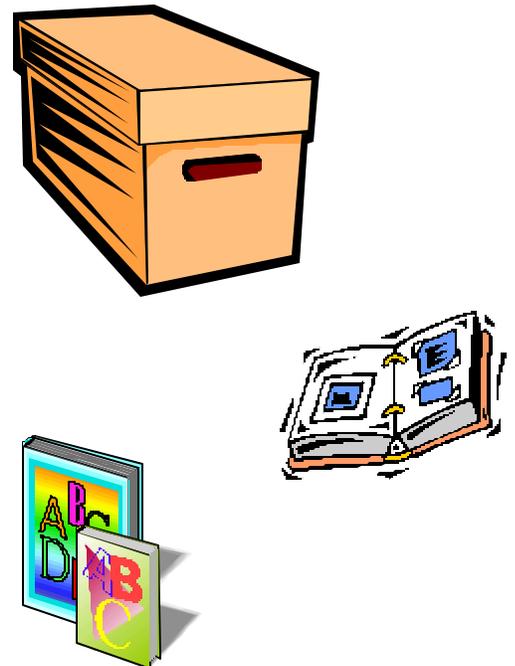
These are official records and must be available to the agency or department upon request.

You might also want to keep a journal on a daily or weekly basis, documenting the child's stay with you. You might record special problems or special progress, parental visits, and also make a note of questions you want to ask the social worker. This can be very helpful to both you and your worker when trying to determine how frequent a behavior occurs with the child, or to try to remember when something happened in the case for inclusion in a court or progress report. It is important to be objective and factual when writing a journal (i.e., do not include your personal feelings).

Another kind of record you should consider keeping, if the child will spend more than a few months with you, is a

kind of personal identity-memory record for the *child*. Set aside a box or folder into which you can put mementos of the time with you: souvenirs of vacations, school work the child was proud of, report cards, school pictures and some duplicates of the snapshots of the child and the family, maybe a favorite outgrown book or toy. Many agencies now have some type of life book for foster children.

If the child leaves, these things can go along as a reminder of places and people – a kind of memory bank of the past that can be very important. If the child stays with you, he or she will have the same kind of record of growing up that you might be providing for the other children in the family. In either case, the memory box contains important reminders that someone loved and cared.



VACATION AUTHORIZATION

If you plan to take your foster child with you on a vacation trip within or outside of Wisconsin, contact the social worker for required permission. This will avoid conflicts with, for example, court orders, planned birth parent visiting, psychological testing, and medical appointments.

If you are not able to take the foster child with you on a trip, you should discuss with your worker where the child will stay. He or she may be placed with a family friend, a relative, or an approved respite provider with the permission of the worker or supervisor.

OTHER AUTHORIZATIONS

Most agencies will have an authorization form that the parent will consent to activities for the child, such as school trips, riding horses, obtaining a driver's license, etc. There is also a Hazardous Machinery Use form which needs to be signed by the parent, child, foster parent, and social worker for any child over the age of 14 that is allowed to use machinery that could potentially be dangerous. Please consult with your social worker for further information.

SHARING INFORMATION

You and your social worker will be sharing much of the responsibility of planning for the child. For instance,

developmental goals while in foster care, opportunities you hope to provide, and ways to implement them.

There is another area of planning which is more exclusively up to the worker: he or she must make judgments concerning the future care of the child. Is the child's home situation improving? Your part in this kind of planning is to provide the social worker with the kind of information he or she needs to make these decisions.

The worker will need your insights about the child's personality, problems, special gifts, and wishes. If you know what the child would want to happen next and can help in the expression of these feelings, please do so.

While you can't expect that what you feel should happen is always going to be the solution chosen, you can rest assured that the social worker will listen carefully and will appreciate your opinions and your openness.



YOU, THE FOSTER PARENTS

RIGHTS AND EXPECTATIONS

You may expect:

INFORMATION

You will want to be as completely informed about your foster child as possible. You can expect to receive information about your foster child's background, the probable length of stay with you, what the plan is for the child's future and what is expected of you as foster parents.

The social worker and the birth parent are your resources concerning the child and your role as a foster family. Be sure to take enough time to talk about the things that will help you to help the child. Never be afraid to *ask*. You need to know the child's situation and what might be the best ways of helping.

Because of a busy work schedule, it may be easier for your worker to talk to you at some times more than others. Ask when the best time to call is, and where.

It is a good idea to write down your questions as they occur to you and have them handy when you contact your worker, so that you don't forget something you meant to ask.



As a plan for the child develops, the social worker will share it with you. Foster parents are regarded as an extension of the agency staff and, as such, are included in planning for the child's future. You will need to be available to the worker for these discussions.

Communication is vital to the healthy placement of the child. The child's feeling of well-being is often dependent upon the free flow of information between the social worker and foster parents. In order to best help your child, remember to ask and remember to share.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Orientation to explain the way in which the agency works is provided as a part of the licensing process.

Workshops are scheduled at various times throughout the year to provide information and practical help with many specific problems, such as the trauma of separation, placement adjustment, or the problems of the retarded or the hyper-active child. You will be given brochures telling about the workshops in advance, with the hope that you will attend as many as possible.

As concerned foster parents, you will also want to be aware of short courses or workshops offered by organizations in the community, such as your agency, PTA, churches, universities and technical colleges. No previous

education is required to attend most of these workshops, and they can be very helpful.

Sometimes, money is available for training and ongoing education for foster parents. You should inquire through the agency whether financial help is available to pay some of the costs of the training you wish to attend. Funds may be available for tuition/registration, transportation or babysitting.

It pays to be alert to television listings concerning child-rearing, too. There are often interviews with experts in the field, or, occasionally, special programs dealing with children's needs or family relationships. These are easy to take advantage of right at home, and can add to your knowledge about parenting.

