

Chapter 2

EXPECTATIONS OF FOSTER PARENTS



STATE OF WISCONSIN

Foster Parent Handbook



CHAPTER 2: EXPECTATIONS OF FOSTER PARENTS

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INTRODUCTION: CHAPTER 2

This chapter is designed to give an overview of what is generally expected of foster parents and of situations that they may encounter. Information discussed in this chapter does not replace the expectations set forth in licensing standards or policies established by the licensing agency. In some instances, the licensing agency may have very specific policies related to topics discussed in this chapter. Foster parents should always consult with their foster home licensor or a child's caseworker if they have a question or if something seems unclear.

As you read through this section, remember that we value foster parent's willingness to take on the challenge of fostering, their contribution to the success of children and their families, and their impact on our communities.

LETTER TO FOSTER PARENTS

All my life I wanted to be a foster parent. I'm not completely sure what drove me, but it would be safe to assume it stems from my own childhood, which found me embraced by a family who did not give birth to me. Through adoption, I was blessed with a family, but, as many adopted children know, there is a restlessness involved in being denied that primal connection with your family of origin.

Shortly after getting married, during my pregnancy with my first child, the first call came to pick up twin girls. Twin babies! They had been left home unattended. I was going to save those poor babies. And the next set of twins, and the baby with the seven broken bones. Don't forget the moody teenager and the neglected brothers with scabs and scars covering their little bodies. It made me feel good to provide them with the things their parents couldn't. Or wouldn't.

As with many dreams, this one came with a strong dose of reality. The children did not immediately blossom and thank me for turning their lives around. Each step forward took unexplainable time and energy and wasn't necessarily greeted with overflowing gratitude. These children were hurting, and I wasn't the end-all to their pain. What they wanted most was the one thing I couldn't provide. They wanted their parents, and their siblings, and the things that were familiar. A healthy meal, a warm bed, and a nurturing environment...while all wonderful things to provide, they did not—COULD NOT—replace what they had lost. I couldn't save them.

In many ways, they saved me. They saved me from a life of thinking that what I had was so much better for them than what their families could provide. I learned that a parent's love is priceless and cannot be substituted, so I shouldn't try. Each child needed me to understand that. I also learned that healing their wounds did not heal their hearts. Stopping their hunger did not stop their longing. They showed me.

I did not become a good foster parent overnight, but I know that I did get there. Sharing some words of wisdom, therefore, comes from years of experience. To any new foster parent, I would like to say: each child is precious and unique and will need something different from you; every child needs you to respect their families and their culture; no child needs you to save them, they just need you to hold them tight until the storm passes.

Lastly, remember to celebrate their little lives for however long you have been blessed to be in them. Good luck...and enjoy!

Kari Behling

COMMUNICATION

Open and ongoing communication among foster parents, caseworkers, parents, and other professionals is key to achieving positive outcomes for families and children. That doesn't mean that everyone will always agree; however, in order for all of us to be successful, everyone needs to understand what is going on and, within the bounds of confidentiality, why things are happening the way they are.

Information to be Communicated to Foster Parents

In order to be able to meet a child's needs, a foster parent must know the child's history, why the child was removed from his or her parent's care, who the medical providers are, if the child has any allergies, and other critical information. Caseworkers are required by state statute and administrative rule to give foster parents as much information as they know about a foster child on the "Information for Out-of-Home Care Providers" forms (Parts A and B). The box below explains some of the information that will be provided on these forms.

It is important to know, however, that caseworkers may not have all of the information about a child. In fact, as the daily caregiver for a child, foster parents may learn information about the child before the caseworker. In these situations, foster parents can and should use the "Information for Out-of-Home Care Providers" form, particularly Part B, to record ongoing information learned about the child. These forms will also provide considerations for making reasonable and prudent parenting decisions, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The forms can be obtained from the foster home licensor or on the Department of Children and Families website at:

Information for Out-of-Home Care Providers, Part A (CFS-872A):

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/forms/doc/0872a.docx>

Information for Out-of-Home Care Providers, Part B (CFS-872B):

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/forms/doc/0872b.docx>

General Information Foster Parents Can Expect to Receive

- ❖ The child's background.
- ❖ The probable length of stay in the foster home.
- ❖ The plan for the child's future.
- ❖ Child specific considerations for reasonable and prudent parenting decisions.
- ❖ Expectations of you as a foster parent.

There is also a form called **“All About Me”** included in this handbook as Appendix 6 in Section 6. This form was created by the Casey Foundation with input from youth who were formerly in foster care. It is a tool foster parents can use with children placed in their homes to find out more information about who they are, what they like, and information about their family.

Things Foster Parents Need to Communicate to the Agency

Since foster parents are with the child every day, they have important information that the caseworker and family will probably want to know. There is also information that the licensing agency needs to keep updated about any changes in the foster home.

The box on the next page contains a list of possible items or updates that foster parents may be required to provide and people who are working with the foster parents and the child may want to know.

Information the Child's Caseworker Wants to Know

- ❖ The child's progress in addressing treatment needs or goals.
- ❖ Observations of the child's daily functioning, interactions with his or her family (including siblings) and friends, and any other important or relevant information.
- ❖ Positive information about the child, such as report card grades or a child's achievement in sports or school activities.
- ❖ Activities the child is involved in or would like to be involved in (*explained later in this chapter*).
- ❖ Health information, including medical and dental care received while placed in your home.

Information Licensing Workers and Foster Care Coordinators Want to Know

- ❖ Any changes in your family, such as a person moving into or leaving the home.
- ❖ Any change in residence from the location for which you are licensed.
- ❖ Changes in your marital status.
- ❖ The child's or your family's potential community resource needs.
- ❖ Respite care needs.
- ❖ Errors in foster care payments.
- ❖ Plans to take the child on a trip or vacation out-of-town.
- ❖ Major physical damage to the foster home.
- ❖ Changes in your work schedule.
- ❖ Criminal activity by any resident in the foster home, including arrests or charges.
- ❖ Emergencies or special circumstances (*explained later in this chapter*).

