

The Foster Parent Handbook

A Guide for Alabama's Foster Parents



STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
JUNE 2001

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Compiled and Edited
by
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Don Siegelman, Governor

Bill Fuller, Commissioner

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Bill Fuller
Commissioner

Dear Foster Parents,

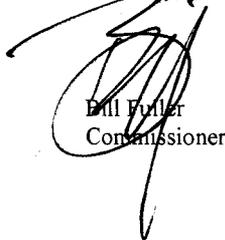
There is an admonition in the New Testament that says, "Suffer the children to come to me and deny them not." I believe it adequately describes the work we are about. It is our task, indeed our mission, to ensure that no child who is at risk is left alone to face the world without a caring adult to guide and nurture them. It is my feeling that we are defined as a society by how we treat our children. Certainly we are judged by our ability to love unconditionally the children who need to experience love where they live. In the Psalms God says to his people "I hold you in the palm of my hand." As the instrument of a loving creator, we hold the children in the palm of our hand. Thus, we are a people with a divine mission.

This handbook is a tool to help you as you hold the children in the palm of your hand. It is intended as a guide that answers some of the questions you might have as a foster parent. If you are contemplating becoming a foster parent, the handbook provides an overview for making an informed decision to become involved in this precious work. The handbook is in no way to be considered definitive, however, it will lead you to understand what other questions you might ask your social worker and the team of professionals at his/her disposal. Your social worker is your partner in designing and creating a loving environment for the child. This partnership is one that must be nurtured by everyone. For this is the only way we can provide the love and growth and nurture that every child must have. Above all else they must not be denied.

Alabama has a very strong Foster and Adoptive Parent Association. Its very existence is grounded in making sure you become a strong foster parent with all the tools necessary to caring for the children. I ask that you devote yourself to the Association.

Please accept my sincere appreciation for all you do for our children. I know that yours are the hands that hold, that soothe the tears, and that heal the wounds of God's precious ones. We are devoted to making your divine mission a successful one.

Sincerely,



Bill Fuller
Commissioner

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Acknowledgements

The Foster Parent Handbook owes its existence to the knowledge of many people. We are especially grateful to those who were involved in reading, re-reading, making suggestions, editing, and providing the wisdom necessary for the creation of the book. Truthfully, the handbook is a compilation of questions and answers drawn from the collective experience of these people. We are grateful for their willingness to understand the vision and act upon it. Special thanks must be given to Harriet Parr, Linda Campbell, Kimberly V. Finch, Linda Stephens, Buddy Hooper, Johnna Breland, Gina Nixon, Mandy Andrews, Carol Burton, Debbie Green, Joyce Wilson, Margaret Bonham, Rose Johnson, Linda Cassity, Chris Johnson, Melba Pouncy, Charles Johnson, James Slaughter, Barbara Dozier, Janet Norris, and Dr. Richard Brozovich. Appreciation is also extended to those who compiled and edited the 1990 edition of The Foster Parent Handbook. Front cover photo courtesy of Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel. Back cover photo courtesy of Barry Fikes, photographer and The Capitol School.

Introduction

The partnership that exists between the Department of Human Resources and Foster Parents is critical to the well-being of Alabama's at-risk children. DHR recognizes the special role foster parents play in normalizing the lives of children and takes this opportunity to express its appreciation to those who give so unselfishly to children in need. This handbook is dedicated to you.

Please take the time to read this small volume. We feel you will be encouraged in your work and that you will discover gems of knowledge that will sustain your family in your spiritual adventure with the children.

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Part I

Legal Authority

Are there laws that govern the care and responsibility of children who are at risk?

Definitely!

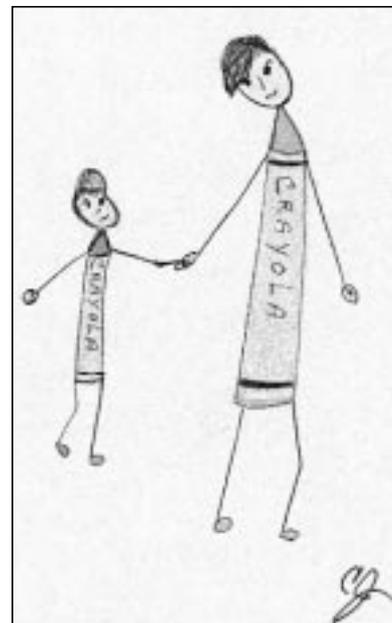
Alabama law gives the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) the critical responsibility of seeking out and protecting children who are at risk. Foster Family Boarding Care is just one way of fulfilling that responsibility.

The law gives DHR the task of recruiting, evaluating, and approving Foster Homes.

In 1986 the laws were amended to require that all foster family home applicants have a thorough background check (including fingerprinting and state and FBI clearance) in order to better protect the children and the families involved in their care. In February 2000, a fingerprint law passed requiring adult members of foster families residing in the home and friends or neighbors involved in the care be fingerprinted.

(Code of Alabama 1975, Title 38, Chapter 7; The Code of Alabama 1975, 26-1-4, as amended 1986)

The Alabama Department of Human Resources has the critical responsibility for seeking out and protecting children who are at risk.



Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes

The *Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes* is simply a detailed set of rules and regulations foster family homes must follow in order to operate under the law. These standards address the special needs of children and their families as substitute care is provided. Five primary goals define the “System of Care” that has been structured for the children: (1) to protect the children from abuse and neglect. (2) to enable the children to live with their families, and if that cannot be achieved, to live near their homes. (3) to enable children to achieve stability and permanence in their living situation. (4) to enable children to achieve success in school. (5) to enable children to become stable, gainfully employed adults.

Minimum Standards for Foster Care Homes is a carefully crafted set of guidelines to provide foster care families a road map for protecting and enabling needy children



Minimum Standards for Foster Care Homes

is a carefully crafted set of guidelines to provide foster care families

a road map for protecting and enabling needy children. It is the responsibility of DHR to school foster families in these minimum standards. Each foster care family will be provided with a copy of the *Minimum Standards*.

Why is it necessary to have a set of standards and principles for operating a foster care home?

Working Together:

The partnership that exists between the Foster Parents, Birth Parents, and DHR.

The responsibility of caring for and planning for children who need a home away from home is shared between the Department of Human Resources, Foster Parents, and Birth Parents. It is a shared responsibility that requires mutual respect between the participants. Only through cooperative efforts by all parties can services be provided and the child's needs be met.

*Who is responsible for the care of
at risk children?*

The partnership requires that foster parents provide a nurturing environment, that DHR provide services necessary to the child, foster parents and birth parents, and that birth parents participate in and provide support for the child during a period of uncertainty for the child. This partnership works best when all parties focus on the needs of the child.



