

SELF-STUDY COURSE

Boundaries in Foster Care Part 1: Boundaries in Your Role as a Foster Parent

This self-study was written by ACRF staff May 2025.

2.5 Training Hours

ITP Topic: Boundaries & Touch

This self-study is based on the following sources:

Professional Boundaries Aug 23, 2021 From **The Social Work Graduate**.

<https://www.thesocialworkgraduate.com/post/professional-boundaries>

Episode #69 *Setting Boundaries: The Tough Love Your Family Really Needs* **Modern Parenting Solutions Podcast**

<https://modernparentingsolutions.org/episode69/>

Resource Family Bill of Rights, State of Alaska Office of Children's Services Publications

<https://dfcs.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/FosterCare/FP-BillOfRights.pdf>

Alaska Resource Family Handbook, State of Alaska Office of Children's Services Publications

<http://dpaweb.hss.state.ak.us/training/OCS/rfh/>

Maintaining Boundaries Publication from the Child Welfare League of America *Publication*

This self-study course was developed by Aileen M. McInnis for the Alaska Center for Resource Families.



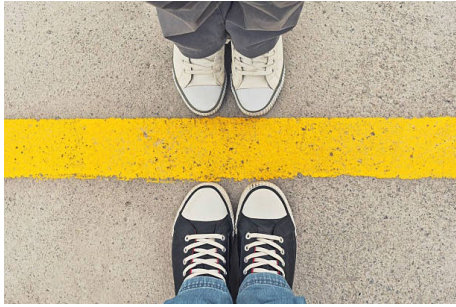
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"Boundaries in Foster Care" was written by the Alaska Center for Resource Families
for the State of Alaska, DCFS, OCS, May 2025.



Boundaries In Foster Care

Part One Boundaries in Your Role as a Foster Parent

NOTE: **Boundaries in Foster Care** is a two-part series. **Part One: Boundaries in Your Role as a Foster Parent** explores professional boundaries and working with the Office of Children's Services, the birth parent, and with other professionals. **Part Two: Maintaining Boundaries in Your Foster Home** focuses on what happens in the home and explore setting boundaries in the family.

What are the Professional Boundaries for Foster Parents?

Professional boundaries are the *ethical, legal, and organizational limits that define the appropriate nature of interactions between a professional and the person they serve*. For a foster parent, these boundaries focus on the relationships you have with the Office of Children's Services (usually represented by the caseworker or the licensing worker), the birth parents, other community professions such as the therapist, the Guardian ad Litem or the medical provider.

Boundaries exists to keep ourselves safe and healthy functioning well. They also exist so that we respect others and allow them to be safe, healthy and functioning well. How do these boundaries show up foster care? Respecting and establishing boundaries for foster parent include:

- **Understanding your role and expectations and clearly communicating information in your interactions with others.** Being a foster parent has some responsibilities and roles—educate yourself on what is expected of you. Learn to communicate and work with others in a team setting.
- **Maintaining confidentiality.** Protecting the privacy and sensitive information of children and their families.
- **Maintaining a professional distance.** Being careful of maintaining boundaries and not blurring the line of friend vs. helper with birth families and children. Refraining from oversharing personal information or becoming enmeshed with the birth family or child.
- **Acting in a professional manner to respect the other members of your team.** Always treating others on your team the way you want them to treat you despite disagreements or strong feelings.

BOUNDARIES EXIST TO:

Guide our behavior to keep ourselves safe, healthy and functioning well.

Guide our behavior to keep others safe, healthy and functioning well.

Let’s look at specific situations and how to establish and maintain good boundaries. We will explore professional boundaries in four areas

- Confidentiality
- Working with the Office of Children’s Services
- Working With Birth Parents
- Establishing Boundaries for Your Own Family

Maintaining Confidentiality

As a resource family, you have access about children and their families that is confidential by policy and by law. You that confidentiality and protect the child in your care.



