

FOSTER CARE PRACTICE

First Few Days

Foster Families should provide special care and attention to the child/youth on arrival into the foster family home and for some time thereafter.

The child/youth may have just been removed from a familiar home situation to the unfamiliar foster home. Circumstances of the child/youth's removal from their former living situation may have a profound impact on the child/youth who may have experienced trauma, which may or may not be known at the time of placement. The behaviors of the child/youth may not be predictable. Careful observation, patience, understanding, consistency, and simplicity are essential.

Daily Routines

The foster family should follow regular daily routines to help the child/youth feel secure and obtain a sense of predictability.

These may include morning and bedtime routines and regular family meal times. Some flexibility is desirable as well. Therefore, the foster family should strive to find a balance between absolute strict adherence to schedules and the chaos of the absence of routines, which causes confusion and disorder. Regular daily routines of the foster family may need to be altered to meet the needs, age, health, level of development and previous experiences of the child/youth. The foster family should attempt to incorporate some of the child/youth's preferred routines into the foster family's regular routines, where these are consistent with and non-disruptive to the foster family's regular practices.

House Rules

Foster families should, at the time of placement, inform the child/youth of all house rules and consequences for non-conformance.

House rules and consequences should be developed or negotiated with age, level of development and maturity of the child/youth. The consequences for violation of health and safety rules should be agreed upon and noted in the child/youth's plan of care.

In general, the foster family may expect the child/youth to abide by house rules that are reasonable, age-appropriate and developed in the child/youth's and foster family's best interests to ensure health and safety. House rules may include rules such as those governing curfew and bedtime, privacy and bedroom visits, suitable and appropriate clothing, nutrition and meal time, personal hygiene and health care, school attendance, physical violence, substance abuse, damage to property and transportation.

Meals and Nutrition

The foster family should ensure that the child/youth is provided with a healthy, balanced diet at regular meal times and should help the child/youth learn nutritional eating habits. Canada's Food Guide, which is available from Health Canada, is the most commonly used guide to healthy and nutritious eating.

Foster families should obtain information on any dietary restrictions, allergies, eating disorders, food preferences or food specific behaviors of the child/youth. Foster families should respect ethno-cultural observances or religious affiliations when planning meals for the child or youth.

Personal Hygiene

Foster families should ensure that every attempt is made to help the child/youth learn grooming habits, which include regular bathing, tooth and hair brushing, and hygienic toileting practices.

A toothbrush, a hairbrush, clothing, and other hygiene items should be provided for each child/youth. Personal hygiene, clean clothing and regular grooming are important elements of a healthy development and positive self-image. Foster families should help the child or youth deal with related issues such as physical growth and maturation, bodily functions, and sexual development, and should become aware of safeguarding measures to prevent abuse allegations.

Medical, Dental, and Health Care

The foster family should become aware of the medical, dental, and health care history and any special needs of the child/youth.

This information should be provided by child and family services to the foster family at placement, or as soon as the information is known. The child/youth should undergo a medical examination at the time of placement. The foster family, with child and family services support, has the responsibility to ensure that the medical, dental or special health needs of the child/youth are met. These may include any allergies, medication requirements, dental work or any known physical conditions, disabilities or communicable diseases. Medic Alert tags should be provided by child and family services and worn by the child/youth when appropriate.

A first aid kit should always be kept in the home in case of accident and all members of the household should know of its whereabouts and how to use it. A list of emergency telephone numbers should be kept near the telephone at all times. All foster parents should be encouraged to take training for emergencies and obtain a certificate in first aid/CPR. Such training is provided by organizations such as St. John Ambulance and the Canadian Red Cross.

Foster families should ensure that the child/youth receives regular and preventative medical attention, including immunization, annual physical check-ups, eye examinations, semi-annual dental check-ups and care, and any medical attention necessary when the child/youth becomes ill.