*Only through cooperative
efforts by all parties can
services be provided and the
child's needs be met.*

The Role and Responsibilities of the Foster Parents

It is obvious that foster parenting is more than providing a home for children. It is parenting at its most critical level. It is an acceptance of the total child, his/her problems and fears, as well as the child's ability or inability to love. It is working in partnership with DHR in healing the child's wounds (whether physical or emotional) and caring for his/her daily needs. And when the time comes, it is preparing the child for return to his/her birth parents or relatives, for adoption or independent living. Foster parenting is the work of parenting a child and caring for him/her until plans can be made for the child's future.

*What is my role as a
Foster Parent?*

Foster Parents are responsible for:

- Providing the child with a home, food, and clothes;
- Meeting the child's educational needs by sending him/her to school;
- Seeing that the child keeps medical and dental appointments as scheduled and obtains emergency medical treatment if needed;
- Notifying the DHR caseworker or worker's supervisor immediately in emergency situations;
- Providing the child with tools needed for developmental activities, such as appropriate reading material, toys and experiences and transportation to activities for his/her age and stage of development; directing the child's teaching, training and development;
- Participating with the DHR caseworker, child, birth parents,

Becoming a professional public parent means your family will now include: Social Services, the new foster child, birth family, and the existing life experiences of the child. All of these are important and all of them become a part of your family.

- Families at Risk

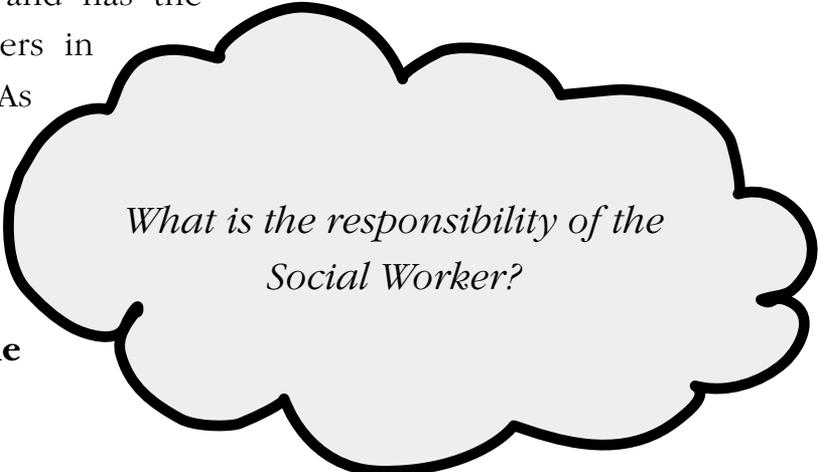
- or adoptive parents in planning for the child;
- Assisting the child’s case worker in scheduling visits with the child’s parents and/or relatives;
- Providing the child with the opportunity for social and religious development;
- Adhering to the regulations set forth by the *Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes*;
- Help the caseworker prepare a “Life Book” for each foster child.

Most Important!

Foster parents must meet the child’s emotional needs by loving the child, even when the child may not be able to return the love. You are charged with providing a positive, happy home atmosphere where the child can thrive.

Role of the Social Worker

The social worker represents DHR and has the responsibility for guiding the partners in decision-making concerning the child. As an employee of DHR, the social worker has the duty to plan for the child during the child’s foster placement.



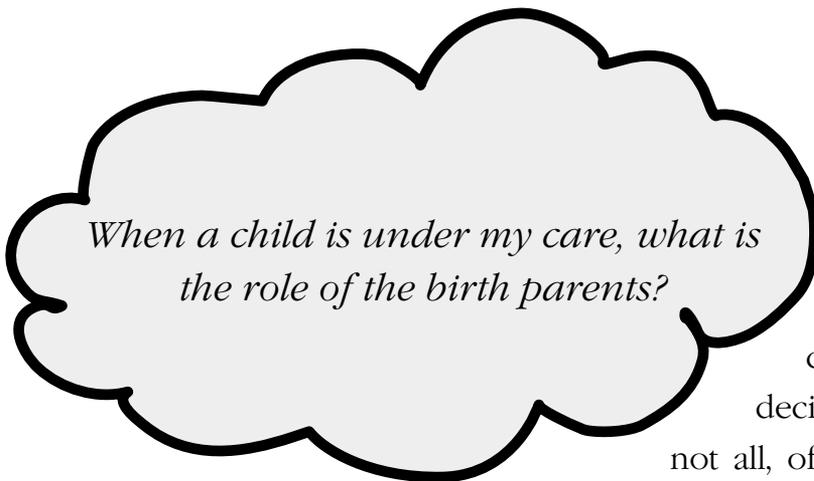
Some of the responsibilities of the social worker include:

- Recruit foster care resources,
- Complete home studies, annual re-evaluations and issue approvals,
- Explain to Foster Parents the operating procedures of the County Department,
- Plan orientation and training programs for foster parents,
- Participate in delivery of an “Individualized Service Plan” with the child and/or his family,
- Select a foster home that will meet the child’s needs,

Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist when he grows up.
 – Pablo Picasso

- Place the child in the foster home,
- Arrange services for the child through the use of community resources,
- Plan the child's return to his/her birth parents or placement elsewhere,
- Provide supportive services to the child and the foster parents,
- Maintain case records,
- Arrange and authorize the board payment to the foster parents for the care of the child.

It is the Social Worker's job to represent the child, the foster parents, the natural family and DHR. The Social Worker functions as a facilitator in meeting the needs of the child and all who are involved in helping the child. He/She understands that the nature of the work is to develop a partnership that works.



Birth Parents

Unless the courts have terminated parental rights, the birth parents have certain responsibilities in planning and decision-making for their child. Some, but not all, of the rights and responsibilities of the

birth parents identified by law are:

- The right to visitation,
- The right to consent to adoption,
- The right to determine religious affiliation and,
- The responsibility to provide support.

Many birth parents work with DHR during the removal and return of their child to their home. During that period, birth parents are encouraged to maintain regular contact with the social worker and actively work to improve the conditions that led to the child's placement. Parental cooperation and participation in the placement of their child in foster care is essential in helping to relieve the child's fears, anger, and guilt about separation from them.

Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.
 - Will Rogers

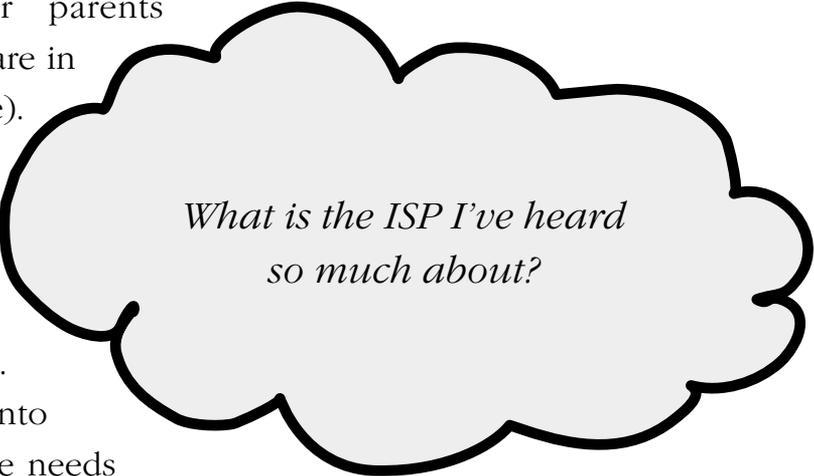
The Individual Service Plan

The ISP [Individual Service Plan] is a plan that is created by a team: the age-appropriate child, the child's parents, the child's caseworker, and the foster parents (when children are in out-of-home care).

It is tailored to the circumstances and needs of the particular child.

It also takes into consideration the needs of our foster parent partners.

Actually it is a plan for the delivery of services to children and families served by DHR. The ISP is a process driven document that undergoes changes as the needs of the child change. The social worker will discuss this plan with the foster parents.



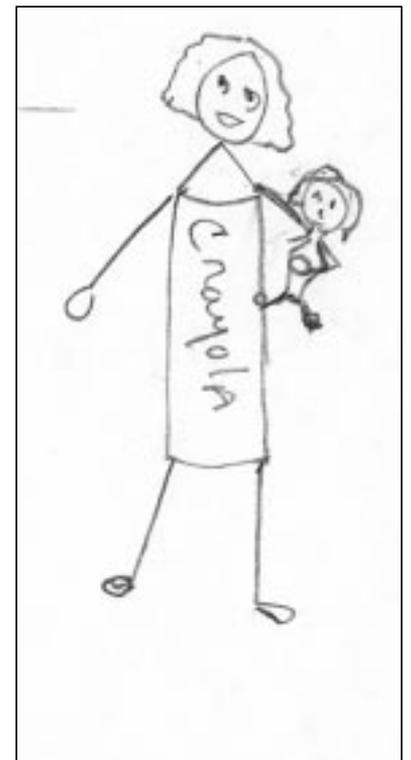
What is the ISP I've heard so much about?

It is pretty hard to be objective about something as painfully personal as losing custody of your children and having them placed in foster homes.

- Birth Parent, Children at Risk

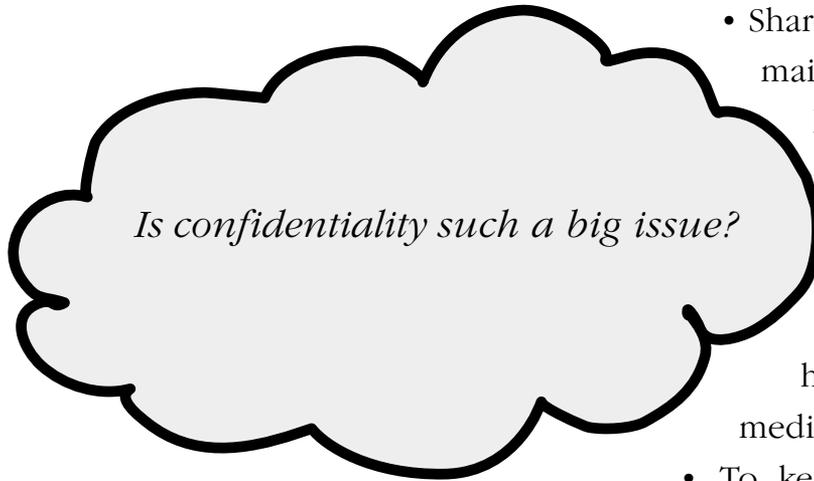
Confidentiality

Alabama law requires that foster parents agree to maintain confidentiality about the personal information of foster children and their birth families. Therefore, foster parents will only use or disclose confidential information concerning children with the authorization of DHR.



Social Workers are directed to do the following with regard to confidentiality:

- Prepare, record and maintain a confidential file of information concerning the child and his family.



- Share all information for the safety and maintenance of the foster child and his/her birth family with foster parents to assist with the child's adjustment.

- To prepare foster parents for problems that may arise, e.g., habits of the child, physical and/or medical problems.

- To keep confidential any information regarding foster parents and their families.

Foster Parents are charged with the following regarding confidentiality:

- To guard information concerning the child by discussing only with the Social Worker and with those who are involved with providing services to the child.
- To refrain from questioning the child about information he does not discuss voluntarily or which has no bearing on his growth and development.
- To consider all information shared with you by the child as confidential and to be discussed only with the social worker.
- To refrain from discussing details with your relatives, neighbors, or friends the reason for the child's placement or his/her family's situation or background.

One never repents on having spoken too little, but often of having spoken too much.
- Philippe De Commynes

Training

Absolutely! DHR offers basic foster parent training to prospective as well as approved foster parents. Representatives of the

County Department, Family Finders and a foster or adoptive parent usually conduct this training. Night sessions are scheduled whenever possible to encourage foster parents who are employed to attend. Frequently, experienced foster parents are asked to participate in the training of new foster parents, thereby, giving the new foster parents an opportunity to hear firsthand experiences of parenting foster children.

Training for foster parents is mandatory. You will be able to meet and share ideas and experiences with other foster parents and become familiar with the policies and procedures of DHR. Participation in the training improves communication and partnership between DHR and foster parents and helps to prevent foster parent burnout.

Specialized foster parent training is also provided for foster parents who provide care for children with exceptional needs. Children with special needs include those with physical handicaps, emotional problems, and mental retardation or behavior problems. If you are interested or would be willing to accept a child with special needs, contact your social worker. (Training will be provided as needed.)



Will I be given training so I will be successful as a Foster Parent?