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CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION	EXPECTATIONS	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Resource families are required to maintain the confidentiality of information regarding children in their homes and birth parents.</i>	You often have very personal information about children and their families. The same state and federal confidentiality laws that OCS caseworkers must follow also apply to you as a foster parent.	• Share information on a need-to-know basis with those who are caring for your foster child (such as in a school setting, therapy, or medical situation.). • Information should not be shared with relatives, neighbors, or other foster parents. • Avoid identifying children as “my foster child” whenever possible. Just refer to them as “my kids.” • Be mindful of talking to caseworkers on the phone in public places such as grocery stores and doctor’s offices where others can easily hear your conversation.

POSTING ON SOCIAL MEDIA	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Resource parents who use social networking sites must never include the names, any personal information, or any identifying information about children in the custody of the State in information they post.</i>	Information sharing on social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat) should never include details about what brought the child into care or any current situations that are happening in the resource family home or the birth family home. Be aware of inadvertently sharing information such as in small communities or pictures of children in recognizable places. Take special care in posting photos of the child for risk of identifying the child by sight. Alaska is a small state! Consult caseworker before information is being shared directly with birth parents on social media.	• Be aware that any posting of any information or photo on social media can be copied and shared (even when you engage privacy settings.) Be aware that photos can also have identifying tags. Be very restrictive of who has access to information about your children. • Be mindful that you are sharing information of a child that may live on for a long time in the digital world. Be respectful, ask permission for older children. • If you seek support in social media settings (such as a Facebook group), you should not include any specifics to the case or references to birth family or identifying information about the child. Participating in a private group does not give you permission to break confidentiality. • Avoid posting photos with any type of identifying information (identifiable locations, your house in the background, your child's school name/mascot). • When posting on social media, stay professional and avoid trashing or name-calling specific team members or OCS staff.

Working with the Office of Children’s Services

Foster parents work with other team members in child welfare. Maintaining and respecting boundaries makes the work go smoother. The suggestions below offer guidelines for honoring boundaries for yourself and for your team members



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BE RESPECTFUL OF TIME	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Respect other people’s time and clearly communicate your own time needs.</i>	Caseworkers oversee multiple cases. Families have many obligations. Honoring each other’s time allows everyone to focus on doing their job.	• Keep messages short and to the point. Put your request near the beginning of the voice mail, text or email. If you left a message, do not call back or text multiple times in one day. • Be efficient. Make a list of all you need to talk about on a home visit. Learn how to write a short effective email or leave a good voice mail. • Being ready and prepared for home visits. • Communicate times of what works for you and what doesn’t so visits don’t need to be rescheduled. Be clear but also try to be flexible with scheduling when possible.

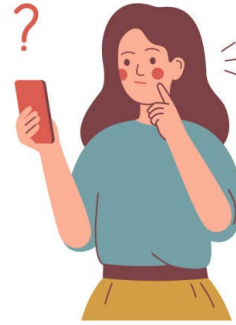
BE RESPECTFUL OF YOUR TEAM MEMBERS	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Show respect to all team members even when you disagree or have strong feelings about a situation.</i>	Understand that everyone has an important role to play. Be respectful in your tone and understand your limits in making case decisions. Address concerns or inactions firmly and use the chain of command when needed.	• Treat others and talk about others the same way you want them to treat and talk about you. • Avoid a “winner-take-all” or a “guns-a-blazing” approach to destroy someone you disagree with by gossiping, name-calling, or trash talking. • Learn not to take things personally. Separate the role from the person. Try to understand the situation from the other’s point of view.

USE THE CHAIN OF COMMAND	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Foster parents who are having trouble with a caseworker, are unsatisfied with what is happening, or are not getting what they need should use “the chain of command.”</i>	All OCS employees have a supervisor. It is encouraged to use the chain of who has authority over who and start at the source then work up. That is more effective and can often get the problem solved. Going to the top (such as the Director or the Commissioner) is not the most effective strategy if you truly want to advocate for a child.	• Avoid the “either-or” approach. (Either suffering in silence and quitting, or rage into the situation seeking to get someone in trouble.) Be a firm but fair advocate for your child. Focus on facts, what happened, and what should have happened instead of blaming, shaming and putting down. • Always address the issue first with the caseworker. If that is not working, make sure you know the caseworker’s supervisor’s name and the staff manager’s name and contact information.