Clothing

Foster families should ensure that the child/youth has sufficient clothing that is appropriate for the season and the child/youth's age, size, and activities.

Foster families should request a list of clothing that is paid for by child and family services and should guide the child/youth in selection of daily clothing and with the purchase of new clothing. Consideration should be given to the child/youth's preferences in style of dress. The foster family should encourage youth to shop for and purchase their own clothing within the allowable budget.

Personal Belongings and Space

Foster families should attempt to ensure that the child/youth is able to retain and preserve any personal belongings of importance to child/youth.

Any restrictions on personal belongings should be limited to the safety of the item for the child/youth and family members, its use and size and any health risk the item may present.

Foster families should request information on relevant legislation and child and family services policies regarding dangerous and illegal items or substances. Foster families should not allow the child/youth to possess illegal or dangerous items or substances.

Foster families should ensure that each child/youth has personal space. The child/youth should be encouraged to decorate this room or area themselves, providing it does not cause damage to the property, and be encouraged to use/keep familiar personal items that make the space comfortable. The child/youth's space should be a safe place and the child/youth's right of privacy should be respected, with exceptions in cases of suspected risk of harm to the child/youth, other family members or the household.

Privacy

The foster family should respect each family member's right to privacy, which includes: uncensored mail and telephone calls, unless otherwise stated in plan of care or mandated by the courts; a private place to practice hygiene, toileting and grooming activities; and the child/youth's personal space and belongings, unless there is a risk of harm to the child/youth or other family members or unless otherwise stated in the plan of care.

All members of the foster family are entitled to the same rights.

Substance Abuse

The foster family should make all efforts to ensure that substance abuse of any kind by any member of the household does not occur.

This includes the use of illegal substances such as drugs or chemical inhalants and the abuse of legal substances, such as prescription and non prescription drugs and alcohol. No illegal substances should be used by any member of the household. Provincial/territorial laws should be obeyed (e.g., age of majority/legal drinking age; legal age for purchasing cigarettes, etc.).

Discipline

Foster families should never use corporal punishment to discipline children/youth.

Corporal punishment includes: slapping, hitting, punching, shaking, pushing, shoving, pinching, strapping, spanking, poking, paddling, belting, beating, hair-pulling, ear-pulling or any other pain-causing behavior.

Foster families should use acceptable forms of disciplining, such as:

- Discussion with the child/youth regarding the undesirability or inappropriateness of the behavior and the value of choosing appropriate alternate behaviors
- Negotiation and problem-solving
- Positive reinforcement, praise and use of rewards
- Positive role modeling
- Routines and limits
- Clear and consistent expectations and follow-through
- Prompting, redirecting, distracting or diffusing
- Verbal disapproval that does not shame or degrade
- Logical or natural consequences
- Withholding or granting privileges
- Time-limited grounding
- Time-limited time-outs
- Ignoring or distancing yourself from the undesirable behavior

Unacceptable forms of discipline include:

- Corporal punishment, including: slapping, hitting, punching, shaking, pushing, shoving, pinching, strapping, spanking, poking, paddling, belting, beating, hair-pulling, ear-pulling, or any other pain-causing behavior.
- Forcing a child or youth to take an uncomfortable or degrading position
- Deprivation of basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, bedding, sleep, or washroom facilities
- Harsh or degrading responses or taunting or demeaning remarks
- Using or threatening to use force to intimidate a child or youth
- Excessively strenuous physical tasks of a meaningless nature
- Placing or keeping the child/youth in a locked room (i.e. isolation)
- Refusal to communicate for an excessive period of time with the child/youth
- The threat to withdraw love or acceptance of the child/youth
- The threat to remove the child/youth from the foster family home (It is recognized that children or youth may engage in behavior that is not tolerated in the home. Plans for serious consequences, such as, removal from the home, should be discussed with child/youth and child family service worker.)
- The threat to deny family contact
- The use of restraining devices, such as hand cuffs, rope or chains
- Destruction of the child/youth's property/belongings

Research on the effects of physical punishment on children has demonstrated a variety of negative results, including increased aggression during childhood and violence's as adults. There is also sufficient evidence to suggest that physical punishment is ultimately ineffective as a method for changing a child/youths behavior. It does, however, teach children and youth that hitting is the way to solve problems.