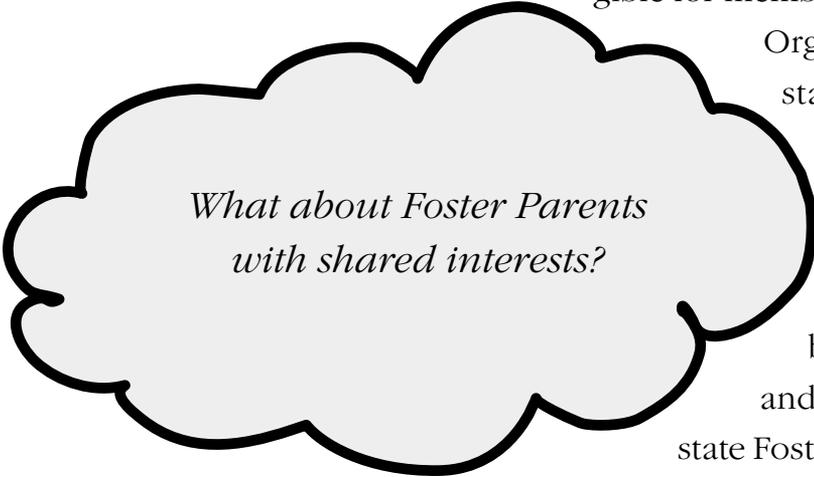
I have found the best way to give advice to your children is to find out what they want and advise them to do it.

- Harry S. Truman

Part II

Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

Many counties in Alabama have a local Foster and Adoptive Parent Association. For information regarding your local association contact your caseworker. The worker will put you in touch with an association representative—either on a local or state level. All foster parents are eligible for membership on a local, state, and national level.



*What about Foster Parents
with shared interests?*

Organized in 1978, Alabama has a very strong state Foster and Adoptive Parent Association. The purpose of the Association is to improve the delivery of services to the children and families served, to improve communication between foster parents and the agencies, and to upgrade the foster parent program. The state Foster Parent Association works to promote the partnership that exists between the Department of Human Resources and parents. It provides statewide and local continuing education opportunities for parents. It sponsors quarterly regional meetings to promote topics of interest and importance. It functions as an advocate for parents needing guidance. It provides a forum for dialogue for foster parents across the state. DHR supports and provides funding for parents to attend AFAPA events.

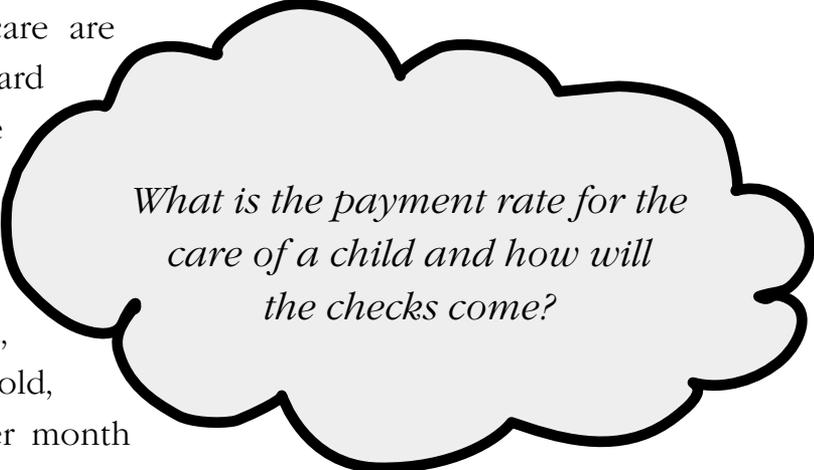
The National Foster Parent Association sponsors annual conferences for the benefit of foster parents, both nationally and internationally.

For information about the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association call **1-888-545-AFPA**. To contact the National Foster Parent Association call **1-800-557-5238**.

*If you're searching for security
in life, you won't find it.
What you'll probably find is
opportunity.
- Unknown*

Board Payments

Monthly payments for a child's care are based on the age of the child. Board payments are not considered taxable income. These monthly rates are as follows: for children 0 - 2 years old, \$230; for children 3 - 5 years old, \$243; for children 6 - 12 years old, \$254; for children 13 - 18 years old, \$266. (Board payments of \$266 per month may continue for a child age 19 if the child is in the last year of high school. The payment covers the cost of room and board, clothing, medicine chest supplies, and incidentals.) Note: Alabama's board payments are presently considered to be one of the lowest in the nation. Efforts are being made to bring about increases.



What is the payment rate for the care of a child and how will the checks come?

Parents need to pay attention to the fact that they will receive a separate check for each child in their home (the child's name will appear on the check). If a child moves out of your home, you are asked to confer with your caseworker to make sure your name is removed from the list to receive a check for that child. It should be noted that when a child receives a board payment, telephone and mail payment, and/or a \$50 service fee, the entire amount will be included on one check. State Supplementation checks are sent separately.

For children who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the foster parents receive SSI Benefits as the board payment. The foster parent may also receive a \$50 per month service fee or State Supplementation (SUP) in the amount of \$110 per month for children who meet the criteria. Additionally, a \$25 per month telephone and mail fee is available when deemed appropriate through the ISP.

Discuss payments with your social worker. He/She will be able to school you on what to expect. *Ask questions!*

*A billion here, a billion there,
soon it adds up to real money.
- Senator Everett Dirksen*

Specialized Service Fee

Are there special service fees for children with exceptional needs?

There is a plan that makes provisions for specialized foster home care services for children with physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral problems. This Title XX Program provides for those children whose special problems have been documented as needing special foster home care. The County DHR documents that the foster parents are trained to provide the specialized services. Foster parents may receive a service fee of \$50 per month in addition to the board payment for specialized services. (Payments for a partial month will be prorated.) This service fee is not considered income for Federal Income Tax purposes for children under the age of 19.

What about reimbursement for travel?

Mileage Reimbursement

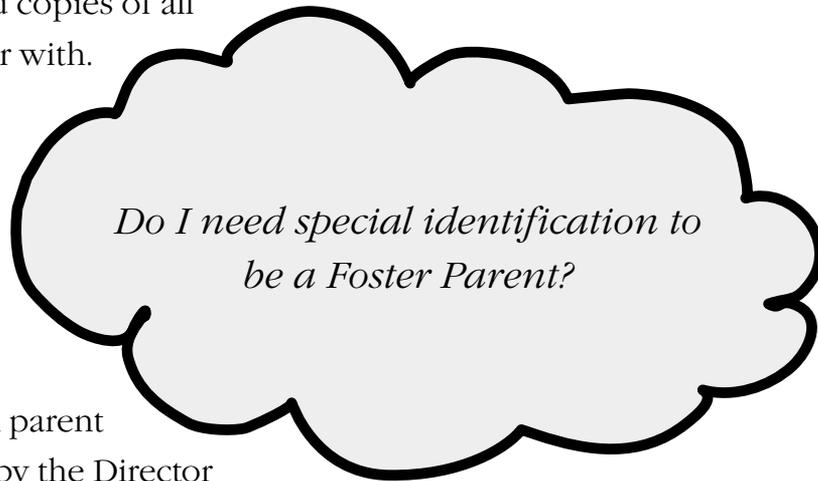
Foster parents can be reimbursed for mileage costs incurred in transporting foster children in situations that eliminate the necessity of caseworker travel. Some examples are transporting a child for parental visitation, to court hearings, or to the doctor's office. The social worker will make these arrangements with you. Officers of the Alabama Foster Parent Association can be reimbursed for mileage and per diem to attend Quarterly Business meetings. The Department can also pay mileage for foster parents to attend training sessions. Per Diem can be paid to foster parents attending training outside their county. It must, however, be approved by the County Department.