CASEPLANNING AND PERMANENCY GOALS	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Foster parents are a valuable team member but are not legal parties to the case and are limited in their decision-making.</i>	As a foster parent, you are a member of the team, but you are not a legal party to the case. That means you have important information to share and you have a responsibility to advocate for the child, but you are limited in making the final decisions in the case or determining the permanency plan or placement of the child. Foster parents should not be making case plan actions without OCS knowledge or approval.	• Understand what a “legal party” is and seek ways to give your information to the team to assist in making good decisions for the child. • All placement decisions need to be made by OCS, not by foster parents. Finding possible placements for children can help with recruitment, but OCS makes the final decisions and must abide by their policies of tribal and relative preferences for placement. • Don’t sabotage or ignore case planning. Advocate for the child in your home respectfully. Follow through with your obligations and be honest and transparent.

Working with Birth Parents

Foster parents are increasingly encouraged to work with birth parents for the best situation for the child. help keep roles clear and help protect your family.



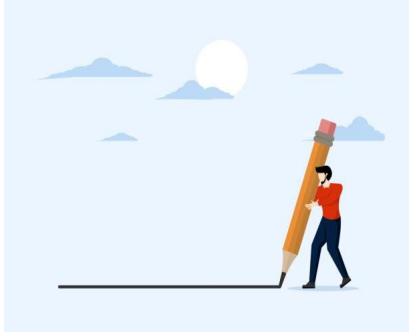
with birth
Boundaries

FOLLOW THE FAMILY CONTACT PLAN	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Resource families are expected to understand and to follow the family contact plan.</i>	Foster families are expected to understand and to follow the family contact plan. Birth families are also expected to follow that plan. Find a balance between being supportive of family contact but maintaining boundaries as needed. The family contact plan should be shared with you in writing.	• Get a copy of the family contact plan in writing or document the verbal instructions given to you. • Visits don't have to happen in your home. You may choose to have a dedicated phone or not share your regular phone number. • Help prepare a child and get them to visits on time. Don't make a child afraid to go on a visit or say negative things about contact with his family. • Use the contact plan to set boundaries with the birth parent. Be polite and respectful but be firm. You have a right to set a limit if a birth parent is not following the plan such as demanding more visits, bringing unauthorized folks to the visit, or calling outside of agreed hours. • Refer the parent to worker or talk with the worker if the parent is not following or wants a change in the plan.

YOUR ROLE WITH THE FOSTER CHILD	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Be respectful in your language and communication with the child.</i>	Your foster home should be a healing place for a child. You should develop a home environment based on trauma informed practices.	• See Part Two of this series for an in depth look at <i>Maintaining Boundaries in Your Foster Home</i>.

<i>Your role as a foster parent is to provide a safe, temporary placement for a child in care.</i>	Set good boundaries between you and your foster child. Be respectful of your role as a temporary placement and help a child understand that role. Follow the licensing regulations and the Alaska Resource Family handbook to make sure that children are safe, they are taken care of physically and emotionally, and they have contact with their family.	• Do not use your foster child as your personal confidante or as a servant to take care of you. • Do not pump a child for information about their birth parent or sharing information about birth parents with your friends. • Do not force a child to call you Mom or Dad or tell them that you are going to adopt them if that is not the plan decided upon by OCS. • Do not trash talk birth parents in front of the child. Stay neutral and matter of fact.
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BOUNDARIES WITH THE BIRTH PARENT	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Be respectful in your words and communication with a birth parent.</i>	When possible, you are encouraged to have a relationship with a birth parent in order to better meet the child's needs. You should treat the birth parent with respect.	• Avoid name-calling, arguing or non-verbal actions that shame a birth parent. Be professional in your communication. • Foster parents should be mindful of their language at home and not say negative things about a child's parents, extended family members, race, national origins or culture.
<i>The foster parent role is as a support and a parent to the child, and not as a friend.</i>	It is important to keep professional boundaries with birth parents for both their protection and your safety. Those boundaries include a clear understanding of your role as a safe place for the child and an understanding of an appropriate relationship between a foster parent and a birth parent.	• Birth parents should not be living in the same home as a child in foster care. • Avoiding giving money or services outside of the case plan. • Avoid oversharing or blurred boundaries (are you my friend or my child's foster parent?) Do not use a birth parent as a confidante or share gossip. • Do not take advantage of your relationship to pressure birth parents to give up their child so you can adopt them.