Foster parent organizations which exist in most areas also provide opportunities for learning about the special concerns of foster parents, both through individual sharing and friendships, and through the information programs these organizations sometimes arrange.

Obviously, there are numerous opportunities for continuing to learn more about meeting the needs of foster children, and thereby continuing to grow as foster parents. Don't hesitate to take advantage of any opportunity available to you; the additional training or advice coupled with your own practical experience and observation will often come in handy in the important business of helping the child in your home.

REGULAR COMMUNICATION WITH THE SOCIAL WORKER

Even if you do not have specific questions or problems which prompt you to seek advice, you may expect that your social worker will be in touch with you and your foster child on a regular basis to help make the child's placement a successful one. The worker has a responsibility to establish a relationship with the child to understand the child's feelings. The worker will stay informed about the child's adjustment to school, for example, and will probably talk to him or her about it, as well as to you.

The worker will want to share any special insights about the child with you, and will be keeping you informed about progress made in improving whatever situation in the birth family made it necessary for the child to be placed in foster care. The worker will be sensitive to your need and the child's need for time to adjust, both to the child's coming to you, and to his or her departure, and will want to help you with both of these events.



Most social workers have a big caseload and must budget their time carefully; however, you and your foster child are the social worker's reason for being, so rest assured of the worker's interest and continuing communication with you.

LICENSING RIGHTS

Wisconsin law gives all adult persons the right to make application for a foster home license. It also guarantees them:

1. The right to be evaluated objectively on the basis of written rules.
2. The right to receive a license if they fully satisfy all requirements.
3. The right to written notice and explanation of the grounds for revoking a license.
4. The right to appeal when refused a license or when a license has been revoked.
5. The right to all information about the child that they will accept into their home.
6. The right to have notice of court hearings pertaining to a child in placement.
7. The right to appeal the removal of a child from their home when placed for more than 6 months.
8. The right to a 30-day notice of change of placement of the child.

Foster parents share the responsibility for the child in foster care with the child's birth family, the family foster care agency, and, in many instances, the court of competent jurisdiction. Within this critical role, foster parents have the following rights and responsibilities:

- The responsibility for keeping the agency informed of any changes in the foster parents' household;
- The right not to be held liable for any personal injury the child might incur unless the foster parents' negligence is established;
- The right to be notified of any court actions or third-party review concerning a child in their care;
- The right to be informed of any grievance procedures or access to any appeals process should they wish to appeal an agency's policy, regulation, or plan for a child in their care;
- The right to be trained in their role as members of a team;
- The right to a clear understanding of their role as foster parents and the role of the child's birth family and the agency;
- The right to be treated with consideration and respect by the agency staff;

- The right to have a part in the decisions regarding the child in their care and to be treated as a member of the team in developing case plans for the child;
- The right to refuse to accept a child into their family if they feel they cannot meet the needs of the child;
- The right to continue their own family patterns and traditions;
- The right to a supportive relationship from the agency;
- The right to receive pertinent information about the child(ren) in their care;
- The right to attend all hearings affecting the child in their care; and
- The right to be considered as a permanent family for a child in their family's care if the agency has determined that plan to be in the child's best interests.



THE FOSTER CHILD

THE FOSTER CHILD

REASONS FOR PLACEMENT

The focus of the work of the social services agencies is to keep families together whenever possible. It is only when other alternatives have been exhausted that we turn to the alternative of foster care.

The usual reason for the child entering foster care is that, for one reason or another, or sometimes a combination of reasons, the child's parents are unable to provide care or insure that the child will be safe in his or her current environments. This may have come about through illness, either mental or physical; death; abandonment; abuse; neglect; imprisonment; catastrophe, such as fire which wipes out the family's home and resources; or because the child has special needs which his or her parents are unable to meet.

You can probably remember times in your own life when day to day routine or responsibilities went by the wayside

temporarily due to some disruptive or stressful occurrence or situation. It is not hard, therefore, to imagine how someone else whose family resources may be fewer than our own may be in a position of having to let "an outsider" take charge for a while. It is not difficult, either, to understand the mixed emotions one would have when giving up the care of one's children to someone else.

Both you and the child are entitled to know the reason it is necessary to live away from the parents. The reasons for placement may enter into the decision about what kind of foster family is best suited to meet the particular needs of the child. The child who is old enough to reason needs as clear, humane, and truthful an answer to the spoken or unspoken question of "why?" as possible. This is discussed more fully in the section called Adjustment to Placement.



THE FOSTER CHILD

PLACEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

MATCHING

In choosing a foster home for the child, the social worker considers the needs of the child and hopes to find foster parents and family who are eager and able to meet those needs.

When the worker or the foster care coordinator comes to you with information about a child who might fit well into your home, it is because the knowledge and information acquired about your family and way of life seem to indicate that you and the child might do well together, that you might be able to fulfill this particular child's needs, and find satisfaction in doing so.

During your home study, you tried to give honest answers to questions concerning the ages of children you might help, the kinds of emotional or physical problems you felt able to deal with, whether the sex, race or religion of the child was a factor, how you felt about cognitively delayed or otherwise handicapped children, and similar questions. Now the social worker has a child he or she feels you can help.

But while the worker has good reasons for selecting your family for a particular boy or girl, the final decision on whether this child will join your family for awhile must come as a result of discussion and thought by you and your family.

The social worker will provide you with as much information as possible about the child. Sometimes it isn't possible to have full information at the time of

placement as needed, but the worker will discuss what information is available with you and let you know in what special way you and your family can help the child. Don't hesitate to voice your doubts and questions. Your worker will want you to feel as secure as possible with your decision.

You will have time to think about it and talk it over with your spouse and children before you respond. A negative response will in no way jeopardize your chance to take a child at some future time. But on the other hand, don't be deterred by simple fear of the unknown.