Staying in Touch

Because of busy work schedules, it may be easier to reach the child's caseworker at certain times more than others. This can be an area of stress between caseworkers and foster parents. Below are some suggestions for how to communicate with caseworkers.

Tips for Communicating with Caseworkers

- ❖ Ask about when the best time to make contact is, where, and how (e-mail or phone message).
- ❖ Write down questions or issues as they occur and have them ready to discuss when you connect with the caseworker.
- ❖ Write the questions, information, or issues in the child's foster home record that you keep in your home.

If foster parents have questions about the child or what is going on with the child's case plan or permanence goals, the best thing to do is ask. The child's caseworker may not be able to answer all of the questions, but he or she may be able to provide enough information to give the foster parent a better understanding of what is happening.

**** Remember: All communication regarding the child and the child's family must be kept CONFIDENTIAL. ****

Confidentiality requirements are discussed more later in this chapter.

REASONABLE AND PRUDENT PARENT STANDARD

Purpose of the Standard

The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS) is intended to increase normalcy for children placed in foster care. Normalcy is the ability to easily have opportunities for normal growth and development that promotes a child's well-being. Every child has a right to normalcy, which should not be prevented by a child's placement in foster care.

All foster parents must apply the RPPS when they make decisions about children placed in their home to allow them to participate in age and developmentally appropriate activities. This standard is not used for children who are with a foster parent for respite.

Foster parents will use this standard on a *child specific* basis to allow children placed in their home to participate in activities that encourage normalcy and emotional and developmental growth. Reasonable and prudent parenting decisions must maintain the health, safety, best interest, and cultural, religious, and tribal values of the child.

Purpose of the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard:

- ❖ Create and promote normalcy by allowing children to participate in normal activities without barriers.
- ❖ Build relationships between the child and their peers by encouraging social interaction.
- ❖ Improve relationships between the child and the foster parents by promoting trust.
- ❖ Enhance relationships between the child and their siblings and other household members.
- ❖ Promote personal growth and improve well-being.
- ❖ Allow children to build and develop life skills.
- ❖ Allow children to explore and try different interests and activities.
- ❖ Encourage children to be involved in their own planning.

Required Training

Foster parents must be trained in the use of the RPPS in order to make decisions for a child placed in their home. Foster parents should consult with their licensing worker about the RPPS training and requirements. The RPPS training will provide further explanation of how to apply the RPPS and provide examples of situations foster parents may encounter.

Making Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Decisions

When a child is placed, the child's caseworker will give child specific information to the foster parent(s) to consider when making decisions for the child. The caseworker will give this information to the foster parent(s) after talking with the child and the child's parent(s)/guardian(s), when it is possible and appropriate.

How Foster Parents Should Expect to Receive Child Specific Information to Consider for Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard Decisions:

- ❖ Information for Out-of-Home Care Providers Part A and Part B
- ❖ Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Tool
- ❖ Updates throughout the life of the case, including updated permanency plans.

If a foster parent does not have enough information about the child in order to make a reasonable and prudent parenting decision, they should contact the child's caseworker or their licenser for additional information about the child. The caseworker and/or licenser can help the foster parent understand how to apply the RPPS, but cannot make the decision for the foster parent. Agencies cannot require a foster parent to obtain prior consent for RPPS decisions. If an agency requires a foster parent to get approval to make these decisions, the Department or the court should be informed.

The fear of liability should not prevent normalcy for a child. Foster parents are not liable for harm caused to the child, others, or property, as long as the decision was reasonable and prudent.

Foster parents are encouraged, but not required, to consult with the child's parent(s)/guardian(s) when possible and appropriate to make reasonable and prudent parenting decisions. The child's parent(s)/guardian(s) may have valuable insight about the child that may help foster parents make decisions, and allows them to remain an active part of the child's life, when appropriate.

Factors to Consider When Making Decisions

Factors to Consider When Making Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Decisions:

- ❖ The age, maturity, and developmental level of the child.
- ❖ The potential risk factors of the situation.
- ❖ If the activity is in best interests of the child.
- ❖ If the activity provides an opportunity for growth.
- ❖ If the activity promotes a family-like living experience for the child.
- ❖ The child's behavioral history.
- ❖ Any court orders or legal considerations that prevent the use of the RPPS.
- ❖ The cultural, religious, and tribal values of the child and the child's family.

In order to allow a child to participate in an activity, the foster parent must make sure the child has taken any required training for participation in that activity, and any safety equipment is provided to the child.

Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard decisions **cannot** conflict with court orders, other laws, or other services that are part of the child's treatment plan. If a foster parent is uncertain if a decision conflicts with any of the below, they should contact the child's caseworker or their licensor for more information.

Considerations that Prevent the Use of the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard:

- ❖ Court-ordered visitation.
- ❖ Medical approvals/other medical laws.
- ❖ Medication authorizations or approvals.
- ❖ Disciplinary policies.
- ❖ Confidentiality policies.
- ❖ Educational-related decisions.

Disagreements: How They Are Typically Handled

The use of the RPPS may lead to disagreements about the foster parent's use of the standard. In situations where there is a disagreement about how a foster parent has applied the RPPS, the agency that has placement and care responsibility of the child is ultimately responsible for the decisions about the care of the child.

For more information about the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard, see Appendix 8, Promoting Normalcy: Applying the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Almost everyone has information they share within their families that they would not want other people to know about. When children and families become part of the child welfare system, an overwhelming amount of their private family information becomes known to people outside their family. There are laws that protect a family's private information so that it may be shared only with those who need to know the information and have authorization to have access to it. This is the essence of what confidentiality means – keeping information private.

Foster parents must respect the confidentiality of children in foster care and their families. Confidential information about a child placed in the foster home or that child's family **CANNOT** be discussed with friends, neighbors, relatives, professionals, on social media, or with others who are not specifically authorized to receive the information. Anyone receiving or sharing information must do so according to a signed consent to release information.

Confidential information includes sensitive information and documents provided by the court, tribe, child welfare agency, the child, the child's family, and the foster parents. It may be about the family's background, the child's and family's medical history or diagnoses, services being provided to the child or family, and many other things. Some reasons why it is important to keep information confidential are listed in the box below.

