

Role of the Resource Family

Handout 5-1

BEFORE A CHILD COMES TO YOUR HOME, plan ahead!

- Talk to and prefer your entire family about foster care.
- Prepare space for a child (bed to sleep, place for clothes, age appropriate toys and activities, car seats/booster seats)
- If you need child care, start looking for a safe appropriate licensed setting.
- Complete your Core Training for Resource Families.
- Complete your licensing requirements.

AT TIME OF PLACEMENT, get the information you need.

- Ask questions when contacted for a placement and get as much information as you can to make the decision of if this will work for your family. Find out where child is going to school.
- Ask for the Red Placement Packet for the child which will contain: EPSDT/Immunization schedule, Consent for Emergency and Routine Medical Care, Clothing Inventory, Medication Log and information specific to the child such as tribal information if known. Fill out Clothing Inventory.
- Ask about any appointments or assessments or visits that are already scheduled. Find out who the current medical provider is. Ask about siblings in care.
- If the child does not have a current medical provider, identify a Medicaid approved provider. If the child is Alaska Native or American Indian, identify a provider with your local tribal health organization.
- If this is the child's first time in placement, schedule an EPSDT exam within the first 30 days in your home.
- If a change in placement has occurred, schedule an EPSDT exam within the first 30 days if the child is over the age of 3 and has not seen a doctor in the past year or if the child is under the age of 3 and has not seen a doctor in the past 3 months.
- The Medicaid Card should arrive in the mail if not in the packet. In some cases, the Medicaid information is included on the Consent Form. Direct questions to the OCS Eligibility Unit in your region.
- Ask for an "Icebreaker" meeting with the birth family if appropriate.
- Help the child transition into your home and feel comfortable.
- Make a recordkeeping file for the child to keep records and include a calendar to track appointments. Note the caseworker's name and contact information. Find out name of Guardian ad Litem (or call Office of Public Advocacy.)
- Ask about Family Contact--often visits begin soon after placement.
- If the child does not come with adequate clothing, use your local resources or request Clothing Voucher from the worker. You will be asked to submit the Clothing Inventory to document.

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WHILE A CHILD IS WITH YOU, stay organized and meet the child's needs.

- 0 Keep required records (Fire Drills, Visit/Medication/Injury Logs, Educational Records).
- 0 Follow the EPSDT schedule for physical exams, immunizations, dental exams, etc.
- 0 Honor the Confidentiality of birth parents and foster children.
- 0 Provide Transportation to visits, school, medical, and therapy appointments.
- 0 Sign school and club permission slips for routine events and transportation. Help kids participate in nonnal, developmentally appropriate activities. Use a Reasonable and Prudent Standard to decide if involvement in an activity is appropriate.
- 0 Ongoing communicate with caseworker about what child needs, ongoing behavior problems, progress. Include the GAL as Appropriate.
- 0 Communicate with OCS if not receiving the foster care stipend or if needed Special Funds to assist with additional needs or events.
- 0 Support a child's education and schooling.
- 0 Be prepared for monthly caseworker visits (every other visit should be in your home).
- 0 Use good judgement when supervising children, selecting others to supervise your children, allowing adult contact with children, or selecting child care.
- 0 Follow the contact plan for visitation and contact with birth parents. Help a child remember birthdays and Mother's/Father's Days.
- 0 If a child is separated from siblings, set up play dates or visits so siblings can keep in touch.
- 0 You should be invited to Court Hearings and may be invited to Administrative Meetings.
- 0 Keep up with licensing expectations (notify worker when changes to household or emergencies or absences, complete yearly training requirements).
- 0 Allow time to obtain permission when needed (leaving home over 72 hours, trips out of state or country, non-emergency treatment and medical care, elective and psychotropic medications).
- 0 Follow all safety measures (car seats and seat belts, life preservers, safe sleeping practices, bike helmets).
- 0 Keep a life book or scrapbook for a child of pictures, school papers, mementos, letters, and papers that keep a record of a child's life.
- 0 Be respectful of a child's religious history and honor the birth parents' preferences or the child's preference if over nine years of age.
- 0 Be aware that if complaints come in on a foster home (child protective system complaints or licensing regulation violations complaints) these will be investigated by licensing or initial assessment or both. You are expected to cooperate with the investigations-this is where communication and documentation is helpful. Read the Handout given in this class for more information or contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families for More information.