Establishing Boundaries for Your Family

Know what your rights are and keep good boundaries for your family while meeting your expectations as a foster parent

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY TIME	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Always take into consideration the health and well-being of your whole family and make decisions accordingly.</i>	You need to attend to your own family's needs as well and not feel bad in doing so. You are the only one who will set these boundaries for your family.	• Develop a good support system and reach out to others to help you. • Ask for help from your worker for assistance for transportation if you experience conflicts. Say no to extra requests when needed.

ASK QUESTIONS AT TIME OF PLACEMENT REQUEST	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Ask questions at the time of placement and say no if a placement will not work for your family.</i>	You have the right to refuse a placement if that placement will not work in your home or if you need to take a break. You have a responsibility to say no if taking that child will put your home over the licensing capacity of your home.	• Develop a list of questions (refer to the Handbook for suggestions) that you ask when contacted for a placement. • Think about the impact on your family when taking a placement and talk to them as well when taking a placement. • Know your license capacity and say no if the placement puts over capacity or talk to your licensing worker about a variance.

TEND TO SELF CARE AND YOUR FAMILY	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Foster care is demanding work, and the child welfare system can be really hard on families.</i>	This system is not very good at encouraging self-care in foster families. When there is a desperate need for finding a placement, foster families are left to set their own limits. Self-care and tending to your family's needs are left up to you to figure out. Plan ahead and know where	• Think about how you take care of yourself physically (taking care of your health, exercise, eating, sleeping) and emotionally (have people to talk to, monitoring and tending to your feelings and stress level.) If you don't have a plan of self-care, develop one.

	your limits are.	• Make it a point to tend to your family’s needs and don’t let your children’s moments pass you by. Take time to focus in on them (both foster and birth children) and be there for school, play and making memories. • Take breaks when you need them. These might be big breaks-- between placements— or little ones—stopping to get a special coffee during the day or browse in a store without kids.
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KNOW YOUR RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES	EXPECTATION	MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES
<i>Resource families have rights when working with the Office of Children’s Services.</i>	These rights are listed out in the Resource Family Bill of Rights and all foster parents should be aware of them. You can find the Bill of Rights online at the State of Alaska OCS Publications page or at https://dfcs.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/FosterCare/FP-BillOfRights.pdf The Resource Family Handbook is also an important reference for finding out what a foster family’s responsibility it and what is expected of them. You can find the Handbook on line on the State of Alaska OCS Publications page or at http://dpaweb.hss.state.ak.us/training/OCS/rfh/	• Read through the resource Family Bill of Rights in this self-study or online and learn about your rights. • Get a copy of the Alaska Resource Family Handbook or locate it online and familiarize yourself with its content. • Use both in your practice and when advocating for yourself or setting limits with OCS.

The Alaska Resource Family Bill of Rights

<https://dfcs.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/FosterCare/FP-BillOfRights.pdf>