To secure reimbursement you must complete Form DHR-FD-1147.

To secure reimbursement for agency approved travel; you must

complete the form DHR-FD-1147, the In-State Travel Expense Voucher. The DHR social worker will assist you with the completion of this form. Your caseworker has a list and copies of all the forms foster parents need to be familiar with.

Foster Parent Identification



When foster parent approval is issued, each parent will be given an identification card signed by the Director of the County Department. The card will be effective for the period of time covered by the approval. A new card will be issued each foster parent when approval is renewed. The purpose of the card is to assist the foster parents when identification is needed to verify their official role as a foster parent; i.e., school, doctor appointments, etc.

Grievance



Because conflicts between foster parents and the department do arise, a procedure is in place for addressing those conflicts.

First, you must realize that your ideas and feelings are important and can be expressed freely. You will be listened to, and efforts will be made to improve or change practices and procedures as needed.

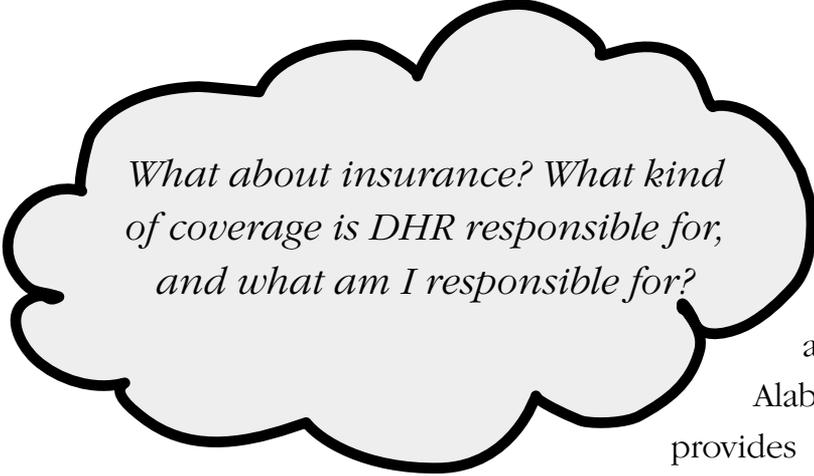
Second, a “grievance” is defined as a complaint about the methods or ways services are provided to foster children in foster care homes (this includes, but is not limited to, services provided to foster care parents). A grievance may also include evaluations, approvals, or denials.

If a problem related to services arises in a foster home and cannot be

*A man who stands for nothing
will fall for anything.*
- Malcolm X

resolved by the foster parents and the social worker, the foster parent has the right to seek resolution by notifying the social worker's immediate supervisor orally or in writing. It is the supervisor's responsibility to collect pertinent information, make an evaluation, and review the decision with the foster parent. If the supervisor cannot resolve the problem or if the foster parent is dissatisfied with the action taken, the foster parent may request a review of the grievance by the County Director.

After attempting to resolve the problem on the local level, the foster parent may choose to take the grievance up with the State Family Services Partnership. This may be done through written or oral contact directed to the Division of Family and Children's Services. Any decision made by the Family Services Partnership is final.



What about insurance? What kind of coverage is DHR responsible for, and what am I responsible for?

Insurance

Liability—Foster care providers, licensed or approved by DHR to maintain homes for a child or children, are covered by the State of Alabama General Liability Trust Fund. The fund provides basic liability indemnification for deaths, injury, or damage arising out of negligent or wrongful acts or omissions committed by a covered individual while in the performance of their duties in the line and scope of their employment.

Homeowners—DHR recommends that Foster Parents check with their insurance company to determine whether foster children are covered or can be covered under the present homeowner's policy. Any premium incurred by such coverage is the responsibility of the foster parent. Also, foster parents may file a claim with the Board of Adjustment if damage occurs from the actions of a foster child.

Automobile—The department cannot be responsible for car insurance for foster children. Alabama law requires that all automobiles have liability insurance. Any other coverage is optional at this time. If a foster child has a driver's license and is allowed to drive your vehicle, you or the child will be financially responsible for the insurance. The child may work and earn money to pay for his/her insurance.

Some people grow with responsibility, others just swell.
- Anonymous

Abuse or Neglect

Certainly, caring for other people’s children is a high-risk profession. “What is appropriate behavior in the primary families may fall under scrutiny when raising children who belong to another set of parents.” The first objective for everyone is to ensure that children are emotionally, physically, and psychologically safe while in surrogate, foster, and adoptive care. It should be understood that children entering foster care may be more vulnerable to abuse or neglect. Because of tremendous stress on foster parents, in some cases abuse may occur in the foster home. Therefore, it should be noted that foster parents may be viewed as “professional parents” and are held to a higher standard than birth parents.



What about abuse or neglect that can occur in a Foster Home?

Professional parents should understand that an initial assessment must be conducted when an allegation of maltreatment is made. It is the goal of the Department of Human Resources to provide safety for both children and foster parents during any assessment. Fundamentally, our work is predicated upon the realization that the victims of abuse and neglect are not just statistics. They are our children. We know in “indicated” cases, children are saved. We are also aware that in “not indicated” cases, foster families can be traumatized.

A standard procedure is followed when an allegation is received of **suspected** abuse or neglect in a foster home. It is referred to as a CAN (child abuse and neglect) assessment. Alabama law dictates the steps in the procedure. It is required that an assessment of every complaint be made, as with any other abuse or neglect report. During the assessment a protective service worker other than the one who is responsible for approving the home will interview the foster parents, the child, and any other persons with relevant information. Depending upon the seriousness of the allegation, the

Nobody knows the age of the human race, but everybody agrees that it is old enough to know better.

- Anonymous

children may or may not be removed from the home during the assessment. Foster parents will be notified of the results of the report and whether their home will continue to be approved. A report containing the disposition of the assessment is then placed on file with the Central Registry in Montgomery.

Foster parents also have a responsibility to report suspected abuse and neglect of any children whether in a child's own home or in another home. See your *Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes* for more information.

Adoption

Is adoption of a Foster Child possible?