Role of the Resource Family

Handout 4.4

WHEN A CHILD LEAVES YOUR HOME, support a good transition.

- 0 Make sure your child goes with adequate clothes and toys. Use Clothing Inventory as a Minimum Guide. Children should go with the clothes you purchased with foster care stipend. Send his belongings in a suitcase or duffel, not a garbage bag.
- 0 Update the Child Information Sheet and send the Red Placement Packet with the child.
- 0 If you are requesting removal of a child, give 15 days' notice for OCS to find a new placement.
- 0 Help your child with the transition.
 - o Talk to the child about what is happening and prepare the child for leaving.
 - o Answer questions and give information about what will happen next.
 - o Advocate for some time to make the transition.
 - o Have a special moment, dinner, or gift that marks the transition.
 - o Write a note for the child that talks about something good that happened in your home.
 - o Update a child's lifebook and make sure that it goes with him.
 - o Share information with the child's birth family or new placement to help with the continuity of care for the child.
- 0 Ask about post placement contact if you desire.
- 0 Take care of your family's needs and feelings of loss and deal with your own grief.
- 0 Take some time if needed and let OCS know when you are ready for another placement.

6 QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CONTACTED ABOUT A PLACEMENT

Adapted for use in Alaska from Foster Parents: Don't forget to ask, Social Workers: Don't Forget to Answer! Caseworker Core Module VIII: Separation, Placement and Reunification. Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, November 2006.

Questions To Ask About The Child

1. Why is the child being placed?
2. Previous placement experiences of the child.
3. What is the child's legal status?
4. What is the plan for the child? Expected length of placement?
5. What is the family contact plan for the child? What is the family situation and the parent's names? Where are the parents? When will the first visit or contact be?
6. Are there brother/sisters? Where are they placed? Birthdates?
7. Is the child in good health? Allergies, medication, immunizations, dental care?
8. When was the last physical and dental checkup?
9. Religion-important or not?
10. Where has the child been receiving medical care? Is there a record of immunizations?
11. What grade is the child in at school? What School? Are there any known educational or learning issues?
12. Does the child have any special behavior problems or unusual habits?
13. Does the child have enough clothing? Will there be a clothing allowance?
14. Will the foster parent and birth parent have an Ice Breaker?
15. What is the foster care reimbursement for this child(ren)?
16. What is the name and contact number for the social worker? Who is the social worker's supervisor?

Forms to Ask For Early in the Placement:

1. Red Placement Packet (Should include the forms below.)
2. Consent for Emergency and Routine Medical Care
3. Family Contact Plan or Visitation Plan
4. Clothing Inventory Form (if you are going request a clothing voucher)

CASEWORKER VISIT CHECKLIST FOR RESOURCE FAMILIES

POLICY: Caseworkers should be meeting with a child at least once a month and meet with the child where he is living (your home) at least every other month. Caseworker will ask for some time alone to talk with the child so be prepared to make a private space available for the worker and child.

Caseworker will want some time to talk with you as well. Bring the Red Placement Packet and any appropriate records regarding the child. Update photo of child if outdated.

Be prepared to talk about:

Education: If the child is school age, how is school going? Any concerns?

Activities: What activities is the child participating in? (Family, Extra-curricular, Cultural, After School, Enrichment)

Family Contact: What contact is the child having with parents? Any sibling visits? Anyone the child should be having contact with?

Health, Medical or Therapeutic Needs: How is the child's health? When was the last check up? Are you seeing any delays, concerns or health needs? Is child receiving the mental health services he needs?

Other Issues? What do you need to take care of this child? Is there something the child needs? Any permissions, financial requests, or travel authorizations that you need? Any special training, support or resources that would help you care for this child?

Other Questions To Consider Asking:

Important Hearings: What important court hearings or meetings are coming up that I should put on my calendar or be aware of? Are there administrative reviews coming up? If yes, what do you need from me to share about the child at that review?