Reasons to Respect Confidentiality

- ❖ Federal law, state law, and foster home licensing standards require that foster parents and others keep information about children and their families confidential.
- ❖ Respecting confidentiality helps build relationships with the child and the child's family.
- ❖ Keeping the child and family's information confidential shows respect for the family and their history.

Agencies must have written consent from the legal guardian in order to allow foster parents to release information about or related to the child. Typically, the child's legal guardian is the child's parent, but, in some cases, it may be a different person. The child's caseworker is generally the person responsible for obtaining and maintaining current consents or authorizations.

When asked about the child's background, foster parents should reply that they cannot discuss it with others. Foster parents may also choose to introduce the child to other people by first name only. It is important to remind all of the foster family's members that

they cannot talk about confidential information about children in foster care or their families.

The box below includes some key points to remember about sharing information about the foster child.

Key Points Regarding Confidentiality

- ❖ Foster parents can allow foster children to be photographed or interviewed by newspaper, radio, or television reporters. However, the foster parent should be sure confidential information about the child is not discussed.
- ❖ Foster parents cannot talk to any media person about the child placed in their home. If someone wants information about the child and is not sure of their authority to have that information, do not provide any information. Instead, direct the person to the child's caseworker.
- ❖ The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard does not supersede confidentiality requirements.

Since federal law, state law, and foster home licensing standards require that foster parents and other people in the home keep information about the child and the child's family confidential, the illegal sharing of a child's confidential information by a foster parent could result in revocation of a foster home license and other penalties.

For more information about confidentiality requirements in foster home licensing standards, see s. 56.09(12) in Ch. DCF 56, Adm. Code.

MAINTAINING AND KEEPING RECORDS

Foster care licensing rules require that foster parents keep a record for each child placed in the foster home. Keeping a record ensures that caseworkers and the child's parents have easy access to important information about how the child is doing, and it provides quick access to critical information in case of an emergency. Clear and accurate records also help keep the caseworker and family up-to-date about the child, clarify misunderstandings or miscommunications, and keep track of appointments or services such as counseling, evaluations, and family interaction plans. By documenting these events, foster parents create a history of how they have handled various situations, and which techniques or interventions worked well or did not. This information can also be helpful in determining supplemental and exceptional reimbursement rates.

The box below contains information that a foster parent should include in a record about foster children placed in their home. This information can be documented in a separate record or, when appropriate, on the "Information for Out-of-Home Care Providers" forms mentioned earlier in this Handbook.

Information to Include in a Foster Parent's Record for a Child

- ❖ The child's name, nickname(s), or other name he or she is called.
- ❖ The date the child came to and left the foster home.
- ❖ The child's birth date.
- ❖ Emergency contact information for significant people in the child's life, including the child's doctor, dentist, and caseworker.
- ❖ Medical information, particularly about allergies, recent medical treatment, or serious medical conditions.
- ❖ The school the child attends and his or her grades.

Other Documentation

- ❖ School reports and pictures.
- ❖ Appointments or meetings.
- ❖ Activities the child is involved in.
- ❖ Progress notes or weekly summaries.

Much of this information will be provided to foster parents when a child is placed. If a child is placed on an emergency basis or with little preparation, the agency may only have and give a foster parent limited information about the child. This basic information is designed to help foster parents provide appropriate care for the child and will be included on the “Information for Out-of-Home Care Providers” form Part A (CFS-872A), which is given at the time a child is placed.

Agencies are also required to provide more in-depth information about a child on the “Information for Out-of-Home Care Providers” form Part B (CFS-872B). This part of the form is much longer and contains a list of questions about the people who can visit the child, the child’s siblings, the child’s behaviors, any health conditions the child has, and much more information to help a foster parent get to know and care for the child. The agency is required to provide information about a child to the foster parent as soon as the information is known. If the agency does not have information at the time the child is placed, the agency must provide that additional information to the foster parent within 7 working days after the agency receives it, or, if the information is of critical importance to the care of the child, the agency must provide the information to the foster parent within 3 working days after it is received by the agency.

As noted previously, a foster parent may be the first person to gain information about a child, such as medical information learned from a child’s doctor. The form should be filled in as information is learned, whether by the caseworker or the foster parent.

Foster parents may receive a copy of the child’s case plan, permanency plan, or other reports, such as the child’s Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths assessment (which is discussed later in this chapter). All records on the child need to be kept together in the same secure place, along with notes about the child’s progress, as well as any other important information on the child. “Secure place” means a file cabinet, drawer, or other location that can be locked or is otherwise not accessible to the child or anyone else in the home that is not authorized to have that information.

During the time the child is in the foster home, foster parents should record factual and specific information and descriptions about the child and activities the child is involved in. Try to keep from including opinions or judgments about things that may have happened.

When the child leaves the foster home, foster parents must give the complete record to the caseworker supervising the child’s placement. Agency staff may also request the child’s record for inspection or review at any time.

For more information about case record documentation requirements in foster home licensing standards, see s. 56.09(11) in Ch. DCF 56, Adm. Code.

PAYMENTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Uniform Foster Care Rate

The Uniform Foster Care Rate provides foster parents with non-taxable payments that are intended to reimburse them for the cost of caring for a child placed in their home.

There are four parts of the Uniform Foster Care Rate which include:

- The **Basic Maintenance Rate** is a set amount of reimbursement that is based upon the age of the foster child and should be used to reimburse foster parents for the basic expenses of caring for a foster child (including food, clothing, shelter, and personal care).
- The **Supplemental Rate** is an additional monthly payment that is based upon the needs of the child in the foster home that exceed normal child development and expectations. The Supplemental Rate is determined on a case-by-case basis by completing an assessment, called the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths tool (usually just called the CANS) for each child. The CANS looks at the strengths of a child and their family, as well as the needs for the child in a lot of different areas of their lives, such as school, development, behavior, and trauma. The CANS is completed by a child's team on a regular basis. Foster parents should talk with their licensing worker or the child's caseworker to get more information about the CANS.
- The **Exceptional Rate** is an additional monthly payment to support the care of a child whose level of needs may be so significant that the reimbursements described above will not provide enough resources for foster parents to adequately care for the child. Foster parents who receive an Exceptional Rate payment are individuals providing care for children who are at risk of placement in higher level out-of-home care settings.
- Foster parents may also receive an **Initial Clothing Allowance** when a child enters foster care to help pay for clothing needs a child may have. The Initial Clothing Allowance is a one-time reimbursement and is a set amount based upon the child's age.