There are some foster children who cannot return to their birth family and for whom adoption by foster parents is the most appropriate plan. The decision as to whether or not the foster home will be considered as an adoptive home is a joint decision with the ISP team. The final plan for the child must be one which meets the child's basic needs and assures the optimum longterm stability, permanence, and the healthiest adulthood. Factors considered in an adoption are: the emotional tie of the child to the foster parents; the age of the child in relation to the age of the foster parents; the length of time the child has been in the home; the potential problems associated with a child being annoyed by the biological family or other persons in the community; and the health and income of the foster parents.

Foster parents are given first consideration when a child in the home becomes free for adoption. A foster parent interested in adoption of a child in his home should discuss his/her desire with the child's caseworker.

*We will be known forever by
the tracks we leave.*
- Dakota Indian proverb

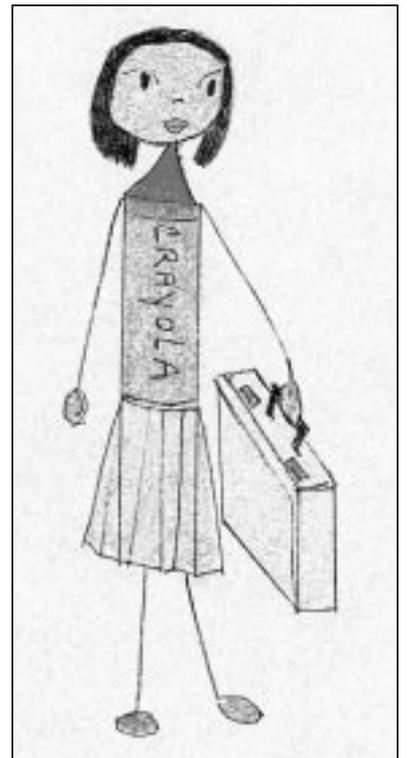
Address Change

The foster family home approval is ineffective if you move from one dwelling to another. If you plan to move, a 2-week notice is to be given to the County Department. You must complete a new application. A social worker will make a home visit to your new home to determine whether minimum standards are met. The new approval will be for the remainder of the current approval year. This policy also applies when moving from one county to another. An application will need to be completed in your new county of residence and your home approved by that county. This insures that the new home meets safety standards. Additionally, if a new person moves into your home after it has been approved (e.g., an extended family member or any other person unknown to the social worker in the initial approval), it is necessary that you inform your social worker and appropriate clearances are obtained.

If the Foster Care Family moves to another residence, what are the consequences?

Any plant growing in the wrong place is a weed.

- Anonymous



Baby Sitters

If the Foster Parents need to be away from home, is it okay to hire a sitter?

If substitute care (sitter services) is needed for short periods of time, foster parents are to use good judgment in the selection of the sitters or caretakers. Discuss with your caseworker the possibilities of your situation; he/she is instructed to be supportive and helpful. Note: New criminal records check legislation requires fingerprinting of employees/volunteers in the foster home; it applies to sitters. DHR understands the need for respite opportunities for foster parents.

We both work. What if I need childcare for my foster child during the day?

Day Care

Choosing the right childcare is extremely important. Your family's situation, as well as the child's individual needs, must be considered during the I.S.P.

Good childcare offers children social, intellectual, physical, and nutritional experiences under qualified supervision in a safe, nurturing, and stimulating environment. In a good childcare center children are encouraged to participate in daily activities appropriate for their ages and developmental levels.

As a foster parent you are required to choose a childcare center licensed by the Department of Human Resources. This is a center which meets minimum standards for such care. Consultation is provided to assist foster care parents and day care providers as they work to achieve the best care possible for foster children. Contact your social worker and negotiate the best arrangement available in your area to provide your foster child with quality childcare.



Part III

DHR's Responsibility under Alabama Law

DHR places children in foster homes under the following conditions:

1. When the Department has been given written consent by the child's birth parent(s) or relative having custody.
2. When the Department has been granted immediate temporary custody of the child by the court pending a custody hearing.
3. When the Department has been granted temporary or permanent custody of the child by the court.
4. When a child's life or health is in imminent danger.

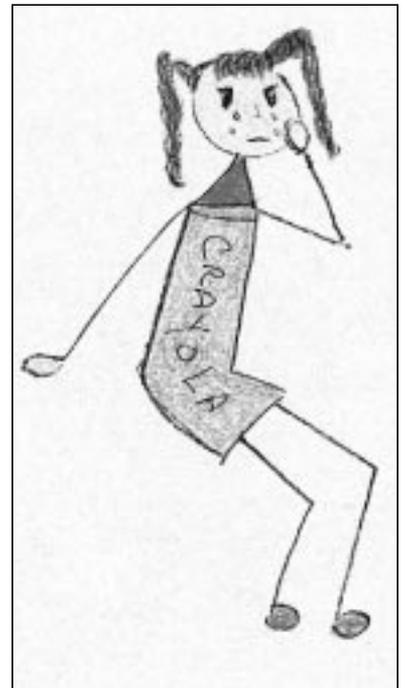
Under what conditions does DHR place children in Foster Homes?

There's no trick to being a humorist when you have the whole government working for you.

- Will Rogers

Special Needs of Foster Children

Yes. The most obvious problem a child faces is a feeling of loss due to separation from his birth parents or those adults on whom he/she relies to meet his needs. Then there is the separation from his friends, relatives, and familiar surroundings. Many times he has little time to prepare for the change that takes place. The child must adapt to a new family, new rules and regulations, new school, new community, and new friends. There are often feelings of guilt, rejection, loneliness, and frustration over having this life experience.



Allow Time for Adjustment.

It is helpful to put yourself in your foster child's place. In addition to uncertainty about the future, foster children often feel intense grief and rage because of what has happened to them. Have informed expectations about how your foster child will act toward you, especially at first. Don't expect things to go smoothly right away. Remember that both you and the child will need time to adjust. Do not feel guilty, disappointed, or take it personally if you and your foster child are not getting along well at the beginning of the placement. If at first you don't like your foster child's behavior keep in mind that adjustment takes time and behavior is an expression of need.

Is separation anxiety a big issue for foster care children?

Be Predictable. Your foster child needs to know that your emotional reactions will be consistent on a day-to-day basis.

Make sure that you do what you promise to do. Also, make sure that your home has routines for the child to follow. For many adults, watching the TV news while drinking a cup of coffee is a morning ritual that brings a certain amount of predictability and calm to the early hours of the day.

What can I do to help my foster child adjust?

A night routine for a young child might consist of a bath time, snack, brushing teeth, and bedtime story. A morning routine for an older child might consist of a regular time to wake up, watch a cartoon show, get dressed, and eat breakfast. The key is to attempt to follow the sequence everyday at the same time. Ask your child what his routine has been, what he/she prefers. Invite the child's parents to tell you what the child's preferences are. Keep in mind (1) your child has lost the most significant person to them, regardless of the circumstances; and (2) understand each child is an individual and expresses deep feelings in a highly individualized way.