Permanency Goals: What's the plan for permanency? Has it changed? What can you tell me about the long-range plan for this child?

ICWA/GAL: If the child is a tribal child or covered under ICWA, do you know who the tribe is and know how to contact the ICWA worker? If you are not ICWA preferred, is OCS looking for ICWA placement for the child? Do you know who the Guardian ad Litem is for the child and how to reach him or her?

Petey

Petey is a ten-year old boy in foster care moving toward an adoption plan with his current foster family. Petey experienced early trauma in his life including physical abuse, exposure to domestic violence and neglect. His mother binge drank during much of his early months of pregnancy until she was arrested and put into prison. Petey lived with his grandmother for much of his young life until she died of cancer and OCS placed him with the family who was in the process of adopting his younger sister. Petey has thrived under the care of his family and after testing, Petey has received a diagnosis of Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder in addition to signs of post-traumatic stress related to his early abuse. Petey doesn't have the facial features or small growth that is often seen in FASD but he is impulsive and has attention deficits as well as have sensory issues that affect his gross and fine motor skills. He seems to need more time than his peers to make a transition at school and he often gets distracted and antsy if he hasn't eaten in a while. In a recent incident, Petey was taking too long to get his math work done and after repeated requests from the teacher to focus on his work and complete it, she took his recess time away as a logical consequence saying he lost the privilege of going out to play. She told him he needed to stay in his seat and write a letter of apology before he could join the others for recess. After struggling with the effort to complete a single line, he got frustrated and ripped up the paper and threw it on the ground. The teacher was very upset and took away his recess privilege for the next day again as a consequence.

What might Petey need to be successful in school? How might the foster mother advocate for Petey?

Investigations of Complaints & Allegations Against Foster Homes:

Frequently Asked Questions

NOTE: These Frequently Asked Questions have been compiled by the Alaska Resource Family Advisory Board in cooperation with the State of Alaska Office of Children's Services and the Alaska Center for Resource Families

**IMMEDIATE CONCERNS****Why is this happening to me?**

Going through a Licensing and/or Child Protective Services investigation is a very difficult experience for a foster parent. You might be feeling anger, shame, embarrassment, and confusion. So take a deep breath, let yourself feel what you feel, and have a good cry if you need to. Then step back and remember this--- this investigation is not a judgment of your fostering—this investigation is about the safety and wellbeing of a child in your home. Don't take it to heart that you are being investigated—focus on the need to make sure the child is okay. As a foster parent, you are expected to cooperate so answer the questions and speak the truth. Remember that this process protects you too. If there is a complaint against you that is not true or misdirected, the investigation process sets out to discover that. Your best strategy is to answer questions truthfully and educate yourself on how the process works.

Why would someone make a report on me?

It is likely that someone made a report regarding children in your home because they had concerns for the safety of that child. This could have come from a mandated reporter such as a teacher or someone such as a neighbor who observed you with your child. Mandated reporters are legally bound to report any suspicions that a child might be experiencing harm. Or a child may say something to an adult that caused him or her to suspect a child may be unsafe.

At times a birth parent or relative to a child may make a report because they are frustrated that you are not providing care for their child the way they want you to. In some situations, a child or youth may be angry or upset with a foster parent and say things (true and untrue) to other adults that may cause concern for a child's safety.

All reports of possible harm to children are taken seriously. Possible reports of harm to children in foster care are also taken very seriously because the State of Alaska has a special responsibility for the safety of the children in their care.

Am I allowed to know who made that allegation?

No, the names of persons reporting harm to children are kept confidential. If you think you know who made the report, don't confront someone for making a report in good faith—something that person saw caused them to be concerned about a child and they made a report to the system that is set up to investigate these concerns.

Where do I find support? Where can I find information?

When there is an active investigation, you may find that workers at OCS are not very communicative. Even your licensing worker who might have been supportive up to now can't talk to you about the investigation. This can be frustrating but it is part of the investigation protocol so let the process unfold. If you have questions about the general process, you can call the Alaska Center for Resource Families to provide a listening ear or to share training material that will help you understand the process of investigation.