Suppose you and your family decide to take this child? What happens next?

THE PRE-PLACEMENT VISIT

The pre-placement visit is just that – one or several short visits, perhaps an hour, a day, or a weekend between you and the child, designed to be an introduction which may help to reduce some of the stress of the actual placement. The visits are *not* a time of "shopping" for a child or parent on the part of either of you, for the decision to place the child with you has already been made by you and the social worker based on sound information and judgment.

The visits, arranged by the social worker (and occasionally including the birth parents, briefly) serve to give you and the child a little taste of each other, a picture in your minds to think about later, a chance to get an inkling of how you might work together, a little reassurance which the first bit of

knowledge about a new situation can bring.

It is important to include the birth parents in a visit. It gives the child the reassurance that the parents know about the arrangement and are part of the planning in regard to the child's life. It gives the birth parents reassurance about you, and helps their self-esteem in a situation that is bound to be hard on them. It helps the birth parents to know, also, that they are expected to remain involved in a relationship with the child.

In addition, it gives you a chance to learn more about the child through seeing the child and birth parents together, and a first chance to try to establish a working relationship with your foster child's important people, the birth parents.

Don't be surprised if the initial meeting gives you a feeling of shock or depression. All at once this child is a real person, a real stranger about to enter your family life. The child comes from another world, belongs to another family, and you feel ill-prepared to cope. The feeling is only natural. The road ahead seems so uncharted.

But remember that this child needs you, the security of your home and your loving acceptance. Soon you will be going down the road together for a ways, and it may very well prove to be an important and wonderful time in both your lives.



THE FOSTER CHILD

ADJUSTMENT TO PLACEMENT

Perhaps the child comes to you with plenty of preparation, including the pre-placement visit, and with plenty of time that will help you and the child in the first hours with you; his or her nickname, favorite toy, usual bedtime, food likes and dislikes.

But chances are if you are a foster parent for any length of time, or especially if you have agreed to take children on an emergency basis, there will come a time when a child will arrive dirty, hungry, perhaps sick, ill-dressed, bone-tired and frightened on the longest, most confusing day of his or her life.



Whichever way the child comes to you, well-prepared or not, there remains ahead of you the difficult time of adjustment to placement.

The child has been removed from familiar surroundings and people, and whether adequate, loving or not, they were what he or she knew. Now, the child has been put into a new environment with unknown and perhaps mistrusted people.

As the child begins to know you and trust you, and perhaps, even to love you, he or she is the victim of feelings of conflicting loyalties. Children have strong loyalties to their families even when the families have failed them in some way. So the sensation of caring about foster parents, of wanting to be part of a new family unit, creates a great frustration. The child needs to know that it is okay to love both, and that it is okay in this life to love people who are not perfect, to go on loving people who have let you down.

Sorting all these feelings out can be the cause of a lot of behavior problems, but it helps if you are aware of these feelings and can help your foster child express some of them. Often, it is a matter of being able to listen, of being available and “tuned in” when the child needs you.

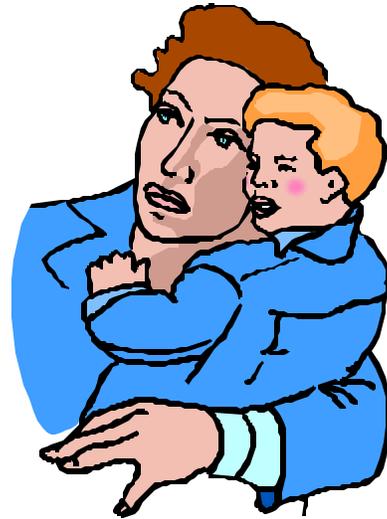
Maybe the child will get rid of some tension in physical ways. Perhaps the child needs to be loud and shout a little, or punch a bag, a balloon or a pillow. Somehow, some way, the child needs to get the frustrations out. Then the child can get on with the business of growing up.

You can let the child know, by way of your patience with adjustment problems, that you have confidence in the child and the child’s ability to grow. You can let the child know that “here is a place for you to grow.”

We all know that whenever a separation occurs in our lives, we must handle it some way within ourselves. It can be going off to kindergarten for the first time, or to college, or figuring out where we are emotionally after the death of someone we love – whenever we deal with separation, we can either be damaged or we can grow from it.

When we know this and understand the background of the child, it becomes easier to realize the importance of support and encouragement. The child has probably been damaged by witnessing battles between parents, receiving severe and undeserved punishment, or experiencing the absolute indifference of a mentally ill parent. Additionally, the child undergoes the trauma of separation from parents, family, and familiar surroundings. Your support during this separation is so important.

You can expect that the child will experience some adjustment problems – it's only normal. It's important that you understand why this may be happening, and that you have some patience during this time.



THE FOSTER CHILD

NEEDS OF THE FOSTER CHILD

EDUCATION

Here, we are talking not only about the child's school education, where you as your child's foster parents will play a big part by preparing neighbors for his or her arrival, introducing the child to other children and enrolling him or her in school, but talking as well about the child's private, or personal education.

The fact is, education may have gone badly for your foster child in the past on both fronts. Perhaps attendance at school has been sketchy until now and maybe the child has had a hard time with enough subjects that he or she has begun to feel stupid.



Perhaps too, the child will amaze you by a lack of knowledge of personal hygiene or ordinary table manners. Bear in mind that in both cases, public and private, it is probably not the child's fault. And keep in mind, too, that with some special help from teachers, tutors if necessary, and your own home dining-room or kitchen study circle, the school problems can probably be licked

gradually, or at the very least, substantially improved.

Chances are, if you are tactful and patient, the child will make even more rapid strides in the areas of personal hygiene and traditional table manners.

