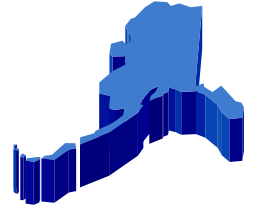




UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATIONS:

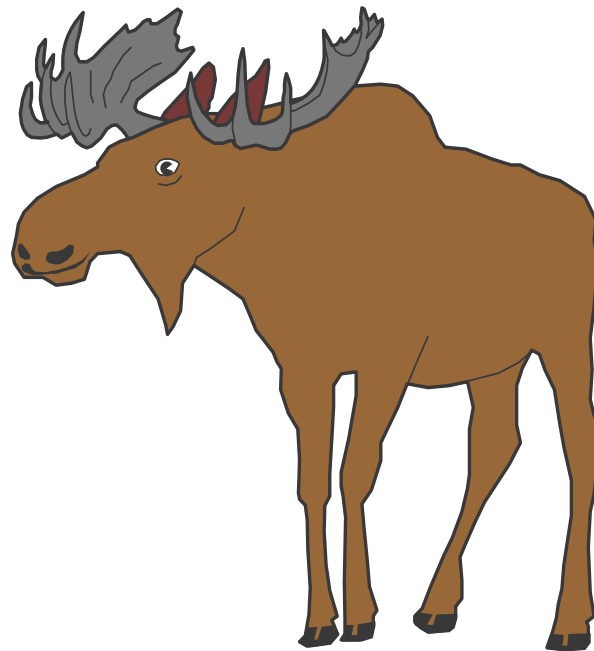


What Alaskan Foster Parents Need to Know

#5

Safety in the Foster Home (Revised 12/1/06)

1.0 Hour Training Credit



Written and Produced by:
The Alaska Center for Resource Families
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UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATIONS:

What Alaskan Foster Parents Need to Know

(Updated 12/1/06)

NOTE: The State of Alaska Department of Health and Human Services revised and combined the regulations for all licensed facilities, including licensed foster homes. The Environmental Health and Safety Regulations took effect on June 23, 2006. This self study reviews a highlight of the regulations that impact licensed foster homes.

Safety in the Foster Home

AUTHORITY: 7 AAC 10.1080 Firearms and Ammunition
7 AAC 10.1035 Premises
7 AAC 10.1085 Smoking
7 AAC 10.1090 Animals
7 AAC 10.1095 Toxic substances; Poisonous Plants

This series was compiled with assistance from the State of Alaska Office of Children's Services to help foster parents understand the foster care regulations. This series is a guide to the regulations, but is not a substitute. In all discrepancies between the information in this series and the regulations, the regulations and the statutes are the final authority. Contact your licensing worker for a complete copy of the regulations.

INTRODUCTION: The health and safety of children in foster care is of utmost importance. Foster care regulations require specific safety standards for foster homes. This self-study looks at several areas of safety including: *Firearms and Ammunition, Premises, Smoking, Animals, Toxic Substance, Poisonous Plants* and *Car Safety*.



FIREARMS AND AMMUNITION

If you have guns in your home and you are a foster parent, you need to use and store your firearms in a responsible way in order to prevent injury to children. The regulations specify that in a foster home, firearms need to be stored *unloaded* and stored in a locked gun safe or other locked place that is not visible or accessible to children in care. Ammunition is to be stored separately from the guns and in a place that children cannot access.

Before an older foster child is allowed to handle a firearm, foster parents must submit a firearm safety plan to the licensing worker that addresses the safety instruction approach the home will use with the child. This **Firearm Safety Plan** is part of the **PLAN FOR CARE** that you complete as part of your application to become a licensed foster home. The resource family must request the child's placement worker to obtain advance permission from the child's parents or OCS if parental rights have been terminated. If you plan to allow a child in care to handle a firearm, you need to explain the firearm safety instruction approach you plan to use and review this information with your licensing worker. *(A copy of the **PLAN FOR CARE** form is included the back of this self study.)* For the foster parent, this means that before a child can be allowed to use a firearm, birth parents or OCS must give permission and the child must have training in gun safety.



SMOKING AND SECOND HAND SMOKE

Research shows second-hand smoke contributes to respiratory illnesses in children. Foster care regulations address smoking in the foster home. If anyone smokes in the foster home, smoking must be limited to outside the home or in a well ventilated area away from the immediate living area. The foster home must submit a plan acceptable to licensing that addresses how children in care will be protected from smoking in the home. Foster parent may not smoke in their cars. Any vehicle used to transport children must also be smoke free.