Only foster parents certified as a level 2 or higher are eligible for the supplemental and exceptional payments.

A representative from the agency, either the child's caseworker or a foster home licensor, will meet with the foster parents to discuss the needs of the child and recommend whether or not the foster child qualifies for a Supplemental or Exceptional Rate and the amount of that additional reimbursement. This recommendation should be made within 30 days after the child's placement in the foster home and no less than

every 6 months after. Foster parents may request a redetermination of the rate at any time. Specific information – such as a description of the child’s needs or condition, explanation of request for additional reimbursement, and the recommended additional amount – must be submitted to the agency for approval. A rate setter within the agency will determine the final reimbursement amount. Foster care payments are made on a retrospective basis, which means that payments are made to foster parent after the end of the month that a child was in care.

Foster parents have a right to appeal the reimbursement rate if they disagree with the result of the rate determination. The procedures for requesting a fair hearing are outlined in s. 56.10, Adm. Code, and under the Grievances and Appeals section later in this Chapter.

The foster care licensing agency will provide foster parents with a copy of a brochure that explains the Uniform Foster Care Rate, reimbursement amounts, clothing allowances, and how to appeal the foster care rate.

For more information about the Uniform Foster Care Rate, contact the foster care coordinator in your agency or visit the Department of Children and Families web site at <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/fostercare/parent>.

Child Care Assistance

Foster parents qualify for child care assistance to support the cost of foster children in their homes attending child care as long as the foster parent is in an activity that qualifies under the Wisconsin Shares Program, including employment or education courses. Foster parents should contact their foster care licensor or the child’s caseworker to find out specific information about how to enroll in the Wisconsin Shares program. The caseworker or an Economic Support worker will be able to provide information about the child care providers in their area that are eligible to receive reimbursement from the Wisconsin Shares Program and any co-pays that may apply to a specific child care provider.

Since the Wisconsin Shares Program has established reimbursement rates, it is important for foster parents to fully understand any co-pay requirements that may apply to a specific child care provider. Foster parents should always compare their child care provider’s rates with the Wisconsin Shares county maximum rate and reimbursement rate because the Wisconsin Shares Program cannot reimburse providers above the established maximum rate. More information about the Wisconsin Shares Program and reimbursement rates can be found at the following web site:

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/wishares>

Reimbursement is provided for regulated child care providers (i.e. YoungStar providers) only.

LEVEL OF CARE CERTIFICATION

When foster parents apply for foster home licensure they are given a Level of Care certification in relation to their foster home license. Each Level of Care has different requirements that must be met in order to be certified at that level.

Level of Care Certification Requirements

All foster parents licensed in the state of Wisconsin will be assigned a Level of Care certification during the foster care licensing process based on meeting specific requirements in each of the following categories:

- ❖ Qualifications
- ❖ Training
- ❖ Caregiver references
- ❖ Caregiver experience

There are five Levels of Care. Each of the five Levels of Care certifications has been assigned a specific number of training hours, personal references, and experience requirements.

A child's caseworker will decide which placements are most appropriate for a child based on the child's level of need, which is determined by the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strength (CANS) tool assessment. A foster home's level of care certification will also help the caseworker to decide which children will be most appropriate in which foster homes. A level of care certification does not necessarily need to match a child's level of need; for information about this, foster parents should talk with their licensing worker.

Foster parents should be involved in deciding which Level of Care Certification to pursue. **Additional information regarding the certification levels can be found in s. 56.13 in Ch. DCF 56, Adm. Code.**

Level of Care Certification Descriptions

Level 1

Level 1 certification is reserved for *child-specific foster home licenses only*. To be child-specific the foster parent must be a relative of the child or must have a prior relationship with the child or the child's family, such as the child's teacher or coach. While Level 1 is

reserved solely for child-specific licenses, you may have a child-specific license at any level. There are no prior experience requirements or references required for Level 1 foster parents.

Level 2

Level 2 foster care is referred to as basic foster care. These foster parents are required to provide 3 favorable references from non-related individuals and are required to complete training discussed later in this chapter.

Level 3

Level 3 certification is considered moderate treatment level foster care, which is foster care that can provide additional supervision and care to children with higher needs than those in basic foster care. Level 3 foster parents care for children who have higher treatment needs than children in level 2 homes. These foster parents may care for children who have more significant mental, behavioral, physical, or medical needs, and can also care for specific populations of children, such as youth who have children of their own or youth who are sexual offenders. Level 3 foster parents must submit three favorable references from non-related individuals and one favorable reference from a relative, preferably an adult child. Level 3 foster parents are also required to meet prior experience requirements. Level 3 foster parents must also complete more training requirements than level 1 and level 2 foster parents.

Level 4

Level 4 is considered specialized treatment level foster care, which is structured to meet the higher needs of children and often addresses specific population needs, such as teen parents or youth with sexually aggressive behaviors. Level 4 foster parents must submit three favorable references from non-related individuals and one favorable reference from a relative, preferably an adult child. Level 4 foster parents must also complete additional experience and qualification requirements. Level 4 foster parents must also complete more training requirements.

Level 5

Level 5 is considered exceptional treatment level foster care, and is also sometimes referred to as “shift-staffed” foster care. These foster homes have staff members who work in rotating shifts to care for the children. Level 5 foster homes are generally created to meet the needs of specific children who need care into adulthood and the home becomes the adult resource for the child. All Level 5 foster homes must receive prior approval from the DCF Exceptions Panel before they are pursued and during the licensing and re-licensing process.