However, “discipline” can teach children and youth positive problem-solving skills and acceptable and appropriate behaviors. Discipline is a necessary part of parent-child/youth relationships. “To discipline” means to teach and guide a child toward desirable and acceptable behaviors. The goal of disciplining is to help the child/youth internalize the value and desirability of certain behaviors and to develop self-confidence and a sense of self-restraint.

Ethno-cultural Practices and

Foster families should promote the ethno-cultural identity of the child or youth by helping them learn about and understand their ethno-cultural history, traditions, language, practices, food and religion or spiritual beliefs, whether or not the foster family shares the same ethno-cultural origin as the child/youth.

Ideally, children and youth are placed in a family that shares the same ethno-cultural origin. Ethno-cultural heritage is an important part of the child/youths identity. The child/youth should be provided with the opportunity to participate in ethno-cultural activities and become actively involved with the ethno-cultural community. The child/youth should be made to feel that the ethnicity/culture of the child/youth is respected and accepted and is an important and positive part of the child/youth’s identity.

Religious/Spiritual Beliefs

The foster family should respect the religious or spiritual beliefs and preferences of the child/youth and the child/youth’s family.

Foster families should encourage the child/youth to participate in religious/spiritual activities that may have therapeutic value for the child/youth, according to the plan of care. If the child/youth was previously affiliated with a religious group, the opportunity to participate in the religious ceremonies and practices of child/youth’s family should be provided and should be stated in the plan of care. It should be the child/youth’s choice whether or not to participate in religious activities and events. If the child/youth does not have a religious background, observance of the foster families religion should be voluntary.

Recreation and Leisure

Foster families should collaborate with the child and family services worker and others involved in the plan of care to develop an appropriate recreation plan for the child/youth.

Play is an important part of a child/youth’s development. It provides and opportunity to express individual creativity and initiative and helps foster the development of physical, social, emotional and intellectual skills.

The foster family should encourage the child/youth to play both indoors and outdoors in safe, stimulating environments. The child/youth should have the opportunity to play alone and with other children/youth, in both structured and spontaneous play opportunities, with adequate supervision where necessary. Foster families should ensure that the child/youth has sufficient age-appropriate toys. Pets can also present play opportunities and can contribute to a child/youth’s development.

Foster families should encourage the child or youth to continue participation in any activities, classes, clubs, or interest groups in which the child or youth was involved prior to placement. The child/youth should also be encouraged to engage in other activities that are of interest to the child/youth, such as sports, music or art classes, peer group organizations and ethno-cultural

activities. The child or youth should be able to make informed choices about participation in recreation and leisure activities and should be made aware of the likelihood/possibility of continuing the activities if/when the child/youth moves out of the foster home. It is also important for the child or youth to participate in recreational or leisure activities with the foster family to promote cooperation and a sense of belonging. Recreations and leisure activities have therapeutic value for foster children/youth.

Education

Foster families should obtain from child and family services information on the child/youth's educational history, assessments and achievements.

An education plan for the child/youth should be part of the plan of care, which is developed by the foster care team. Foster families should advocate on behalf of the child or youth and offer encouragement and support to obtain the maximum level of formal education that the child/youth is capable of attaining. The child/youth should be provided with educational supports such as a quiet space and time at home in which to do homework; any educational supplies or special materials necessary to do homework or study; a tutor or tutoring classes if necessary or beneficial to the child/youth; and career counseling for the adolescent. A child or youth with special needs should be provided with any assistance or items necessary to enable learning and to achieve educational goals (e.g., individual tutors, special classes, hearing aid, eyeglasses, wheel chair, computer, etc.)