RESPECT Resource families can expect to be treated with respect when interacting with staff of the State of Alaska Office of Children's Services and be included in discussions about the child prior to case planning, administrative reviews, TDMs and court hearings. CPS 1.3	OPTIONS Resource families have the right to decide whether to accept placement of a child into their foster home. Resource families have the right to set a limit to the number of children that can be placed in their foster home within legal and licensing capacity. CPS 3.5, AS 47.14.100	RELIGION Resource families have a right to practice their religion and spiritual practices in their home as long as the religious and spiritual practices of the child's birth family are also respected. CPS 6.5.4, 7 AAC 67.230	PRIVACY Resource families have the right to work with the caseworker on how family contact will be maintained in the home. Resource families will make the decision on what contact information will be provided to the parents/caregivers and the decision to allow birth family visits in the home. CPS 6.5.6	INVOLVEMENT Resource families have a right to receive notice of court hearings involving a child placed in their home. CPS 6.6.3, AS 47.10.030
FAIR HEARING Resource families have the right to a fair hearing on licensure actions on their home including access to an appeal process if given a plan of correction or if a license is revoked. Resource families have a right to include a written response to a completed investigation despite the outcome to be included in the foster care licensing file. CPS 1.16, AS 47.10.098	INFORMATION Resource families have a right to receive known information on each child who is to be placed in the foster home including educational, medical and behavioral information including the strengths and needs of the child. CPS 3.5, AS 47.14.100	NOTICE Resource families have a right to have notice of a placement change of a child in their home under non-emergency conditions and have a right to challenge a placement change under non-emergency conditions. CPS 2.11, 1.16, AS 47.10.098	TRAINING Resource Families have the right to request training for foster children in their care. An individualize training plan (ITP) will be developed with the foster parent(s). The training plan is designed to strengthen the foster parent's ability to meet the needs of the children in care. 7 AAC 67.130	
COMMUNICATION Resource families can expect regular visits from the child's caseworker to exchange information, plan together, and discuss any concerns about the child. CPS 3.2.1	PERMISSIONS Resource families have the right to sign for permissions for every day events (as long as they don't go against regulations or statute) using a reasonable and prudent parent standard to decide based on the child's age and developmental level about child and youth participation in cultural, extra-curricular, social, and enrichment activities. CPS 6.5.4, 7 AAC 67.200	GRIEVANCE Resource families have the right to use the grievance procedure established by the Office of Children's Services to make their concerns known without the fear of reprisal. CPS 1.16AS 47.10.098	DISCLOSURE Resource families moving towards adoption of a foster child have the right to full disclosure information regarding the child before the finalization of the child's adoption. CPS 3.15.5	PLACEMENT Resource Families have the right to request a change in placement of a child from their home. Resource Families shall provide notice to the child's caseworker at least 14 calendar days in advance when requesting placement change of a child except when the health or safety of a household would be endangered by the child's continued placement. CPS 3.7.1, 7 AAC 67.150

It is unclear who wrote “The Rules of the Road” but these rules summarize this section on boundaries perfectly. These are great guidelines to guiding and maintaining boundaries as a foster parent, whether dealing with your kids, other foster parents or social workers. Use these phrases as mantras or self-talk in guiding your interactions with others. Make them part of your family and your personal way of relating with people in your life.

The Rules of the Road

1. Go to the source.
2. Own your part of the issue.
3. Use “I” statements.
4. Hold no grudges.
5. Show respect—on an individual, professional, and team level.
6. Deal in the present.
7. Show basic courtesy.
8. Invest in each other (provide support).
9. Respect differences.
10. Be an active listener. Acknowledge others’ thoughts and feelings.
11. If it doesn’t work, say so.
12. No reprisals or “Gotcha’s!”
13. Be authentic.
14. Don’t take everything personally.
15. It’s okay to take care of self and set limits with others.
16. Honor confidentiality.
17. No gossiping or feeding into rumors.

ALASKA CENTER FOR RESOURCE FAMILIES SELF-STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FOSTER PARENTS

ITP Topic: Boundaries & Touch

COURSE: BOUNDARIES IN FOSTER CARE, PART 1: BOUNDARIES IN YOUR ROLE AS A FOSTER PARENT

2.5 TRAINING CREDITS

Please read the above entitled self-study. Then complete the questionnaire found on the following pages. Try answering the questions first from your understanding of the material before referring back to the course. These questions pertain specifically to the course which you have read.

After you have answered all the questions, please **send your completed questionnaire to the Alaska Center for Resource Families, 3429 Airport Way, Suite 202A, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709**. We will score your answers and credit your training record with 2.5 training credits. A score of 70% correct or better will entitle you to receive the training credit. In the event your score is less than 70% correct, we will contact you to determine if you wish to review the material and retake the questionnaire.

If you have questions or concerns about this self-study course, please call us on our toll-free line at 1-800-478-7307 Fairbanks. Anchorage: 279-1799.

The following section is an evaluation of the self-study materials. Please fill it out upon completion of the questionnaire and return this page to us with the rest of the course materials. Thank you for your time and comments. It helps us provide appropriate training to meet the needs of foster parents.

*******EVALUATION OF SELF-STUDY MATERIALS*******

Please complete the following questions.