For more information about foster parent training requirements in foster home licensing standards, see s. 56.13 in Ch. DCF 56, Adm. Code

TRAINING AND CONTINUED LEARNING

Foster parents must complete specific training requirements depending on their Level of Care certification each year and each licensing period. Training is necessary to prepare foster parents and help them to continue to develop as a foster parent.

In Wisconsin, each foster parent is required to complete pre-placement training, initial licensing training, and ongoing training required for their foster home's Level of Care Certification. Being a successful foster parent means continuing to learn through classes and other training methods, reading books or magazines, talking with other foster parents, and continually developing new skills.

Level of Care Certification: Training Requirements

- ❖ **Level 1:** 6 hours of pre-placement training.
- ❖ **Level 2:** 6 hours of pre-placement training, 30 hours of initial licensing training, and 10 hours of ongoing training in each 12-month licensing period.
- ❖ **Level 3:** 36 hours of pre-placement training, 24 hours of initial licensing training, and 18 hours of ongoing training in each 12-month licensing period.
- ❖ **Level 4:** 40 hours of pre-placement training (4 of which must be child-specific), 30 hours of initial licensing training (6 of which must be child-specific), and 24 hours of ongoing training in each 12-month licensing period.

Pre-placement training is meant to be completed prior to having any children placed in a foster home. This training provides an overview of the child welfare system and the foster care program.

Initial licensing training is the next step in foster parent training, and is meant to provide a solid foundation of education on issues relevant to foster care and the children involved in the child welfare system. Initial licensing training digs deeper into issues that are introduced in the pre-placement training, such as permanence, culture, child development, family connections, abuse and neglect, attachment, discipline, and the effects of fostering on the foster family.

Ongoing training is offered on a continual basis to provide education topics relevant to the specific children placed in a foster home. Ongoing training is an opportunity to explore areas of interest and to learn more about how to meet the needs of children placed in a foster home. Ongoing training can be completed in various ways, and foster parents should talk with their licensing worker about how to complete this training.

While foster parents may have chosen to begin fostering because they successfully raised their own children, foster children have lived under different sets of rules, have had different experiences, and may respond very differently to parenting styles that worked with other children. Foster parents may feel helpless, frustrated, and ineffective at times with both themselves and the foster child for not following directions. These reactions are normal.

It is important for foster parents to take time to identify their personal strengths and, at the same time, acknowledge areas of their parenting skills that may need improvement. Taking classes and talking with other foster parents can help foster parents gain the knowledge and skills to work better with the children in their care, to minimize miscommunications, and to help the children in their home succeed.

There are many opportunities both locally and statewide for continued learning and growth as a foster parent. Additional training or advice, coupled with practical experience and observation, will benefit both parents and children alike. Foster parents should talk to their licensing working to learn about their training requirements and opportunities for ongoing training.

For more information about various books, videos, and other trainings available, check with the foster care licensor or the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center at www.wifostercareandadoption.org or 1-800-762-8063.

For more information about foster parent training requirements in foster home licensing standards, see s. 56.14 in Ch. DCF 56, Adm. Code

EMERGENCIES AND SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

An emergency is a situation that occurs outside the normal day-to-day routine of foster parenting and demands immediate intervention or assistance. When a child is placed in foster care, the foster parent should discuss with the caseworker how emergencies – both during business hours and after hours – should be handled. Foster home licensing requirements list situations in which a foster parent must immediately, or within a certain period of time, contact the agency. Those situations are explained in more detail below.

Serious Injury or Illness

If the child placed in the foster home is seriously injured or becomes seriously ill and requires medical care, foster parents must contact the caseworker as soon as possible. In the event of a medical emergency, the foster parent should take the child to the hospital emergency room first (take the child's medical consent form) and then notify the caseworker, agency supervisor, or the on-call (after hours) worker as soon as possible.

If a child requires surgery, consent must be provided by the child's legal guardian. In most cases, that will be the child's parents. As mentioned before, the caseworker is responsible for getting any consents or releases regarding the child's care and giving copies to the foster parent.

Refer to s. 56.05 in Ch. DCF 56, Adm. Code, for more information about licensing requirements regarding the reporting of serious injury or illness.

Concerns about Child Maltreatment

If a foster parent notices that a child has suspicious marks, injuries, or bruises, or indicates that she or he has been harmed in any way, it is critical to call the caseworker or on-call worker immediately to report that information. Foster parents are required by licensing standards to notify the supervising agency if they believe a child in foster care has been abused or neglected, has been threatened with abuse or neglect, or have reason to believe that the child will be abused or neglected. This includes any child in foster care, not just children placed in their foster home.

A child may also disclose past or current abuse. On the next page are some tips to keep in mind if a child discloses abuse or neglect.

What to Do When Children Disclose Abuse or Neglect

- ❖ Find a safe, quiet place to talk; be at the same eye level as the child.
- ❖ Do not interrogate the child.
- ❖ Choose words carefully, listen without judgment, and let the child tell the story in his or her own words.
- ❖ Be honest with the child about your responsibility to report the information he or she is sharing.
- ❖ Be calm; try not to show reactions, especially disgust, fear, or anger.
- ❖ Believe the child and be supportive—say that you are glad he or she told.
- ❖ Confirm the child’s feelings and let the child know he or she is safe.
- ❖ Make it clear that you care for the child—some children fear that you will not like them any more or they will blame themselves.
- ❖ Tell the child it is not his or her fault.
- ❖ Tell the child what steps you will take and that you will be talking with someone who can help.

(Source: Reilly & Martin, 1995)

Refer to s. 56.05 in Ch. DCF 56, Adm. Code, for more information about licensing requirements related to foster parents reporting suspected child abuse or neglect.

Children Missing From the Foster Home

Foster parents are required to report when a child is missing from their home or if a child has been missing for up to 8 hours or for a period of time that cannot be reasonably explained by the child’s age, maturity or mental capacity. For young children and children with disabilities or special needs, missing for any period of time may be cause for immediate action.