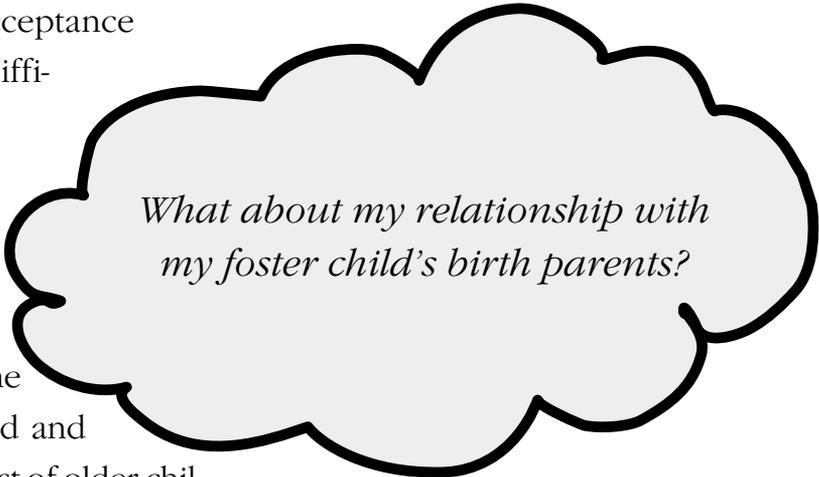
A Child's Relationship with His Parents

The majority of children in foster care have living parents. The child needs you to convey to him your acceptance and respect for his parents. This may be difficult, especially when you know the child has been ill treated. It is critical to your child's emotional well-being and to the future successful reunification of the family.

Dealing effectively with birth parents is the most important gift you can give your child and his/her family. It is certainly in the best interest of older children who may fear their parents have died or abandoned them forever. It is also in the best interest of infants who may not have concrete fears but still require a sense of security and attachment. ***It is also in the best interest of foster parents. When you give the child permission to love the birth parents, you are giving the child permission to love you.*** The child no longer has to choose between you and the birth parents. Our children are usually too immature and too traumatized to express this need, and biological parents are usually too angry, fearful, and embarrassed to express this need.

For some foster parents, a natural reaction may be, "The birth parents have allowed terrible things to happen to this child. They have not been good parents at all." While this reaction is common, it is also harmful to the child. The child needs to have the best possible relationship with his/her birth family. As long as the child is not released for adoption, it is important that you continue to provide opportunities for contact with the birth family. As soon as possible, contact the birth parents (the I.S.P. must be the guide here) to find out the birth parents' answers to questions such as:

- What do you want us to know about your child?
- What can we do to help him/her while he/she is with us?



What about my relationship with my foster child's birth parents?

An ounce of parent is worth a pound of just about anything else.

- Proverbs 22:6

- What should we know about your child's likes and dislikes or eating and sleeping habits?
- What are your concerns about your child's day to day care?
- What do you suggest about haircuts, clothes, etc?
(these can be very sensitive issues)
- Do you have any strong feelings about certain toys, television programs, etc.?
- May we discuss visitation, telephone talks, and exchange of mail?
- Your caseworker will already have the answers to some of these questions.

Remember the child has suffered because he/she is disconnected from the birth family. Any connections you make with them are like threads that may eventually be strong enough to reunite the family. As life goes on with your foster child, there will be events to which the birth parents should be invited. The following list provides examples of some occasions for keeping the parents involved with the child.

Make sure you have the consent of your caseworker when initiating these suggestions.

- Doctor and Dentist appointments.
- Events or meeting at school.
- Ball games or dance recitals.
- Birthdays and other holidays.

Realistically, it may be difficult for birth parents to attend any of these events. They may feel an overwhelming sense of failure and assume the agency and foster family condemns them. For the sake of the child, do what you can to show them acceptance. Let them know that you are all on the same side, the side that wants what is best for this child. Acknowledge any positive efforts on their part. Step aside and allow them to care for the child when you are together (feeding, diaper changing, etc.). While in some instances reunification may not be possible, the best possible outcome for this child is to be with a supportive and loving birth family. We strongly suggest that you continue making the following efforts even if you have little response from the birth parents:

- *Notify them about any important upcoming events.*
- *Keep them informed about developmental milestones (walking, talking, teeth, etc.).*

Even if you don't plan for the future, you'll have to live through it anyway.

- Unknown

- *Keep them informed of school progress.*
- *Send them some of their child's school papers, report cards, pictures, special awards, and announcements.*
- *Have the foster child send drawings or notes for holidays.*

In some cases, the court determines that children will not be reunited with their birth family. At that time, your foster care caseworker will have suggestions for you and will help the child adjust emotionally. Occasionally the court will order that visitations be continued even after parental rights have been terminated. In all other cases, attempting to keep the lines of communication open and maintaining a positive attitude toward the birth parents are important duties. Fulfilling these duties can have long-term benefits for your child. *If reunification occurs, your positive attitude may make it possible for you to have future contact with this child. If reunification does not occur, you will be secure in the knowledge that you did what you could to serve the best interests of your foster child.*

Visits Are Important.

In some cases, with your consent, the birth parents may visit the child in your home. These visits are planned in partnership with the I.S.P. caseworker and you will be asked to participate in the arrangement of such visits.

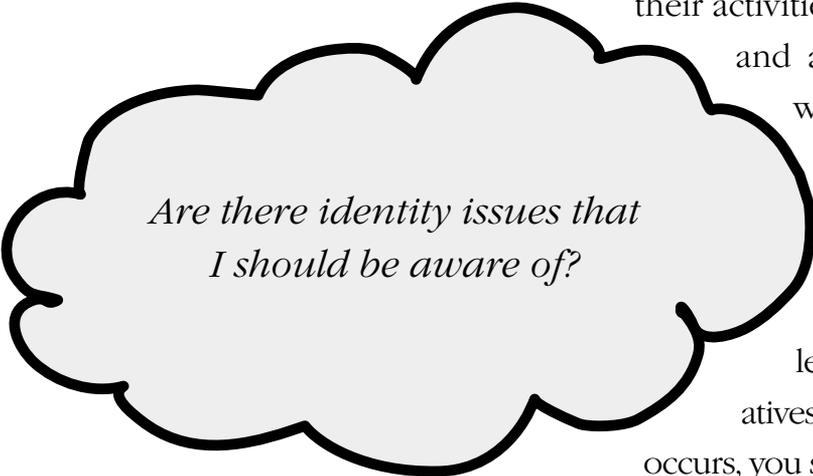
Some visits with parents may be upsetting to the child. Nevertheless, these contacts must be maintained in accordance with casework planning with the family. Most children are to maintain contact with their parents and relatives through telephone calls and letters. The goal of all contacts is to maintain and strengthen the child-parent relationship. Again, keeping children involved with their birth parents is good for the child and good for the foster parents.