It also helps to find another foster parent who has been through an investigation before and can offer emotional support. Remember, *you are not alone*. Other foster parents have also gone through this process.

DURING AN INVESTIGATION

What is the difference between a licensing and a child protection investigation?

A **licensing investigation** looks into complaints of whether you have violated your responsibilities to follow the State of Alaska foster care regulations that guide the requirements you must meet to maintain a foster care license. Many licensing violations don't rise to the level of a child abuse act.

A **CPS (Child Protective Services) investigation** looks into complaints of whether you have committed any of the acts considered child maltreatment under Alaska Statute 47.17.

Joint Investigations: Sometimes these investigations are run concurrently. Sometimes licensing will wait for the CPS investigations to conclude before conducting their investigation. It is important to know that CPS Investigations look to the Alaska Statutes on Child Maltreatment for guidance to determine if maltreatment has occurred and Licensing looks to Foster Care Regulations guided by the Alaska Administrative Code to see if violations of licensing regulations has occurred. Each will produce a separate report even if there is a joint investigation.

Can I have someone else with me during the interview? Can I have a tribal representative with me during the interview?

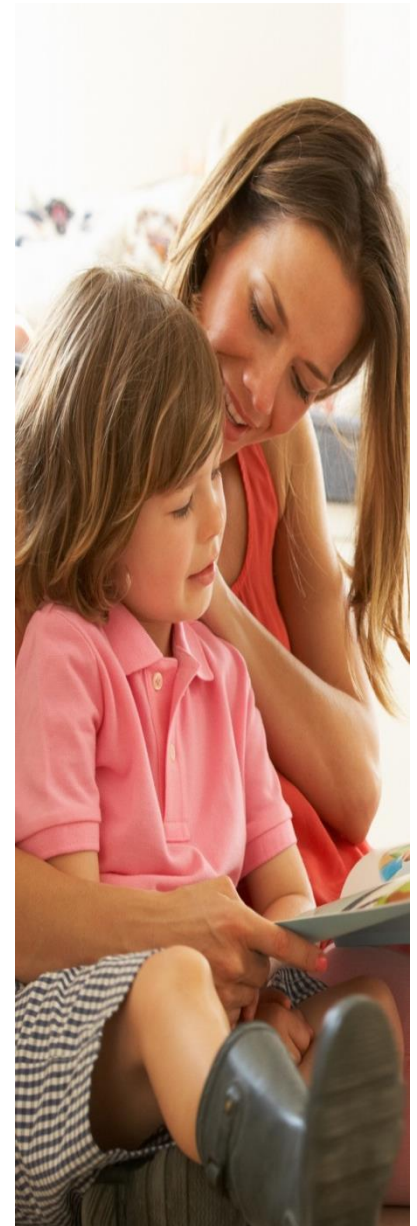
The short answer is yes. You can have a friend or a tribal representative or another foster parent with you during the investigations. You can also have a legal representative (though this not required or necessary.) But investigations may happen unannounced and you may not have time to notify them ahead of the visit. You can ask to take a pause before you meet with OCS representatives until your support person is able to be with you. Be aware that as a licensed foster parent, you are expected to cooperate with the investigation so eventually you need to talk with OCS and if OCS cannot guarantee the safety of children in their custody who may be in your home, they may choose to remove the children from your home until they can talk with you and determine that the children are safe remaining in your home.

How long will the investigation take?

- If the investigation includes a Child Protective Services investigation, the guideline is to have these completed within 60 days.
- If the investigation includes a foster care licensing allegation, the guideline is to prepare a report of the results of the investigations within 10 working days after the completion of the investigations. While there is not strict time limit on an investigation, the goal is to complete the investigations within 60 days.

Is it okay for OCS to interview my birth children as part of an investigation? Even at school?

It is standard policy of OCS that anyone who resides in the home is interviewed during an investigation. This includes your birth children. By OCS policy, children can be interviewed at school or other locations. You should be notified within 24 hours of your child being interviewed.