If the child leaves, is taken away, or is kept away without permission, follow the licensing agency’s policy. This typically involves contacting the child’s caseworker or the on-call worker. The worker from the agency will work with the foster parent to determine what the next steps should be. With some children who have a history of

running away, there may be a plan in place to follow already possibly included on the Information for Out-of-Home Care Providers form, Part B.

The agency's on-call or after hours phone number should be included on Part A of the Information for Out-of-Home Care Providers form.

Other Situations

This Handbook has given three examples of situations in which foster parents should notify the agency, but there may be other unique and complicated situations that may also require foster parents to notify the agency immediately. Foster parents must also report any similar crisis related to the health, safety, or well-being of a foster child. The box below includes some of those additional examples. Remember, if foster parents have concerns about any situation, they should consult the agency as soon as possible.

Other Situations Requiring Immediate Attention

- ❖ The death of a foster child.
- ❖ A fire in the foster home or its property, which requires the assistance of the fire department.
- ❖ A child has problems with law enforcement—either arrest or criminal behavior in the community.
- ❖ There are problems associated with a Family Interaction Plan.
- ❖ A child is expelled or suspended from school.
- ❖ A child threatens to harm him or herself or others.
- ❖ An error in administering medication to a foster child.
- ❖ A condition or situation which requires the removal of a child from the foster home.
- ❖ The use of physical restraint as required under s. 56.09 (1g) (e), Adm. Code.
- ❖ Another situation specific to the child or identified by the agency that qualifies as an emergency or special circumstance.

IF AT ANY TIME FOSTER PARENTS THINK A CHILD IN FOSTER CARE OR ANYONE ELSE IN THE HOME MAY CAUSE PHYSICAL VIOLENCE OR HARM, THEY SHOULD CONTACT LAW ENFORCEMENT (911) IMMEDIATELY.

For more information about when foster parents are required to report information to the agency, refer to s. 56.05(1)(a) to (j). in Ch. DCF 56, Adm. Code.

ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Foster parents should be prepared to experience allegations, or reports, of abuse or neglect against themselves or someone in their home. Foster parents are reported for allegations of child abuse and neglect at higher rates than the general public. The substantiation rate of those allegations, however, is much lower than the general public.

Foster parents have an obligation to ensure the safety of the children in their home. It is the responsibility of the agency or tribe to make sure foster parents are providing a safe environment for children. The agency and, when applicable, the agency in consultation with a tribe, has a duty to assess allegations of maltreatment of the children living in the foster home. If the agency determines an assessment is not necessary, the situation may be addressed in the same way as a general concern or licensing violation (discussed later in this chapter).

As a precaution, foster parents should talk to their licensing agency to learn about the steps it will take if someone in the foster home becomes the subject of an allegation. The agency should also provide foster parents with information about their appeal rights if a caregiver in the foster home is substantiated for child abuse or neglect.

Safeguards to Put in Place

While there is no guaranteed way to avoid an allegation of child abuse or neglect, there are ways to minimize the risk of allegations. The suggestions on the next page from the National Foster Parent Association give foster parents tips for minimizing the risk of an allegation of abuse or neglect.

Suggestions for minimizing the risk of an allegation:

- ❖ Find out as much information as possible before deciding whether to take placement of a child, including the child's abuse or neglect history both at home and in out-of-home placements.
- ❖ Ask whether a child has a history of making allegations against caregivers. Such a history does not mean the child is lying but could indicate a need for more involved treatment and more precautions that need to be put in place in the foster home.
- ❖ Do not accept placement of any child you do not feel confident you can adequately parent.
- ❖ Work with the agency and tribe to ensure that the child's needs are identified and met.
- ❖ Understand and follow all laws and regulations related to foster care.
- ❖ Develop family rules and expectations and ensure that all family members follow them. Rules might include:
 - Always being clothed in common areas of the home.
 - Restricting the foster parents' bedroom to foster parents only.
- ❖ Do not leave a child who has been sexually abused alone with anyone of the same gender as the person who abused the child.
- ❖ Provide a **HIGH** level of supervision for a foster child who demonstrates or has a prior history of sexualized behaviors.
- ❖ Keep a daily log and record, especially with any unusual events, behaviors, comments, or reactions before or after interaction with family members; school issues; medical, dental, or therapy appointments; and all discussions with other professionals about the child's progress and needs (including social workers, attorneys, mental health professionals, etc.) with specific details about the person, event, and any important details.
- ❖ Promptly report any unusual incident or injury to the child's caseworker or tribal worker.
- ❖ Maintain a professional working relationship with the child's parents, caseworkers, and other professionals involved with the child.
- ❖ Participate in training for foster and adoptive parents about caring for children who have been abused or neglected.

Coping with Maltreatment Allegations

Going through an allegation and assessment of child abuse or neglect is a very difficult, emotional, and challenging experience. Having access to other foster parents who have experienced allegations and have successfully managed situations is invaluable to foster parents during the allegation assessment process. The box below contains some suggestions on how to work through an allegation and assessment.

What to Do During an Assessment

- ❖ Maintain a professional attitude.
- ❖ Stay focused on understanding and following the procedures in place to assess the maltreatment report.
- ❖ Maintain or start a log of every conversation or activity related to the assessment, including the name of the person calling and the agency for which he or she works.
- ❖ Ask for copies of all documents, such as the complaint or report of abuse or neglect and the safety plan established for the child.
- ❖ Read documents carefully and ask questions about anything you do not understand.
- ❖ Keep track of timelines for the assessment.
- ❖ Provide information and documentation to the agency about the event that caused the report to be made.
- ❖ Reach out to local foster care support groups and associations and ask for support and assistance.
- ❖ Request that the child welfare agency provide at least one contact person in the agency to provide ongoing basic information about the assessment process.
- ❖ Maintain your family's routine; do not isolate yourself from friends and family.

(The primary source for the information found in this section is Regina Deihl's Allegations of Maltreatment against Foster Parents-Keeping All Children in Foster Care Safe)

For more information about child maltreatment reports and assessments concerning foster parents, talk with your licensor, refer to the National Foster Parent Association at www.nfpainc.org or 1-800-557-5238, or contact the Wisconsin Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center at www.wifostercareandadoption.org or 1-800-762-8063.

