

House Rules

Suggested House Rules for Foster Homes Caring for Children with Sexual Behavior Problems

1. **Family members are treated in a respectful and caring manner** (you will need to model and teach what this means continuously – do not assume a child knows how to do this). Sexual advances toward others are not acceptable.
2. **Supervision:** Children with sexual behavior problems must have continuous eyesight supervision (by an identified, responsible adult knowledgeable about their issues) when they interact with other children. Inappropriate sexual behavior is dealt with at the time it occurs in a respectful, direct and firm manner. During adolescence, adjustment of supervision may be necessary to allow for social activities and peer contact. Teens need to be able to progressively earn freedom by demonstrating responsibility.
3. **Bedrooms:** Children should sleep in their own beds and not share bedrooms. If it is absolutely necessary to share, it should be with a strong, assertive child of similar age or older who has been informed and understands about the sexual behavior problems. Monitors or door alarms should be placed on the bedroom doors of children who have problems staying in their room at night or following safety rules (and/or other children in the house who feel unsafe). A child may be able to earn the privilege of having a roommate or overnight guest or having the monitor removed by making progress and earning trust over time. Except in the case of very young children, family members should knock before entering bedrooms. Care should be taken when tucking children in at night. For children who have been abused in their beds, nighttime may be an anxious transition. Foster fathers may cause anxiety for children, so it may be more comfortable to say good night from the door in the beginning of the placements. Leave lights and doors open for children who are fearful. Playtime with other children should not take place in bedrooms.
4. **Bathrooms:** One person in bathroom at a time (except for adult with a young child that needs help or supervision) – knock to let someone know you need to use the bathroom. Door closed when using toilet or showering. Children wash own private parts.
5. **Privacy:** To help children learn the importance of boundaries, emphasize that everyone has the right to privacy. This may include a private spot or drawer that no one should go without your permission or knocking on the bathroom or bedroom door and waiting for permission to enter. Do not search drawers or read diaries without permission.

6. **Clothing:** It is a good idea to require bathrobes or sweats around your house for all family members. Walking around naked partially clothed or in your underwear may cause embarrassment or anxiety for children. It may also arouse children who are prone to sexually acting out. Identify appropriate dress for different situations as necessary. Children should wear underwear under clothes and not wear clothes that have holes near private parts.
7. **Horseplay:** Reduce or eliminate horseplay such as tickling or wrestling. While these behaviors are not bad in themselves, tickling can be coercive, and wrestling is often the starting point for more intimate behavior. Children with violated boundaries may feel anxious or coerced during wrestling. Other children may use the guise of wrestling as an excuse to sexually touch other children. Sexually abused or acting out children may find wrestling to be quite sexually stimulating. Instead of wrestling, channel kids into lots of physical activities that are appropriate.
8. **Sexual talk:** Monitor sexual talk and gestures between children in the home. Talk openly about sexual matters, but make sure it is developmentally appropriate and respectful (it's important not to treat it as a secret topic). Children who sexually molest others often groom their victims through sexual talk so keep tabs on talk in your house, especially when used as a put down or act of aggression. Keep to a minimum the presence of sexually stimulating materials such as explicit television shows, movies, magazines, music and pornography. Be aware that violent, aggressive and stimulating television shows or video games can raise the tendency toward aggression in children, at least temporarily, and it has been suggested that there is a link to sexual stimulation as well. Talk to children about what is appropriate and supervise children appropriately.
9. **Physical punishment:** Foster parents are not allowed to use physical punishment with a foster child and are not allowed to use punishment that is cruel or humiliating. This includes your response to sexual behavior problems. Do not use pepper, restraining devices, slapping, or humiliating or hurtful consequences when addressing a child's behavior.

Foster parents should review their state's rules and regulations regarding discipline.

10. **Personal touch:** When children first come into your home, be respectful and, even with young children, ask permission to touch. Address immediately any touch that feels uncomfortable to you or that is hurtful. Children need to know what is not acceptable, but they also need to be sensitized to good, nurturing touch. Go slow. Side hugs, brushing hair, pats on the back, tag; all are less intrusive touches that most children can handle. Allow children to say no to touch and don't be hurt or cajole children into touches they clearly are

uncomfortable with. If children need constant touch or contact with you, set limits for the child. Give a child five to fifteen minutes of sitting on your lap, and then you take a break. Schedule these times throughout the day, so the child gets his need for attention met, but learns to respect boundaries. Talk openly and often about appropriate touch safety and boundaries with all children in the family. This will let everyone know that everything can be talked about and sexual touching will not be kept a secret.