It helps to remember, too, as you help the child and watch for improvement in these areas, that he or she is learning a great deal all the time – about a place in the family, about identity as a person, how to manage feelings, and what it's like to begin to like yourself. Remembering how much your foster child *is* learning may help you to be patient with the more obvious, but probably no more important areas.

HEALTH AND MEDICAL

You will want to discuss with the social worker any particular problems concerning the health of your foster child. It may be that because of certain lacks in the child's earlier environment, a special plan will be developed to build up the child's health.

If the child is in good health, you will, of course, make the same efforts to maintain it that you do with your own children.

As mentioned above, health and medical education may be gaping holes in the child's or teen's back-ground, and you will want to fill these in with factual information, tactfully and affectionately.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT, INDIVIDUALIZED DISCIPLINE AND GUIDANCE

Most foster children have special problems related to emotions and development that differ in degree and often in kind from the usual problems of children living with their own parents.

In addition to the warm parental acceptance, love and care all children need to promote normal development, your foster child may need:

1. Help in relating to strangers and in adjusting to living with them. Making a stranger part of your family isn't easy, and much of the effort must come from you to see that your foster child becomes a participant in your family life.
2. Help in recovering from traumatic events leading up to placement and the trauma of separation from parents. This means listening and talking when he or she is ready. Verbal recognition of the child's plight is also helpful; for example, words which express some of the child's pain for him or her, such as, "I know that it is hard for you to be away from your family; you miss your own home, and get lonely here sometimes, because it seems strange."
3. Help in understanding why the child's own parents couldn't provide care. This is a hard one, especially where little children are concerned. It helps to keep the explanation simple and as non-judgmental as possible, while still being honest. If the matter is never discussed, the

child may make up reasons, perhaps blaming him or herself, or blaming his or her parents unfairly. Chances are that the imagined reasons are more terrifying to the child than the truth, if gently presented. Remember that it's always best not to be judgmental about the birth parents.

4. Opportunity to make up for developmental lags and to correct emotional problems, through understanding and the security of "belonging" to a foster family who cares about him or her, and through continuing exposure to a healthy emotional atmosphere.

Discipline can be thought of as a learning process. If we think of it in this light, and as a means for helping the child develop inner self-control, we are more likely to be effective in guiding the child, and less likely simply to be administering punishment after the fact. Chances are the child has already received too much in his or her lifetime. It is important to remember that the licensing rules prohibit any kind of physical discipline of foster children.

Guidance for the foster child, as for all children, is based on the child's individual situation; his or her past experiences, present stage of development, and need for independence or for nurture.

The small child in foster care needs the usual guidance and loving teaching that comes with helping any toddler learn the ways of the world, plus the additional parenting and security a foster child may need to undo or alter the results of some previous harmful or neglectful treatment.

We know that all small children need loving physical contact in order to mature, and foster children, who may have lost out on hugs and holding in the past, may need an extra portion now. It is a good thing to remember in all our days as parents: Loving makes the child feel lovable, and when we feel lovable, it is easier to behave like lovable people.



An older child may need special help in relating to family members or friends; he or she may need to be shown better ways of settling differences, or simply how to be friendly. Above all, the child or teen may need experiences which will prove to him or her that he or she is not a failure, and is capable of good work, good play, and good feelings.

Because teenagers need to know with certainty what is expected of them, it is a good idea for you, your teenage foster child and your social worker to sit down together and write out a set of "House Rules" or "Living Requirements."

These can be guidelines concerning such things as curfew, chores and school attendance, which all of you agree on. It helps the young person to know what is expected and to assume part of the responsibility for deciding the house rules. When he or she can be part of the decision making about the

requirements, usually it is easier to comply.

It is helpful for you, too, to decide ahead of time what is important to you and helpful for your foster child. And perhaps the social worker can help both of you in deciding what is important and realistic in the way of guidelines.

If you can see that the child or young person has successes, give them positive feedback. The successes may be very ordinary tasks done well, such as remembering to feed the dog, or going to the store for milk, or amusing the younger child for a few moments while you're busy.

Or they may be good, positive emotional moments, moments when the foster child shows concern or affection or delight in another member of the family. Show appreciation for this wonderful piece of behavior! Give praise. If you think it would embarrass your foster child for you to mention it in front of others (and teenagers, particularly, are notoriously easy to embarrass), then say privately later: "It was good of you to console Randy about his bad day at school; you made him feel so much better. You showed a lot of understanding and kindness."

When things *don't* go right, it is important for the child to know that this does not mean that he or she is worthless or bad, only that he or she has things to learn and growing to do – as *everyone* does.

Perhaps the key words concerning guidance for the foster child would be: Gentleness, warmth and consistency. Let's quickly add on to that list a large

portion of patience, both for your own sake and for the child's.

It is important to remember that your foster child did not become the person he or she is now overnight, or as the result of one or two experiences. Is it reasonable to think, then, that the child can change overnight? It will take time to acquire happier, more agreeable qualities. It will take time and lots of emotional room, support and guidance for the child to sort through the problems life has given, and the new ways of being that seem to be open.

So, take time to listen as well as to talk, and take pleasure in the small successes as they come. Help the child to do so, also. Remember to show appreciation for the person the foster child is now, whenever and however you can. It gives him or her courage to grow.

RELIGIOUS TRAINING

As foster parents, you may want to provide religious experiences for your foster child that is appropriate to the child's age and religious heritage. If there is no religious tradition in the child's background for you to consider, you may want to include him or her in your family religious activities and organizations. The child's wishes, and those of his or her parents, must be respected.



Some children who come to you will have had a real lack in their lives in the area of recreation, both as individuals and as members of a family. You can do a lot for these children by introducing them to healthful hobbies, sports, and games as a way of amusement and enjoyment.

It is hard to overestimate or to exaggerate the lack of knowledge some foster children may have in ordinary pleasures and experiences. Foster children have sometimes been described by their foster parents and social workers as being "like a piece of Swiss cheese." In other words, they have "holes" in them. They lack experience in areas that will sometimes surprise you.