OTHER CONCERNS THAT MAY BE RAISED

Foster parenting is demanding and complicated, and it is not unusual for challenges to arise. Foster parents need to be prepared for concerns or complaints that may come to the attention of the agency or tribe. There are various ways an agency or tribe may handle concerns or complaints about a foster family, depending on the information provided and the particular procedures of the agency or tribe. The following provides a general guideline to help foster parents understand how various concerns are handled.

General Concerns: How They Are Typically Handled

There may be times when someone within or outside of the licensing agency or tribe may have concerns about a particular incident, behavior, or decision a foster parent has made. The information provided or observed may not be something that would rise to the level of abuse or neglect or a licensing violation, but it may be something that the agency or tribe needs to clarify and address.

Some examples may be that the child is not appropriately dressed for school or that a foster parent made a comment that someone in the community perceived to be inappropriate. It may also be that a foster parent is having challenges with following through with appointments or returning phone calls or paperwork.

When a general concern is raised, the caseworker for the child will usually talk with the foster parent in person or by phone to let him or her know if something needs to be corrected. The caseworker may provide suggestions, recommend training, or connect the foster parent with another experienced foster parent in the area.

Addressing concerns with one another is part of building a relationship between the foster parent and the caseworker. It is also a way for foster parents to gain insight and build the skills needed to care for children. It is important for foster parents to be willing to listen to the concern, provide clarification, and accept the caseworker's recommendation if something needs to be changed.

Licensing Concerns: How They Are Typically Handled

Investigations of potential licensing violations may occur in response to complaints or concerns about the foster home. It may have to do with the physical requirements of the home, sleeping arrangements, general care of children, or other requirements. Alleged licensing violations are generally addressed by the foster home licensor, who may observe the violation during a home visit or who may come to the home to specifically address the alleged licensing violation.

The box below contains some possible consequences for foster parents who violate licensing requirements and ways to make sure you understand licensing requirements.

Possible Consequences of Licensing Violations

- ❖ The agency may determine that the foster parent can maintain his or her license if the foster parent brings the home into compliance or corrects the violation. The violation and corrective actions should be documented in the foster home file and a copy should be provided to the foster parents.
- ❖ Verbally or in writing, the foster home licensor will provide instructions to a foster parent about how to correct the violation.
- ❖ The agency may determine that, due to the severity of the violation, number or frequency of violations, or inability or unwillingness to correct the violation, a foster parent's license will be revoked. If a revocation occurs, the foster parent will be provided written information about the basis for revocation and the appeal process, as described in s. 56.10, Adm. Code.

Tips for Understanding Licensing Requirements

- ❖ Keep a current copy of the foster care licensing laws and regulations on hand and become familiar with them.
- ❖ Request information in writing about agency procedures and how licensing violations are handled.
- ❖ Work with the agency or tribe to resolve any licensing concerns.
- ❖ Immediately comply with any corrective action plan to resolve problems.
- ❖ Provide the agency or tribe with documentation in writing that the violation has been corrected.

GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS

Filing a Grievance

Agencies are required to have policies that outline how anyone involved with child welfare services – including foster parents – can address concerns, complaints, or grievances with the agency. Typically, agency grievance procedures require individuals to first address their concerns with the caseworker or staff person directly. If talking with the caseworker or supervisor doesn't address the person's concerns, the next step is usually to send information in writing to the agency. Foster parents can get a copy of the agency's grievance procedure from administrative staff, the foster home licenser, the child's caseworker, or other agency staff.

A person expressing a concern or filing a grievance with the agency should be specific about what he or she sees as the problem that occurred. The agency can best address a concern when it has specific information about what happened and why someone thinks it is a problem. Also, a person filing or expressing a complaint should consider what outcome or solution they want to fix the situation.

Appealing a Decision

Foster parents can appeal decisions about their license, foster care rates, decisions related to the child in their home, and anything that affects them as foster parents. Agencies should notify a foster parent of his or her ability to appeal decisions at the time the agency sends notice of its decision or action. For example, if an agency revokes a foster home license, the agency should send the foster parent a letter stating why the foster home license is revoked, the date the revocation is effective, how a foster parent can appeal the decision, and the time period the foster parent has to appeal the decision.

To appeal a decision, foster parents should follow the written instructions provided by the agency, paying close attention to any time limit given for the appeal. To file an appeal, send a written request to the following agency:

A request for a hearing may be mailed to:
Division of Hearings and Appeals
P.O. Box 7875
Madison, WI 53707-7875

Faxed to (608) 264-9885; or

Delivered to:
Division of Hearings and Appeals

4822 Madison Yards Way
Madison, WI 53705

There is also a form created by the Division of Hearings and Appeals that foster parents can use to request hearings, which is located on the DHA web site listed below:

<https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/LicensesHearings/DHAAdministrativeHearingProcess.aspx>

This appeal process is for decisions made about a foster parent's license and decisions that are made about children in the care of foster parents. **The process for appealing a substantiation of child abuse or neglect is a separate procedure. A foster parent who is substantiated for child abuse or neglect will receive specific instructions about how to appeal that decision.**

Appeals regarding removal of a child from the foster home are explained in the next section.

A foster parent cannot appeal a denial for an exception made by the Department of Children and Families Exception Panel nor can they appeal a denial on a foster parent insurance claim.

For more information about what decisions a foster parent has the ability to appeal and the procedures for requesting an appeal, refer to s. 56.10 in Ch. DCF 56, Adm. Code, the foster home licensing requirements.

REQUESTS FOR REMOVAL OF A CHILD

There may be situations in which either a foster parent, the agency, or the tribe makes a decision that a child needs to be moved from the foster home. This section explains how agencies and foster parents should proceed if a decision is made to move a child to another placement. This process is commonly called “giving notice.”

The Foster Family’s Responsibility

Foster families are required to provide an agency with 30 days notice when requesting that a child be removed from their home. This is very important so that a new plan can be made and that plan explained to the child before the child moves. Foster parents need to help with these preparations to ease any anxiety or confusion the child may have. A foster parent may request that the agency move the child before 30 days if the situation is very difficult, but the agency may not always be able to find an appropriate home in less than 30 days. In many cases, the agency may wish to remove the child as quickly as possible to avoid any additional issues such as those that led the foster parents to request the child’s removal.