1. Did this self-study course meet with your expectations? ____YES ____NO
2. How would you rate the written presentation of information on the topic?
____Excellent ____Good ____Fair ____Poor
3. Did this course add to your knowledge and/or skills? ____YES ____NO
4. Comments/Concerns:

Boundaries in Foster Care PT 1: Boundaries in Your Role as a Foster Parent**2.5 Credits****NAME:** _____ **PHONE NO.:** _____*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.***ADDRESS:** _____
*Street or Post Office City/State Zip***EMAIL:** _____

☐ **YES! I would like to receive ACRF email.** *(Includes Training Tracks Newsletter, training reminders and community events or training of interest for resource families)*

Are you a foster parent? ☐ YES ☐ NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: _____If NO, please check one: ☐ Pending Foster Parent ☐ OCS ☐ Birth Parent ☐ Adoptive Parent☐ Residential Treatment Facility (License #: _____) ☐ Agency: _____☐ Other *(please specify)*: _____**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

Check or fill in the appropriate answer to the following questions. Try filling out the questionnaire first from what you remember from the self-study course. Then review the reading if necessary.

1. What are the two reasons that boundaries exist? (FILL IN THE BLANKS)

To guide our behavior to keep _____ safe, healthy and functioning well.

To guide our behavior to keep _____ safe, healthy and functioning well.

2. The same state and federal confidentiality laws that OCS caseworkers have to follow also apply to foster parents.

- ____ a. TRUE
____ b. FALSE

3. It is okay to post pictures and information about your foster child on your social media page as long as your settings are set to private.

- ____ a. TRUE
____ b. FALSE

4. Foster parents are a legal party to the case of a child and have full decision-making authority.

- ____ a. TRUE
____ b. FALSE

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

PAGE 2 – BOUNDARIES IN FOSTER CARE, PART ONE

5. What is one action you can take to be respectful of a caseworker's time?
6. What is meant by using the "chain of command"?
- ☐ a. Immediately calling the OCS Director with your complaint
 - ☐ b. Talk to a fellow foster parent about what to do
 - ☐ c. Writing a letter to the Governor and your legislator
 - ☐ d. Starting with the caseworker and working your way up
7. Resource families should get a copy of the family contact plan in writing or document the verbal instructions given to them.
- ☐ a. TRUE
 - ☐ b. FALSE
8. What are the two (2) written resources that were mentioned in this self-study that foster parents can use to help understand what is expected of them and what they can expect from OCS?
- a. _____
- b. _____
9. It is acceptable for a foster parent to loan a birth parent money if the money gets paid back.
- ☐ a. TRUE
 - ☐ b. FALSE
10. All visits between birth parent and child should take place in the foster parent's home.
- ☐ a. TRUE
 - ☐ b. FALSE

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

PAGE 3 – BOUNDARIES IN FOSTER CARE, PART ONE

11. It is your responsibility to say “no” to accepting a placement will put your home over the licensing capacity of your home.

- ☐ a. TRUE
☐ b. FALSE

12. Name two (2) of your rights as a foster parent that are listed in the Resource Family Bill of Rights.

a. _____

b. _____

FOR SCORING AND TRAINING CREDIT OF 2.5 CREDITS, RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO:

**Alaska Center for Resource Families
3429 Airport Way, STE 202A
Fairbanks, AK 99709**

OR FAX TO: 1-907-290-8765

ALASKA CENTER FOR RESOURCE FAMILIES SELF-STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FOSTER PARENTS

ITP Topic: Boundaries & Touch

COURSE: BOUNDARIES IN FOSTER CARE, PART 1: BOUNDARIES IN YOUR ROLE AS A FOSTER PARENT

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☐ Residential Treatment Facility (License #: _____) ☐ Agency: _____

☐ Other *(please specify)*: _____

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 - ☐ b. FALSE

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

PAGE 3 – BOUNDARIES IN FOSTER CARE, PART ONE

11. It is your responsibility to say “no” to accepting a placement will put your home over the licensing capacity of your home.

- ☐ a. TRUE
☐ b. FALSE

12. Name two (2) of your rights as a foster parent that are listed in the Resource Family Bill of Rights.

a. _____

b. _____

FOR SCORING AND TRAINING CREDIT OF 2.5 CREDITS, RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO:

**Alaska Center for Resource Families
3429 Airport Way, STE 202A
Fairbanks, AK 99709**

OR FAX TO: 1-907-290-8765