Some foster children have never ridden a bike, for example, or taken a city bus, or had a birthday party. Because of these lacks of opportunity, the child doesn't know the appropriate behavior and is, therefore, fearful of new situations. It must be a little like being in a foreign country and not knowing the customs or the appropriate actions.

Foster parents will need to determine what things the foster child doesn't know and hasn't been exposed to, in order to help him or her to begin to experience them with pleasure. You will want to prepare the child for new experiences

ahead of time, gently and with thoughtfulness, so that he or she cannot only learn new things, but be comfortable in the learning, as well.

Doubtless, your family has certain activities that you enjoy as individuals (perhaps cooking, carpentry, model building, knitting) and others that you do as a family (such as swimming, skating, fishing, card games or board games, singing, or hiking, to name a few). Your foster child will benefit from being included in these; they can provide good opportunities to get to know each other – provided there is no pressure involved about winning or being “best” – they can add a lot to the enjoyment of life, both now and in the future.

So, provide opportunities for the child to have fun in various ways. If a child or teenager has a special desire to learn about or participate in a sport or activity you cannot easily provide yourselves, consider community resources, such as the “Y” or other groups which encourage good activities for kids. Help the child get started. There is no reason why a child should always be on “hold” just because his or her living situation may not be permanent. These are valuable years. Help the child to make the most of them in whatever ways you can.

SAFETY

It is assumed that you will child-proof your home to protect the safety of your foster child as well as your own children. However, your own children have grown up with your safety rules, and a foster child is a stranger to these rules.

Be especially careful with firearms, making sure they are always unloaded and kept in a locked cabinet, inaccessible to curious children. Keep all medications, poisons, matches, cigarette lighters, household cleaning supplies, nail polish remover, pesticides and painting supplies well out of the grasp of small children.

Go over the fire evacuation routes in your home with your foster child within the first several days of placement. Review these routes with the whole family every three (3) months so that everyone knows how to get out of each room.

If you have a swimming pool, lake, or river on your property, careful supervision is a must. **You should check with the agency for policies regarding safety and supervision for other more “hazardous” recreational activities, such as trampolines, horseback riding, recreational vehicles, boating, and waterskiing or tubing.**

Children up to age four (4) must be restricted in a crash-tested, child-safe car seat when they are riding in an automobile. After age four (4), they must, by law, be buckled into a car seat belt restraint. Some agencies provide infant seats to foster parents or may know of a service group, hospital or public health nursing service which can provide a seat. Check with your social worker when placement is made.

PERMANENCY PLANNING/ CONCURRENT PLANNING

The child who enters your home has a “permanency plan” designed to ensure that there is reunification with the birth family whenever possible, or that the child quickly attains a placement or home providing long-term stability.

If the child is in placement under court order, a written plan becomes a part of the court record. The plan contains documentation of the services to be provided to ensure the proper care and treatment of the child and to meet the child’s physical, emotional, social, educational and vocational needs. It also indicates what conditions need to change or improve in the parental home to facilitate the return of the child.

Every six (6) months beginning from the date the child first entered placement, the permanency plan must be reviewed. This review is done either by the court or a review board consisting of an agency person and an impartial outside person. This “board review” is known as an administrative review. You, as foster parents, will be invited to participate in all administrative reviews along with the child and the birth parents. Your input into these reviews is important for the future placement of the child.

For children whose permanency plan indicates that they will not return home, several options will be considered. Those are adoption, transfer of guardianship, or sustaining care. All of these options require court hearings. The child may be represented by an attorney who will speak for the best interests of the child.

If the child has been in your home for over six (6) months, and the child is free for adoption, your home may be one of those considered as an adoptive home. This does not obligate you to adopt the child.

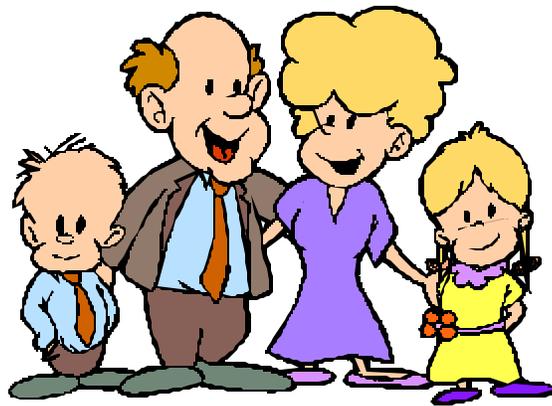
Sustaining care is used by the court whenever the parental rights of the child have been terminated and the court finds that the child is unlikely to be adopted or that adoption is not in the best interest of the child. Legal custody is transferred to an agency and the foster parent contracts with the agency to provide care until the child reaches age 18.

In rare instances, guardianship is transferred to the foster parents. Usually, these are children whose parents are unable to care for the children, but where there are insufficient grounds for a termination of their parental rights.

Concurrent planning is another term that, as a foster parent, you will hear. Concurrent planning, which comes from the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), is a set of strategies and decision-making criteria aimed at achieving more timely permanence for children. ASFA provides that reasonable efforts to place a child for adoption or with a legal guardian may be made concurrently with reasonable efforts to reunite families.

Concurrent planning is based on informing the birth parents about their options, including the steps necessary for reunification, as well as the options for a termination of parent rights. Basically, it's setting up a plan for the child to be reunited with the birth family while at the same time having an alternative plan for permanence if reunification does not occur.

Effective concurrent planning assures that the birth family recognizes that they choose outcomes for their child through their actions. Some of the benefits of concurrent planning are a decrease of the length of time a child stays in foster care and, hopefully, a reduction in the number of moves that a child experiences.