The Agency’s Responsibility

If the agency plans to remove the child, the agency is required by law to give a 30 day written notice prior to removing the child when the child has been in the foster home for more than 6 months. This requirement does not apply if the child has been in a foster home for less than 6 months or in situations when the agency has determined that the child is not safe or other emergency conditions exist.

A foster parent may appeal the agency’s decision if a foster child has been in his or her home for more than 6 months. When the agency notifies a foster parent of its intent to move the child, the notice should include information about how to appeal that decision.

If the safety of the child is not in jeopardy and a foster parent has filed an appeal regarding the agency’s decision to remove the child, removal cannot be carried out until a fair hearing is held and a ruling is made.

These rights apply only when the decision to remove the child is made by the agency. The county circuit court may order such removal without 30 day notice and with no recourse for a foster parent to appeal this action.

FOSTER PARENT INSURANCE PROGRAM

As required in s. 56.04(4)(a)9.b., Adm. Code, licensing agencies must provide all foster parent applicants with a brochure that explains the Foster Parent Insurance Program. Foster parents are required to have homeowner's or renter's insurance as stated in s. 56.05(4)(a), Adm. Code; however, sometimes homeowner's insurance may not cover damage done by foster children. The Foster Parent Insurance Program has been established to help reimburse a foster family for damage or loss caused by foster children that is not covered by private insurance (s. 48.627, Stats).

The program was created to assure that foster parents are reimbursed for damages or loss they might experience that are caused by county or state foster children placed in their care and that are not covered by their private insurance policies. Any foster parent licensed in the State of Wisconsin is eligible to file a claim under this program when the child is in custody of the county or state and placed in their care. However, this program is the "insurer of last resort" and should be used only when a private insurer will not cover any damages or loss.

A claim for damage suffered by foster parents must be filed within 90 days after the damage or loss occurs or is discovered. Regardless of any other circumstances (e.g., waiting to hear from private insurers, the child going to court for a possible restitution order), the foster parents should file a claim with the social worker as soon as possible after the damage or loss occurs or is discovered.

There are specific forms needed to file a claim, and the agency's foster home licensor can provide those forms. The more documentation foster parents have, the better. It is recommended that foster parents photograph or videotape their home and contents both when they are initially licensed and at regular times after they are licensed. When damage or loss occurs, they can then photograph the damage and submit all of the photographs for comparison. Foster parents must submit written estimates on printed business forms or letterhead for repairs or replacement costs, receipts for replacement items, written insurance company estimates of damages, police reports, fire reports, or other documentation that indicates what happened, what item is damaged or lost and what the value of the damages or loss is. If possible, foster parents should keep any damaged items until their claim has been approved. The Department cannot pay claims if there is not documentation regarding the loss or damage.

Foster parents will need to submit proof that their private insurance will not cover any of the damages or loss by sending a current copy of a letter from their insurance agent. In addition, the Department may only reimburse foster parents for parts or section of a set of items. For example, if a couch is damaged beyond repair and it is part of a sectional or matching set, only the couch that is damaged can be reimbursed.

The Department is required to deduct \$100 for all claims submitted within the same State Fiscal Year (July 1 through June 30). If a foster parent's private insurer pays part

of the claim and charges a deductible, \$100 will be subtracted from that deductible. If a claim is for less than \$100, foster parents should file it with their licensor in case they have another claim within the same fiscal year. For example, if a foster parent has a claim in August for \$50 and another in January for \$150, the \$100 would be deducted from the total of both claims.

Unlike other insurance programs, claims with the state insurance program are reviewed quarterly in January, April, July, and October. It takes approximately six weeks from the time a claim is approved for a foster parent to receive a claim check. If the claim is incomplete or does not include adequate documentation, the processing time will be increased.

The insurance program may also, in some cases, be accessed if the foster family is sued because of injury or harm to a foster child. The State Foster Parent Insurance does not cover third party claims, unless the foster parent is sued by the third party. All insurance claim decisions are final and cannot be appealed.

The Foster Parent Insurance program brochure explains further details of the program. Contact your licensing worker to obtain a copy of the brochure or access a copy online at the link listed: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/2010.pdf>.



KEY CONCEPTS

CHAPTER 2

- ❖ Foster parents are required to follow the rules of confidentiality regarding information about children in foster care and their families.
- ❖ Open and ongoing communication between the foster parent, the child's caseworker, the child's parents, and other professionals involved with children placed in their home is important to the success of the child and his or her family.
- ❖ The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard allows foster parents to make decisions about a child's participation in age and developmentally appropriate activities and requires that foster parents provide opportunities for children to have normal childhood experiences.
- ❖ Foster parents are required to keep a record for each child placed in their home.
- ❖ Refer to the Uniform Foster Care Rate Brochure and the agency's foster care coordinator regarding questions about foster care reimbursement rates.
- ❖ Foster homes are licensed at one of five Levels of Care. Each Level of Care must meet specific requirements to be certified at that level, including training requirements.
- ❖ Talk with the child's caseworker and the foster home licensor about how emergencies, both during business hours and after hours, should be handled.
- ❖ For a variety of reasons, foster parents are reported for allegations of child abuse or neglect at higher rates than the general public. Foster parents should be prepared for allegations even though the substantiation rate of those allegations is much lower than the general public.
- ❖ Concerns or complaints about foster homes may come to the attention of the agency or tribe and need to be addressed.
- ❖ Agencies are required to have policies that outline how people can address their concerns, complaints, or grievances with the agency.

- ❖ Foster parents have the ability to appeal administrative decisions that affect their license and decisions related to the child in their home.
- ❖ Foster parents are required to provide an agency with 30 days notice if they request a child be removed from their home.
- ❖ Wisconsin has a Foster Parent Insurance Program. Consult your licensor for more information regarding the program and to obtain a copy of the state-issued brochure.