Foster families should monitor the child/youths educational progress through regular contact with teachers and in collaboration with the child and family services worker and the child/youths family, where appropriate. If the child/youth has special requirements to obtain educational goals, these should be addressed in the plan of care.

Daily Chores and Additional Responsibilities

Foster families should encourage the child or youth in care to participate in all aspects of family living.

Participation in regular household routines provides the opportunity for the child or youth to learn new skills, prepare for independence and obtain an understanding of the purpose and value of work and feel like a member of the household. Foster families should assign the child/youth daily or weekly chores in accordance with the child/youth's ability, age, health, and level of development and in relation to the participation of other family members in daily or weekly chore routines. The child/youth should be given the opportunity to choose, whenever possible, between chores so that they have the opportunity to become familiar with a variety of tasks and activities.

The foster family should not require or expect the child or youth to take on additional responsibilities related to the care and functioning of the household or family members. Responsibilities such as babysitting or attending to the needs of younger children/youth in the family are the responsibility of the foster parents, not the child or youth in care. The child or youth may be encouraged to take on additional responsibilities in the process of preparation for independence and in line with similar expectations of other family members. However, the child/youth's participation should be part of the plan of care.

Special Events

The foster family should collaborate with the child/youth's family, unless otherwise stated in plan of the care, to coordinate birthday celebrations and other special events.

The child/youth's birthday should be recognized and celebrated as a special day. The foster family should include the child/youth in any special family events and activities such as, the celebration of family members' birthdays, to help the child/youth feel a sense of belonging.

The foster family should encourage the child/youth to participate in any special events that celebrate the child/youth's ethnicity/culture and ancestry. The foster family should also make it possible for the child/youth to honor religious or ethno-cultural practices and participate in holiday celebrations related to the child's ethno-cultural practices and spiritual origins and beliefs.

The child/youth's family and the foster family should celebrate special occasions or milestones of the child/youth to recognize achievements or growth. These may include events such as: passing into next school grade; graduation from elementary, junior high school or high school; completing program; earning a certificate or license; learning a new and important skill; or working diligently toward a goal.

The foster family should plan a special celebration for the child/youth upon the child/youth's graduation to independence, leaving the foster home to be reunited with family or moving to an alternate placement.

Life Book and Journals

The foster family should encourage and assist the child/youth to keep an up-to-date "life book", which includes pictures of the child/youth, the foster family, the child/youth's family, friends and others of importance to the child/youth.

The child/youth should also be encouraged to keep a journal, which will provide the child/youth with a record of their experiences and a vehicle for expressing their thoughts and feelings. The child/youth who keeps a journal should be assured privacy.

Part-time Employment and Income

Foster families should encourage youth to earn extra money for completing tasks that are beyond the daily or weekly chore requirements.

Consistent with age, level of development and maturity, the youth should be encouraged by the foster family to look for and obtain suitable and appropriate part-time employment, in accordance with the plan of care, although the youth's education is always the priority. Work situations can help the young person with their decisions regarding career choices and can promote the development of self-confidence through successful work experiences. Any money earned through employment should be kept by the youth for personal use. The foster family should teach the youth how to budget, bank, spend and save money. Work done by the youth should always be in accordance with labor laws and children/youth's rights and the youth should be paid a fair and acceptable wage.

Sexuality and Sexual Development

The foster family should ensure that the child/youth is provided with age appropriate information on the physical changes that occur as the child/youth matures and should be taught hygienic practices related to the physiological changes.

Children and youth have a right to control over their own bodies and should be taught what to do if these rights are violated. Although most children/youth learn about sexual abuse, and what to do if it happens to them, through special programs in school, the concepts of “saying no” and “telling somebody” should be taught and reinforced at home. Part of a child/youth’s natural growth and maturation is the development of healthy sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Foster families should ensure that the child/youth learns about personal, family and ethno-cultural values regarding sexuality and sexual behaviors and should be taught respect for other people and their rights. The development of the child/youth’s own sexual identity should be supported to promote self-confidence and self-respect.