THE FOSTER CHILD

TERMINATION OF PLACEMENT

REASONS

As we noted in the section of the book concerning foster parents and their right to notice of removal, there are several reasons why the child may be leaving your home.

In all probability, you will have been part of the planning for the child's departure. Nevertheless, when it actually happens there may be a real feeling of let-down or loss. If the reasons for the child's departure are positive ones, it is usually easier. An example is the child who is happily rejoining the natural family which has dealt with its problems, or the child who is being adopted into a family which will provide a permanent, secure home life. If the reasons seem less positive, departure may be more difficult. (For instance, the child who is rejoining the natural family which seems to have reached a very marginal level of stability.)

Sometimes a child may have to go back to the natural family even though it may not appear to be the best option. The agency may not have a legal basis to keep the child in foster care. The law says that the natural parents do not have to show that they can provide **quality** care, only that they can provide a minimum of care. This may be hard for foster parents to accept, but it is one of the hard facts.

The child may be leaving to be placed in another foster home or in a group or

residential treatment setting because the placement with you doesn't seem to be working out. You may logically and naturally feel disappointed. You should not regard yourselves as failures as a foster family because of it.

Chances are the decision will have been reached gradually by you and the social worker together. Perhaps factors in the child's personality, background, or behavior make your lives and the child's unworkable together. There seems to be no real promise of change in the present situation. Sometimes the child can be best helped by a different situation. Because you want the child to be helped, you will understand the need for removal.

In rare instances, a child will be removed from a foster home because it has become apparent that the foster parents are not abiding by the rules and goals the agency establishes for foster care. In short, they are not a constructive or nurturing foster home at all, but quite the opposite. In such cases more is involved, of course, than the simple termination of a placement. An Independent Investigation of the circumstances will occur and the foster home license may also be revoked.

This is very unusual since foster care is not a business, but a service. It is generally taken on by people who want to help and who have much in the way of love and support to give.

PREPARATION FOR LEAVING

The Foster Child

Your foster child will need help in understanding the reasons for the move, as well as help in coping with feelings about it. Feelings of rejection, of having failed in some way, or of not being lovable or worthy need to be brought out into the open and talked about. Try to give the child understandable explanations about why the move is occurring. Reassurance that the child is not being deserted also needs to be given. Explain that these plans were made with care and out of concern and regard for the child's well-being.

Even when a child is helped to an intellectual understanding of why the move is taking place, there may be feelings of anxiety like the ones suffered during a pre-placement visit. It will be helpful to the child to talk about these feelings openly and to share, in a positive way, your own feelings about the move.

The social worker will also be active in helping the child with the adjustment. Sometimes, even in cases where the child is returning to the birth family, it is helpful for the child to make a series of extended visits before the move takes place. These are arranged by the social worker and are similar to the pre-placement visits the child had with you.

It is vital for the child's adjustment to the move that helpful information is shared about what to expect when going on to a new home. If the child is going back to the natural family, it is important for the child to understand the family's feelings about the return. (For example: they

may be both happy and nervous about it.)

Remember that we all fear the unknown. The more the child can know about the coming situation, the better for the child's peace of mind.

Often, it is important to the child to know that contact with you and your family will not cease abruptly. In most instances there can be contact by letters, phone calls, or visits. Ultimately, this extended contact is up to the birth parents to decide. Many times, this will be based on the relationship between the foster parent and the birth parent. You will want to talk with your worker about future contact with your foster child to determine if this will be in the best interest of the child.

You and Your Family

It is only natural that you will have feelings about the separation from a foster child, especially if the child has been with you for any length of time. Sometimes the feeling of loss will be mixed with feelings of relief, or unfortunately, sometimes feelings of failure. Be open with your social worker about your feelings. The worker can try to help you understand the feelings and deal with them.

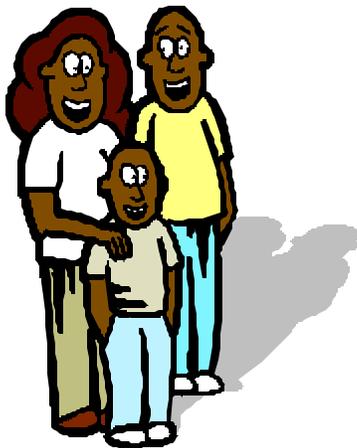
You need to have a good understanding of the need for the move in order to talk with the child and other family members about it. Your own children need to have time to prepare themselves for the loss of the foster child, and to develop an understanding of the reasons for the child's departure.

Your children also need a chance to talk about their feelings. They may need some help in understanding them too. It would not be unusual for your children to feel guilt due to the fact that they may have had hidden feelings of wanting the foster child gone. They may have worry feelings, too, and need some reassurance about the decision.

Sometimes it is helpful for them to have a chance to visit the foster child in the new surroundings. This may help your children to relieve feelings of anxiety about the child, particularly if they have become close.

It helps enormously if, right from the start, your children, the foster child and yourselves, have had a good realization that in most cases the foster home placement is working toward something. So while it is a home for the child, it is in most cases a temporary home until things are better for the natural family or until such time as the child and an adoptive home are ready for each other (if that is the plan).

You must be the first to realize and keep in mind that the child's stay in your home is most probably temporary, although the child's place in your heart may not be.



GIVING NOTICE

The Foster Family Responsibility

In cases where you wish to ask for the removal of a child, the licensing rules require that you give a 30-day notice. This is very important so that a new plan can be made for the child before the removal takes place. You will want to help with these preparations. You and the social worker will be working together to see that the removal deals fairly with the child's need for preparation, as well as your own.



The Agency Responsibility

In most cases, you and your worker will be working together toward whatever plan seems best for the child's future. The timing of the child's departure will depend upon what both of you see as being best for all concerned.