Should you talk with your kids about the investigations? Prepare your kids to talk to OCS staff by telling them to be cooperative and answer questions truthfully. Be careful not to coach your children by telling them what to say to investigators. Explain to them that OCS receives a report and they want their perspective to make sure everyone in the home is safe.

What are my rights as a foster parent?

You have the right to be treated with respect and if the investigation results in an action against your license or a substantiated protective services report, you have a right to appeal the judgment. Please see attached Resource Family Bill of Rights.

Am I held to a different standard than birth parents?

As a licensed foster parent, you are held to the standards outlined in the State of Alaska foster care regulations. Birth parents are not held to these standards because they are not licensed.

For child protection investigations, if the investigation concerns your birth children, you will be held to the same child protection statute that all Alaska parents must adhere to. If the allegation applies to your treatment of the foster children in your home, you will be held to a higher standard than birth parents. For example, CPS may choose to implement a safety plan with birth parents but will not do so for foster families.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT AT THE INVESTIGATION CONCLUSION?

How will I know the result of an investigation?

In both licensing and child protection investigations, you will receive a written notice of the result of the investigation. For a

licensing complaint, this is called a Report of Investigations which will list the complaint, the foster care regulation that it might violated and either a decision of “ finding” or “ no finding.” For a child protection report, this is called a Letter of Substantiation, and it will list the complaint and the result of the investigation and a decision or either substantiated or not substantiated. This written notice will also give you information or instructions if you have grounds for an appeal of the decision.

What happens if there is a finding in a licensing complaint against me?

- It will depend on the type and severity of the violation. OCS may ask for a voluntary plan of correction or may develop a plan of correction for you. OCS may use other avenues such as modifying your foster care license and restricting the number of children you can care for. In serious or extreme cases, OCS may also take an action against your license such as suspension or revocation of your license.
- All results of investigations (findings and no findings) will be included in your foster care licensing file.
- In cases where your license is suspended as a result, this information will be listed on the central registry and may impact your eligibility for future employment involving children or licensure.

What happens if a child maltreatment complaint is substantiated?

- If the complaint involved the foster children in your home, these children may be removed from your home.
- If the complaint involved your birth children, a CPS case could be opened for services with your family and in some situations your children could be removed.
- The substantiation of abuse will be listed on the central registry and may impact your eligibility for future employment involving children or licensure.



Is this a confidential process?

All licensing and CPS investigations follow the guidelines of confidentiality laid out in the Statutes, Regulations and OCS policies and procedures. Results of licensing investigation are placed in the foster care file, The foster care file is a public file but only the results are included in the file, not the investigation notes or interviews. OCS investigations files and records are confidential and are not public but are documented in the OCS information management system called ORCA.

Will I lose my foster care license?

Your foster care license, once granted, is considered a property right and you cannot not lose this right without the right to appeal. OCS licensing has many options available to assist you getting back in good standing including asking you to develop a plan of correction, developing a plan of correction for you, or adjusting the conditions on your license. There may be more severe actions against your license such as suspending your license or revoking your license permanently. Anytime there is an action against your license, you have the right to appeal and this process will be given to you in writing. You have 15 days from the time of notification of the action against your license to notify OCS in writing if you wish to appeal.

HOW DO I CARRY ON AFTER AN INVESTIGATION?

What if I want to appeal the decision? Do I need to get a lawyer?

- If there is a substantiated child abuse report, you will receive a letter stating the results of the investigations and given information about how to appeal the decision if you feel it is unfair or untrue. Follow the direction and note there is a time limitation of 15 days to respond. You always have the right to secure an attorney at your own expense if you wish but be aware that most appeals proceed without an attorney so it is not a requirement or necessity.
- If there is a substantiated licensing violation, you will receive a letter stating the results of the investigation and given information about how to appeal the decision if you feel it is unfair or untrue. Follow the direction and note there is a time limitation of 15 days to respond. You always have the right to secure an attorney at your own expense if you wish but be aware that most appeals proceed without an attorney so it is not a requirement or necessity.



If I want to talk to someone for more information, where can I go?