This **Second Hand Smoke Reduction Plan** is part of the **PLAN FOR CARE** that you complete as part of your application for licensing. If any one in your family smokes, you will need complete this section to outline how you will protect children from second hand smoke. **NOTE:** The forms have not yet been updated to reflect the change in the regulations. Smoking is not allowed in the living areas of any children in the home, regardless of their age. *(A copy of the **PLAN FOR CARE** form is included at the back of this self study.)*



PETS AND ANIMALS

Pets can be a positive experience for children. Good sense should guide the foster parent in keeping pets and providing a safe experience for children as well. Foster families need to ensure that any animal kept in the home has no communicable diseases and is free of parasites. Pets should also have all the required immunizations and foster families should have proof that pets have received the required shots.

Foster parents should take care to provide the appropriate cages or aquariums for animals and to keep cages and pets clean and free of disease. Keep your pet living areas easy to clean. Change bowls and water daily. Remove waste regularly to prevent odor. Make it a habit, and teach your children, to wash hands thoroughly after handling pets.

If you have an animal that has a history of aggressive behavior such as biting, or has been reported to animal control because of aggression, you must let your licensing worker know. If an animal becomes aggressive or bites someone, you should immediately remove the animal from the children in your care and contact your licensing worker within 24 hours of any occurrence of aggression. OCS will need to determine if the animal continues to be a threat to the safety of the children in your care.

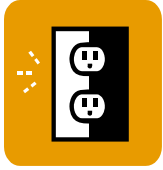
Foster homes should avoid dangerous animals such as dogs with a history of biting or wild animals such as skunks, monkeys, and wild rodents. Approval needs to be obtained from your licensing worker to keep amphibians, ferrets and reptiles. Psittacine birds such as parakeets, parrots, macaws, pigeons or other small sized birds may be kept if they have been treated with antibiotics before entering the home and go through an isolation period from other birds when first entering the household. Make sure you ask the pet store you buy the bird from about their history and ask for documentation.



PREMISES

When your licensing worker visits your home for a home inspection, he or she is looking at your premises, or the environment that children will be living in. Generally, the worker is looking at the overall safety of the home. The regulations outline some specific areas of safety that he or she will be looking at.

- Your residence must be generally safe, sanitary and in good repair.
- Your home should be free of hazards such as splintered surfaces, broken or hazardous toys, unsafe play areas, lead paint and flaking paint.
- Insects, rodents and other pests need to be under control.
- Your home should have adequate lighting appropriate for the activities performed in each area of the house.
- Your furniture should be durable, in good repair and kept clean.
- Your hot water temperature should be no less than 100 degrees and no more than 120 degrees.



CHILDPROOFING AND CHILD SUPERVISION

Childproofing:

An important part of keeping your home safe for children is to look at those things in the environment that can hurt them. Making sure the environment is safe is called “childproofing.” This means going through your home and fixing those things that can hurt children. For foster homes with infants and children, this includes:

1. Installing and using safety gates to prevent access to stairs
2. Installing outlet covers in all electrical outlets accessible to children
3. Using safe and sanitary equipment for diapering, and making sure that caregivers can easily wash hands after diapering or helping a child with toileting

Playground Equipment: Make sure your play areas are free of hazards as well. Securely anchor outside play equipment, such as swing sets, if not self supporting and make sure that there aren’t any dangerous features on play equipment such as sharp points or edges or pinch points. If there is a fall height from equipment of three or more feet, use shock absorbing materials such as pea gravel, sand or sawdust, and avoid concrete or asphalt.

Toxic Substances: Securing and locking up toxic substances is also an important part of making the environment safe. All toxic substances such as cleaning material, detergent, pesticide, poison and aerosol cans need to be stored in the original labeled container. Exceptions would be commercial sanitizing or bleach water solution in a spray bottle that is properly labeled. These products need to be stored inaccessible to children and stored separately from medication and food. Foster families should take care to use only nontoxic arts and crafts materials with children.

Child Supervision:

Foster parents must supervise the children in their home according to the age and needs of the child. If your foster child has special needs or needs individualized care, you may need to limit the number of children in your home in order to provide an adequate level of care. Your supervision plan, which is part of your foster home application, needs to designate an adult who will help in case of sickness, accident, or other emergency absences. Notify your licensing worker if your emergency caregiver changes.