If the agency must plan for the removal of a child against the wishes of the foster family, it is required by the licensing rules to give a 30-day written notice prior to removing the child. This is true when the child has been in your home for at least 6 months. This requirement doesn't apply in cases of emergency removal where there is evidence of child abuse or neglect. It also does not apply if the child's behavior poses the possibility of physical danger to self or others.

THE CHILD'S BIRTH FAMILY

THE CHILD'S NATURAL FAMILY

LEGAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BIRTH FAMILY

The agency has definite responsibilities to the birth parents of the child in placement. Because of your care and concern for your foster child, you will often be an active participant in helping the agency meet these responsibilities.

Briefly, the responsibilities are these:

1. preserving and strengthening the parent-child relationship during the time a child is in foster care,
2. helping the parents to perform their parental role as adequately as possible during the time the child is in foster care, and
3. helping parents to give up rights to the child permanently in cases when reunification is not possible.

The areas in which the foster parents can be helpful are, of course, the first two mentioned above, and we will discuss these later in this section.

The agency helps the birth parents to be aware of their rights while their child is in placement, and while these may vary slightly, generally they are these:

1. The right to reasonable visitation with the child unless this has been expressly limited or prohibited by the court.
2. The right to know the where-abouts of the child and to be kept informed of how the child is getting along while away from his or her parents (unless prohibited by the court).
3. The right to determine the child's religious affiliation.
4. The right to consent to the child's adoption, marriage, enlistment in the Armed Services, and to surgery and medical treatment.
5. The right to bequeath property or other valuables to the child.

Along with these rights, the parents have the responsibility to contribute to the support and care of the child to the extent possible under the circumstances.

THE CHILD'S BIRTH FAMILY

VISITS AND COMMUNICATION

Usually, visitation times are arranged by the agency, and every effort will be made to plan the visits so that they are convenient for you and the birth parents. There may be times, too, when you will arrange the visits (with the consent of the worker).

Parent-child visiting is very important in achieving permanence for a child. There are four major purposes to parent-child visits:

1. Maintain and improve the parent-child relationship;
2. Provide opportunities for parents to improve their parenting skills through modeling the actions of foster parents and social workers;
3. Provide the social workers the opportunity to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the parent-child relationship; and
4. Provide opportunity for documentation that may result in termination of parental rights.

You, at times, may be expected to model appropriate parental tasks, i.e., feeding a baby, changing a diaper



during a scheduled visit. You may also be expected to record the birth parent's progress in completing such tasks.



Visitation between parents and children are central to good concurrent planning. You can expect that following placement of a child, visits with the birth family will increase in frequency. Providing opportunities for birth parents to have contact with their children is important for both reunification with the family and to develop a sound legal argument for termination.

Visits will usually occur at your home, the agency, or an established visitation center in your community.

Even with good planning, the visits may be difficult for everyone involved. We can easily imagine how painfully mixed the emotions of the natural parent may be upon visiting the child. The parent may feel guilt at having had to give the child up and may feel a need to try to explain to the child or to you. There may be feelings of resentment toward you for experiencing success where he or she experienced failure. In short, the parent feels in a "down" position in

relation to you, and may feel a loss of regard and status in the eyes of the child, as well.

Couple this with the feeling of loss the parent may be experiencing due to separation from the child and we can see that the visits present great difficulties even to a parent who may deeply wish to see her or his child.

The birth parent's feelings and emotions about the situation, while they often don't come out in the open, are sometimes apparent in a number of ways. Because of embarrassment or discomfort, the parent may not keep the visit appointments. Or you may notice that he or she acts aloof to and ignores the child while visiting with you, instead, during the allotted time. Perhaps, too, the parent will be critical, finding fault with your way of doing things and the care the child is getting.

When you understand the troubled emotions causing these behaviors, it makes it easier to try to help. An informal, friendly approach is often helpful in making the visit less tense. Treating the parent as a friend, as someone who has the best interests of the child at heart, and with whom you have a common bond, can lift the spirits of both the birth parent and the foster child who observes your actions and attitude so closely.

While the visits may cause painful emotions for the child as well, they are often helpful in the long run in sorting through his or her difficult situation.

The child must face the undeniable fact that there are, for the present at least, two sets of parents. The child needs to

have a sense of identity, as we all do, but quite possible is confused and dismayed by a conflict of loyalties – the loyalty which is beginning to grow toward you and your family, and the loyalty a child nearly always feels to the birth parents and family, regardless of whether they have been good to the child.

The child wants to have good, loving, responsible parents like other children do, and may feel defensive about his or her birth parents, desiring so much to think well of them even while mistrusting and resenting them.

The child's newly developing sense of warmth and of worth in your household makes him or her want to feel a part of this family group. The visit of the birth parents makes it apparent that, in one sense, he or she will always be from another background and belong in some ways to other parents.

It is a difficult situation for a child to grapple with, but confused feelings about his or her own parents and the reasons for removal from home must be worked through. This means that visits may be indicated even in cases where there is no plan for the child's eventual return home.

As far as the child is concerned, the foster parents who do the most to help sustain a relationship with the birth family are those who make the child feel they are acting for the birth parents rather than replacing them.

Even in cases where you may deeply disapprove of the birth parents, remember that it can be damaging to the child to hear you criticize them. The

child needs to be sure of your love and approval. It is destructive to the child to hear of your dislike and disapproval.

Because the visits are bound to be a “mixed bag” as far as the child’s feelings are concerned, it stands to reason his or her behavior will reflect the turmoil, perhaps during the visit and nearly always after. It is important to know that a visit may result in temporary upset behavior including:

- Withdrawal from foster parents and other children in the home
- Anger and disruptive actions
- Unexplained tears and outbursts

- Going back to earlier, more difficult patterns of behavior or eating

A child may suffer a somewhat delayed reaction of great disappointment when it becomes apparent that parental promises of phone calls, letters, or presents are not being kept.