- You can always go to a licensing supervisor or manager to ask questions about the process or to give feedback about your experience. Likewise, in a child protective services investigation, you can always go to a supervisor or manager to ask questions.
- For ongoing support or for general information about the investigations process, contact your nearest office of the Alaska Center for Resource Families or call toll free 1-800-478-7307.
- The Resource Family Advisory Board is working on an initiative to support families going through an investigation so you are welcomed to reach out to your regional Board representative with ideas or for more information about their work.



This publication was developed as part of an initiative by the Resource Family Advisory Board to support families through the investigations process.

Know Who To Call

- Know the name of your licensing worker and the social worker assigned to the child in your home. Know how to reach them. Keep names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses in an easy to find place.
- In Anchorage and Fairbanks, every social worker belongs to an OCS unit led by a supervisor. Know who the worker's supervisor is in case of emergency. The Social Services Associate assigned to the unit can also be very helpful. Also, each day a Unit Coordinator is assigned to handle emergencies.
- Every resource parent should have the number of the OCS social worker for his or her child in care. Keep it in a handy place. Or call the main number and request to be connected to the person you are calling. You can also access the State Employee directory at www.state.ak.us for phone numbers and email addresses.

Calling On The Phone



- Try to call early (between 7:30 to 9 a.m.) before social workers are caught up in court and visits.
- If a social worker is not available, you will reach his or her voice mail. If you get voice mail, listen carefully to the message. It may tell you the social worker is on vacation or in training.
- Realize a social worker may not have time to chat over a long period of time. Be direct and precise in what you need so problems and concerns can be solved quickly.
- Leave a message! Be very specific. State the reason you are calling and give an idea of how urgent the message is. Indicate if you need to be called back and what time is a good time to call and indicate any deadline to receive the information needed. The more specific you are the better. Lots of time can be lost playing "phone tag" when a social worker could be using that time to work on your request.
- Realize social workers may not be able to call back the same day. Be patient! Social workers often have dozens of phone calls to return upon returning to the office. Do not leave more than one message the same day.
- Give the social worker a reasonable amount of time to return calls. Utilize the Unit Coordinator if it is an emergency and the social worker has not returned your call in a reasonable amount of time.
- *Voice mail is your friend!* Leave an update on the child just for information sharing so the social worker knows more about day-to-day issues. State your questions clearly so a social worker can call back if necessary. Speak clearly and leave your phone number so the social worker doesn't have to look it up.



Using E-mail

- E-mail is another option for contacting social workers with information. Social workers can often answer an email faster than return a phone call. If you have access to email, use it whenever possible.
- All social workers have an e-mail address. But talk to your workers about what they prefer. Some social workers don't use email as much as others. All state employees have the email address of **firstname.lastname@alaska.gov**.
- Just as in a phone call, be precise and clear about what you are asking for. Be brief and be patient for a reply.
- Emails can be printed and included in the child's file. So use it as a way to update the social worker on a child's progress. Indicate in your message that you are keeping the social worker up-to-date and that you don't need a reply. Be professional. More people than your social worker may see your communication.



THE LADDER OF COMMUNICATION

1. Contact the social worker first. Leave a clear message and a way to contact you. Allow a reasonable amount of time before calling again. Or try some of the suggestions given in the box to the right.
2. If you don't get a return call after leaving several messages, or if it is an emergency and you cannot wait for an answer, call the main number and ask for the Unit Coordinator for your social worker's unit.
3. If you still can't get what you need, contact the Unit Supervisor. (In some areas, the Unit Coordinator is the social worker on call for that day.)
4. If you still can't get what you need, contact the Staff Manager or call the reception desk and ask to talk to someone in person.

Who Do You Call With Questions?

Late Foster Care Payments

- Social Worker
- OCS State Provider Payments 1-877-465-2215

Problems With Medicaid Coupons

- Social Worker
- Social Services Associate
- In House Eligibility Techs

Clothing Vouchers?

- Social Services Associate
- Social Worker

Still Can't Get What You Need?

- Supervisors
- Staff Managers
- Children's Services Manager
- Unit Coordinators

Questions About Training?

- Alaska Center for Resource Families, 479-7307 in Fairbanks, 279-1799 in Anchorage or 1-800-478-7307
- www.acrf.org