Youth should be encouraged to abstain from early sexual activity and should be provided with information about other birth control methods and sexually transmitted diseases. If a child/youth is pregnant, the foster family should ensure that the child/youth discusses available options with the child/youth’s physician and child and family services worker. Parenting youth should be provided with the opportunity to participate in parenting and life-skills classes and can benefit from positive parenting role models in the foster family environment.

Reporting of Serious Occurrences

The foster family should immediately report to child and family services with any serious occurrence involving the foster child/youth.

Child and family services should contact the child/youth’s family. Serious occurrences include incidents such as: serious injury or death of a child/youth; hospitalization; disclosure of abuse by the child/youth and any other member of the household; the abuse or maltreatment of the child/youth; allegations of abuse against a member of the foster family or child/youth; drug or alcohol abuse; a suicide attempt or dramatic change in the child/youth’s behavior; commission of a criminal offence; apprehension by police; fire or serious damage to the home; suspension or expulsion from school; and the absence of a child/youth without permission from the foster home. The foster family should document and report these and any other serious occurrences.

Allegations of Abuse

The foster family should take measures to prevent and safeguard against allegations of abuse and ensure they are aware of guidelines and procedures for responding to allegations of abuse.

Documentation

Foster families should create and maintain a record for each foster child/youth in their care.

The record should contain all information related to the child/youth and the child/youth's family, as well as contact and casework with child and family services.

Foster families should also keep files containing important information such as: service agreements with child and family services; insurance policies; fee schedules and expenses; and policies and procedures of child and family services.

Foster families should keep daily logs for each child or youth in their care. These logs should be kept in a secure place and should be accessible by child and family services. Foster families should provide child and family services with summary reports, which may be accessed through child and family services by the child/youth and the child/youth's family. Foster families should retain logs on all foster children/youth in their care for an indefinite period of time. Reports documenting any complaints, grievances or serious occurrences should also be kept on file in a secure place. If the child/youth or the child/youth's family wishes to see information contained in the logs, they should make a request to child and family services.

Confidentiality

Foster families should sign an oath of confidentiality.

Any information related to the child/youth, the child/youth's placement and the child/youth's family should be kept confidential by the foster family. All records or documents kept by the foster family should be kept in a secure place. Access to information recorded by the foster family or known to the foster family should be made available only to child and family services. Some information about the child/youth will need to be shared (e.g., with teachers, counselors or doctors), but should only be done on a need-to-know basis, according to the plan of care and should not constitute an unjustifiable invasion into the privacy of others.

Following the Plan of Care

The foster family should, as part of the foster care team, participate in the development/review and revision of the plan of care.

The foster family should follow the plan of care as it was developed and reviewed/revised by the foster care team. The foster care team included the child and family services worker, the foster parents, the child/youth (consistent with age, level of development and maturity), the child/youth's parents (unless otherwise mandated by the courts) and others who will be involved in meeting the goals of the care plan. The foster family should be willing and able to meet the needs of the child/youth.

Decisions to change the plan of care should be made by the foster care team. The foster family should provide special care, attention, and support to the child/youth when changes in the child/youth's plan of care have been decided upon. The foster family may request changes to the plan of care.

Involvement of the Child/Youth's Family

The foster family should work with the child/youth's family, unless otherwise mandated by the courts or stated in the plan of care, to support the child/youth in maintaining a relationship with family members and should immediately report and document any concerns to the child and family service worker.

The child/youth's plan of care should detail the frequency and nature of involvement of the child/youth's family and the ways in which the relationship between the child/youth and the child/youth's family are to be maintained and strengthened.

**-National Guidelines for Foster Care in Canada
Canadian Foster Care Association**