Do not let children play in dangerous situations or be exposed to potentially harmful animals or individuals. What is considered to be dangerous? The regulations give the following examples:

- ✓ *Riding a three-wheeler*
- ✓ *Boating without a life vest*
- ✓ *Use of an infant walker*
- ✓ *Young children walking along a river edge unsupervised*

Foster parents must have written permission from their social worker before allowing foster children to ride on a snowmachine or all terrain vehicle.



POISONOUS PLANTS

If you have children in your home, you should be aware of that some plants, trees and shrubs can cause injury or death if a portion of that plant tree or shrub is ingested or touched. The department may allow certain common household plants that are considered dangerous if it can be shown that children will be protected from harm.

If you have potentially poisonous plants in your home or garden, how are you protecting young children from possibly being harmed by them? Some plants may need to be removed, some plants may need to be set on higher shelves or hung from the ceiling or your garden may need to be fenced in, or plants moved to more inaccessible spots. Your licensing worker may ask you to put your plan of protection in writing. Part of that plan of protection will be to identify what you have that might be dangerous to children and how you will try to keep children safe. It is also suggested that you know how to treat accidental poisonings of the specific plants you may have in your home and have the number for your nearest medical facility or poison control center clearly posted near your telephone.

POISONOUS PLANT STRATEGY

- 1. Identify plants in your living area and outside areas.***
- 2. Develop strategies to prevent harm to children.***
- 3. Develop a plan of action if a child is harmed.***

In the licensing regulations, the list of poisonous plants include:

- Flower garden plants, including autumn crocus, bleeding hart, chrysanthemum, daffodil, four-o'clocks, foxglove, hyacinth, hydrangea, iris, jonquil, lily-of-the-valley, morning glory, narcissus, and snow-on-the-mountain
- House plants, including bird of paradise, castor bean, dumbcane, English ivy, holly, jequirty bean, Jerusalem cherry, mistletoe, mother-in-law, oleander, philodendron, poinsettia and rhododendron
- Trees and shrubs, including black locust, boxwood, chokecherry, elderberry, English yew, horse chestnut, buckeye, juniper, oak, water hemlock and yew
- Vegetable garden plants, including asparagus, sprouts and green parts of potato, rhubarb leaves, and green parts of tomato
- Wild plants, including belladonna, bittersweet buttercups, Indian hemp, jack in the pulpit jimson weed, larkspur, monkshood, poisonous mushrooms, nightshade, poison hemlock, poison ivy, poison oak, poison sumac, tobacco and skunk cabbage



CAR SAFETY

While the licensing regulations don't directly address car safety, foster parents are expected to follow all state and federal laws.

Alaska law says that a driver may not transport children under 16 in a motor vehicle unless the child is properly secured according to state child passenger safety law. Children under age 4 must be properly secured in a federally approved car seat or booster car seat. For children over age 4 but under age 16, Alaska state law requires that the child be properly secured in a vehicle seat belt or federally approved car seat or booster seat, whichever is appropriate for the particular child.

Never place a child in a rear-facing car safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle that has a passenger air bag. The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat. All infants should ride rear-facing until they have reached at least 1 year of age and weigh at least 20 pounds. Once your child is at least 1 year of age and at least 20 pounds, he can ride forward-facing.

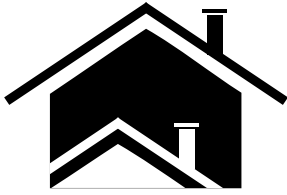
When children have reached 4 years of age and have outgrown their car seat, they should ride in a booster seat. The seat should raise your child so the lap and shoulder seat belts fit properly. A child should use a booster seat until they fit properly in a regular seatbelt harness.

Foster parents should set a good example and always wear your seat belt. Help your child form a lifelong habit of buckling up. Wearing a seatbelt or providing appropriate safety restraint for children is the law for all passengers in Alaska.

Never leave a child in a car alone even if it is for a short time. Children have been known to slip cars into gear accidentally and be seriously hurt or hurt others. It only takes a minute for a tragedy to happen.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has an on line guide called **Car Safety Seats: A Guide for Families 2006** for choosing the right car seat and guidelines for child and car safety restraint that can be located at <http://www.aap.org/family/carseatguide.htm>

For more information about the **UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATIONS: What Alaskan Foster Parents Need to Know** series, contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families at 1-800-478-7307. In Fairbanks/North Pole, call 479-7307. In Anchorage, call 279-1799.