11. **Pets:** If a child has any known or suspected history of abuse or neglect of an animal/ pet, there must be a supervising adult within eyesight when he/she interacts with the animal/ pet. (The pet cannot sleep with the child in his or her bedroom, for example.) It will be very beneficial to the child if the adult teaches and models proper care, handling, boundaries and love for animals.

Teaching children about your house rules

- **Young children (4 and under)** – Can tell them rules as things come up
- **Children 5 and above**– Go over rules, and consequences for breaking them, early in placement. **Write** important rules down, discuss in family meetings.

Additional House Rules To Consider

1. **Contribution** – in this family, everyone contributes something.
2. **Open doors** – When more than one person is in a room, the door must remain open, except for parents in their bedroom together.
3. **Curiosity** – It is okay to ask any questions that you want to ask. We will answer every question we can in the best way we can. However, sometimes we may need to answer a question in a different place or at a different time so that we can talk appropriately.
4. **Consequences** – It is important that children understand in advance what the consequences will be if they break a house rule. For many children, severe abuse may have been the response that they received in their birth homes if they broke a rule.
5. **Limits** – It is important to have boundaries and rules around computer and phone usage, as well as parental controls on television and access to pornography.

Preventing False Allegations of Sexual Abuse Checklist

- ✓ **Make sure your behavior is above reproach.** Do not sexually abuse, sexually touch, physically abuse, spank or use suggestive language with a child.
- ✓ **Secure accurate information upon placement of child.** Ask why the child is being placed, ask about behavior problems that are known, and ask about any history of abuse. If a child has been sexually abused, set up an effective safety plan (to be covered in Unit 8).
- ✓ **Use the “rule of three”.** If a child has a history of sexually acting out, do not leave alone with another child. Never leave the child in an unsupervised babysitting situation. If a child has a history of false allegations, when possible, do not be alone with the child for a long time. Use the rule of three. That means try to have three people in the room such as a parent and two children or two adults and a child.
- ✓ **Put foster child in own bedroom.** Leave doors open and be within earshot of another parent if you need to talk or be with child in his or her room.
- ✓ **Do not use physical punishment.** Physical punishment is not allowed in foster care and breeds resentment in children.
- ✓ **Be clear about rules of dress, privacy and touching.** Set, explain and maintain clear, firm, concise rules on dress, privacy, touching, boundaries, language, and behaviors. Ask permission to touch. Take special caution around bathroom, bedroom and dressing issues.
- ✓ **Record any sexual acting out in writing.** Send a copy of the report to child’s social worker or therapist and keep a copy for yourself.
- ✓ **Reduce your stress.** When you are caring for difficult children, schedule in a regular break for yourself. Take care of yourself! You must monitor your own emotions and own stress and get help when you need it.
- ✓ **Address issues when they happen.** If you are open and confrontative, children will learn that everything can be talked about and secrets about touching are not allowed.
- ✓ **Avoid aggressive horseplay, teasing, suggestive or ambiguous language.** Avoid sexual language, swearing, comments, whistles, things that may be misinterpreted. Keep touches appropriate: kisses on the cheek, short hugs or side hugs. Avoid lap sitting for older children.
- ✓ **Use family and group therapy rather than confidential individual therapy with the child.** The secrecy and isolation of one-on-one therapy may encourage manipulative reporting in a child who has a history of false allegations.

Reprinted with permission from the self-study course *Dealing with Sexually Acting Out Behaviors in Foster Care* by Aileen McGinnis, Alaska Foster Parent Training Center, Fairbanks, Alaska. Her sources included Kunstal, Frank “Preventing Allegations of Abuse”, *The National Advocate*; Sprouse, Jacob, *Defensive Parenting*, American Foster Care Resources; and McNamara, Bernard and Joan, *The SAFE TEAM Curriculum: Preparation and Support for Families Adopting Sexually Abused Children*, Family Resources, 1990.

An additional step that foster parents can take to reduce the risk of false allegations is to develop and maintain a good relationship with your caseworker. Find a communication strategy and schedule that works for both of you and KEEP IN TOUCH!