If it is apparent that this has happened, it can be helpful to the child to discuss the matter with sympathy and tact, and to point out that we all, at times, *want* to do things for someone and yet, for one reason or another, find that we are unable.

You can help your foster child by trying to make the visits as positive as possible, and by sharing with your social worker the child’s reactions.

THE AGENCY

THE AGENCY

HUMAN SERVICES AGENCIES PROVIDE SERVICES AND FINANCIAL AID

The agency placing the child provides aid and services to people who, for reasons often beyond their control, cannot survive without it. The agency gives financial assistance and services to individual adults, parents and children.

The agency tries in every way possible to keep families together through extensive services and financial aid. At times, there are situations in which a substitute home must be found for a child.

Through foster homes like yours, the agency provides foster care for the child when all resources of the child's natural family have been exhausted.

In nearly all cases, the work of the agency (and therefore, the foster family as well) is directed toward the eventual rehabilitation of the birth family and the child's reunion with them.

A variety of services are available:

1. Supportive Services:

These services support the ability of the parents to meet the child's needs. They are offered when problems affect the child's health or safety and threaten the family unit.

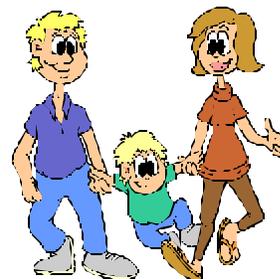
2. Supplementary Services:

These are provided when parents are not adequately meeting certain needs of their children, but where, with such help as a homemaker, day care, or intensive in-home family services the child continue to live at home.

3. Substitute Care:

This resource is used when the family situation is such that temporary or permanent separation of the child from the parents is necessary. Foster care is included in these services.

When you are licensed as a foster home and accept your first foster child, you are regarded as an extension of the agency staff, and you and they begin to work together as a team on behalf of the child.



THE AGENCY

SOCIAL WORKER COMMUNICATION

The social worker's contact with you begins during the search to find the most suitable home for a child.

At this time, it is the worker's responsibility to see that you have as much information about the child, his or her background, prior problems and relationships, special needs and wishes, as it is possible to provide.

You will want to determine whether you feel the placement will be a good one.

When you and your family accept a foster child, your social worker will function as a source of information and advice to you. You and the social worker will be partners in helping the child adjust to this new phase of his or her life, and to prepare for the future.

The social worker will want to get to know you and your family, and to "keep up" on your feelings, as well as those of the foster child. She or he will be working toward a good and comfortable relationship with you which will make it possible for both of you to communicate your feelings, observations and opinions freely with each other for the benefit of the child.

You and the worker will want to work out times which are convenient for both of you when you will meet together and talk things over. The worker will also schedule times to talk separately with the child.

Determine with your worker mutually convenient times and ways for communication about the placement.



FINANCIAL INFORMATION

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

BASIC MAINTENANCE RATE

Each foster parent will receive a monthly maintenance payment to contribute to the cost of caring for the foster child in the home. This rate is established uniformly across the State of Wisconsin and is based upon the age of the child in care. The basic rate is intended to cover the expenses of food, clothing, housing, personal care, and other expenses (including school supplies and recreation). Many foster parents also provide a personal allowance to the child to help the child learn the skills of money management and budgeting. Information on current maintenance rates is available from your licensing agency.

INITIAL CLOTHING ALLOWANCE

When a child is first placed in foster care, the need for clothing may be severe. To build up the child's wardrobe, an initial clothing allowance may be available. Again, the amount of the allowance is based upon the age of the child. You will be allowed to spend whatever portion of the initial clothing allowance is needed and appropriate. After the initial clothing allowance has been used, the child's ongoing clothing expenses are covered by the basic monthly rate. Check with your social worker about the amount of initial clothing allowance that would be available for your foster child.

SUPPLEMENTAL MAINTENANCE RATE

This is an additional amount of money which is available if there are extraordinary costs encountered in caring for the child with unusual or special needs. The amounts are based on a point system that considers emotional, behavioral, and medical problems. Discuss these areas with your social worker.

EXCEPTIONAL RATE

This is intended for extreme cases where foster care would prevent continued or initial institutional placement.

FREE LUNCH PROGRAM

Foster children are usually eligible for free or reduced rates on school lunches. Each school system determines its own eligibility requirements; therefore, please contact your local school system for information.

INCOME TAX

Payments made to you as reimbursement for expenses of caring for a foster child are not taxable. You may not be required to report either expenditures or reimbursements for the care you provide. If you have further questions, please contact your local Internal Revenue Service office or your tax consultant.

FOSTER PARENT INSURANCE

The State of Wisconsin has an insurance program to cover the cost of damages (either by accident or on purpose) done to your home by your foster child. The insurance program is a program of "last resort" and will cover damages that would not be covered by your homeowners or automobile insurance. The DCS 116 form must be completed by the foster parent and the DCS 117 is completed by the licensing agency to document the damage. Both

forms are then submitted to the State by the licensing agency. A statement that the foster parents' own insurance will not cover the damages, as well as receipts for replacement or repair of the damage, must accompany the claim. The insurance fund is a limited amount of funding every year. **There is a 90 day time limit on submitting claims for damage or loss, so** you will want to consult with your licensing agency immediately if damage does occur in your home.

A LAST WORD

One last word from our heads to yours: A sense of humor can be a lovely thing, both for lightening your own burdens and those of your foster child.

If you have children already, or have participated in foster care before, you know that, occasionally, humor can save the day – not a making-fun-of kind of humor, but a joking *with*, or a kind of humorous acknowledgement that the situation may contain laughable elements, that life and even one's mishaps in it are not always deadly serious.

So, while we wish you much satisfaction in what is a real challenge and a serious responsibility, we also wish you much joy in it, and much shared laughter along the way.

Best wishes.