OTHER IDEAS FOR A SAFE HOME

1. Take CPR or First Aid, especially if you have a medically needy child, an accident-prone child, or young children. Have basic First Aid supplies on hand, such as Band-Aids, Ipecac syrup, alcohol, gauze and tape. OCS will soon distribute first aid charts--post it in an easily accessible place.
2. Look at toys in your house. Be careful of toys with small pieces or sharp objects. Do not let young children play with plastic bags or balloons.
3. Cut up food into small enough pieces so that children do not choke on hot dogs, meat, vegetables, etc. Don't let children have hard candies. Cereals with holes, such as Cheerios, are also safer for young children.
4. Take special care with children around strange dogs or animals.
5. Wash your hands frequently. Teach children to do the same (such as before food preparation, after touching animals, after sneezing, before eating). Hand washing is proven to cut down on disease and colds. Set up a hand washing system that is easy to use.
6. Be careful with long curtain cords that can strangle a child and tablecloths that can be pulled atop a child.
7. Get breakable things up and out of the reach of children. Secure kitchen cabinets with plastic child locks to prevent children from getting into cupboards.
8. Teach children biking and boating safety. Teach them to use hand signals, bike horns, helmets and to look before going into the street. Teach them to always wear a personal flotation device. If children are often around water, teaching them to swim may be a good idea. Never leave young children around water unsupervised, even if it is in the sink or washtub.
9. Always use infant and car seats when transporting children under 4 years of age in the car. Always wear your seat belt and teach older children to do the same.
10. Inspect your outdoor play area often. Is there sharp, rusted or bent metal exposed? Is equipment working properly? Are swings and bars at a good height? Is the area free of broken glass, garbage and other dangerous material? Are children safe in the area? Are they in view or in close access to adult supervision? Fix safety concerns *immediately*.

SAMPLE FORMS RELATED TO SAFETY IN THE FOSTER HOME

Included in this section is a copy of the Plan for Foster Care that includes sections referenced in this self study.

PLAN FOR CARE

Completion of this form, and the Background Information form constitutes the required plan for supervision of children and operation of a resource family home.

SUPERVISION

How will you ensure children in your care are adequately supervised?

Who is your emergency backup? Who will you use as a baby-sitter? If working, what child care arrangements do you have? Please describe the qualifications of your emergency backup, baby-sitter, and/or child care provider.

If you plan to accept a child/ren with significant medical needs, how will you ensure licensed medical personnel are available to perform the prescribed services?

What precautions will you take to ensure children in your care are adequately safe with pets/animals?

FIREARM SAFETY PLAN

Do you plan to allow a child in your care to handle a firearm? No [] Yes []

Before a resource family home allows a child in care to handle a firearm, the home must request the child's placement worker to obtain advance permission from the child's parents, or OCS if parental rights have been terminated. If you plan to allow a child in care to handle a firearm, explain the firearm safety instruction approach that will be used.

YOUNG CHILDREN

If you are licensed or approved to care for young children (through 8 years old), what opportunities will you provide to ensure individual self expression and imaginative play, vigorous daily physical activity, intellectual and social development, and opportunities to foster independence?

What materials, toys and equipment do you have for young children?

INFANT/TODDLERS

If you are licensed or approved to care for infants and toddlers, who is the primary caregiver? Describe the primary caregiver's contacts with infants/toddlers.

If currently caring for infant/toddler, describe your activities and interactions with the infant/toddler in your care (i.e.: discovery play, quiet activities, motor development).

REDUCING THE SPREAD OF DISEASE

Describe precautions you take to reduce the spread of disease. (Ex. hand washing, using paper cups in bathroom, etc.)

What precautions do you take with blood and/or bodily fluids?

SECOND HAND SMOKE REDUCTION

If anyone living in your home or visitors are allowed to smoke in your home, please complete this form. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has issued a national warning that exposure to tobacco smoke in the environment (secondhand smoke) presents a serious public health risk. This is your plan to reduce the effects of secondhand smoke on children in your care.

Specifically, where are people allowed to smoke in your home?

Child foster home regulations and safety practice do not permit smoking in the same room with infants and toddlers ages 30 months and younger. What will you do to be sure everyone in your home follows these guidelines?

If anyone in your home smokes in the same room with children older than 30 months, what do you do to protect the children from the effects of second hand smoke? (Preferred methods include not smoking in the house, smoking in an entry way or garage, smoking in only a designated room of the house that is well ventilated.)