The Child's Identity and Name

It is important that the foster child maintain and develop a positive identity. A clear concept and acceptance of self is essential. This is just

You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.
 – Eleanor Roosevelt

one of the reasons that we promote continued involvement with the birth parents. It takes skill for the foster parent to involve the child in their activities, treat the child as a member of the family, and allow the child to maintain a relationship with the birth family when appropriate.



Are there identity issues that I should be aware of?

For example, a child may wish to identify with you by using your last name. This is not appropriate because it may add to his confusion about himself. This can cause other problems when the child visits with his parents or relatives or is moved to another home. If this situation occurs, you should discuss it with the child's caseworker.

The Child's Emotional and Physical Problems

Before placing the child in a foster home, the caseworker will discuss the child's known emotional and physical problems. This information will help the foster parents' decision to accept the child into their home. Some of these concerns may include lack of toilet training, physical handicaps, mental retardation, malnutrition, being withdrawn, and acting out behaviors. Some of these symptoms reflect neglect or abuse or deprivation or separation. Good foster parenting and training can address these issues.

The implications for children with a history of neglect or physical abuse or sexual abuse can be many. In addition to the emotional difficulties abuse can cause, the child may also experience problems in school and relating to other children. Some suggestions that may be followed are to:

(1) Respect the child's space

(2) Be firm and consistent in correcting inappropriate behaviors. In all situations the foster parent must be open, loving and accepting of the child, not the behaviors. The caseworker is always available to help.

We must try to keep ourselves in countenance by examples of other truly strong people.
- Benjamin Franklin

Part IV

The Child's Foster Care Experience.

A child will come to foster care with feelings, ideas, and behaviors and will grow and change while he is with you. It is important to keep a life book and/or a folder for him with photographs, papers, and other items that reflect his experiences while in your home. He will want to take these along with his possessions when he leaves your home. You and your family will become a part of the child's total life experiences. It is important that he take with him positive attitudes from his foster care experiences. The physical evidence of the life book will be beneficial in helping him with his identity as he grows and matures.

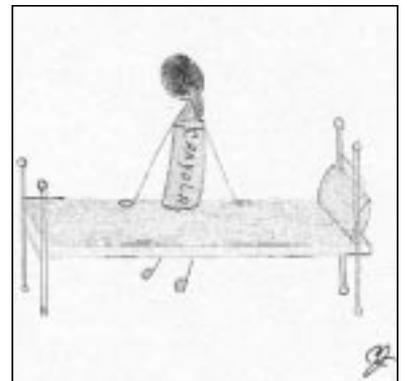
When will I know if a child is slated for adoption? Do I handle things differently?

To be a leader means having (and seizing) the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who permit leaders to lead.

- Max De Pree

The Child to be Placed For Adoption

Some children who come to you will not return to the birth family, but will be placed in the permanent custody of the Department to go into adoptive homes selected and approved by DHR. A record of the child's early development is important to his adoptive



placement. The Social Worker will need your help to observe and record the child's developmental milestones, as well as the child's social, physical, and educational development. The Social Worker, of course, will have regularly scheduled contacts with the child to observe his development.

Prior to the child's adoptive placement, the foster parent will be requested to share observations and knowledge of the child that will aid in preparing a comprehensive summary. The summary will be presented to the prospective adoptive parents. The social worker is instructed to provide all the forms and instructions necessary.

Regardless of the age of a child, he needs your help in preparing for adoption. It is important that he has the support and guidance of the foster parents in making this move. Feelings of anxiety and apprehension about adoptive placement are not unusual. The child needs to know you understand and that you care about him and want him to have parents with whom he can live permanently. Again, the social worker will work closely with you and with the child during the preparation and placement.

*The real act of
discovery (learning) consists
not in finding new lands, but
in seeing with new eyes.*

- Marcel Proust



School

With the rising number of children being cared for in homes away from their parents, most teachers will have foster children in their classrooms at some time. This means that another group of people will become involved in the foster child's life. In many ways, however, this is no different from any other child. Foster children do present unique educational challenges due to their past life experiences and current living situation. Above all, these children will respond best to a positive and caring environment at school and at home. The school administrator, the teacher, and the foster parent who can relate to the foster child's difficult life circumstances will be a positive force in his life.

Here are some Facts, Implications, and Suggestions for providing a positive and caring school atmosphere.

FACT

Disruptions in family life and multiple moves result in some foster children having little schooling or a lack of consistent schooling.

Implications

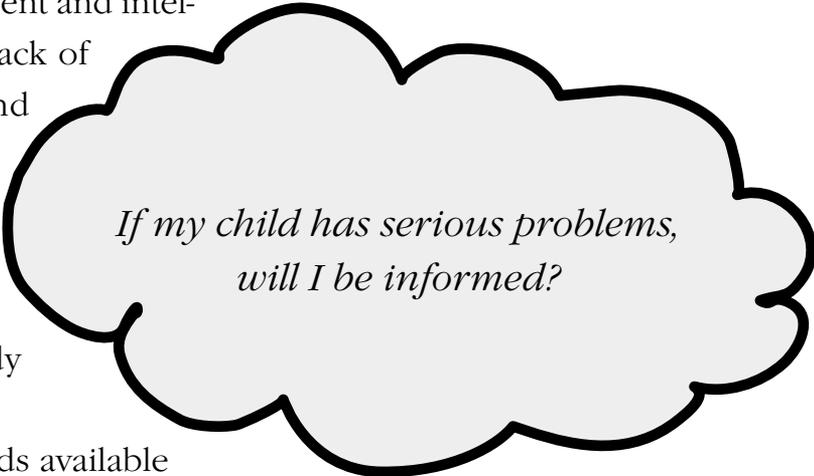
Low scores on achievement and intelligence tests might reflect lack of consistent schooling and emotional turmoil rather than academic potential.

The student may be lacking familiarity with a school routine or in study skills.

There may be few records available regarding past educational performance or programming.

Suggestions

- Ask the school to provide extra help and supportive services before considering a disability as the cause of the child's problems.
- Find out if your child's school has "building teams" made up of the school psychologist, school social worker, teachers and other professionals who meet to solve problems. If there are problems, get the building team involved.
- Make sure your foster child has materials at home that help to carry out the assignments that the school assigns.
- Make sure the teacher understands that predictability is important. The child who has recently experienced a move may need more preparation for changes in routine (e.g. field trips, substitute teachers, etc.).
- Ask the school for special help with study skills training for the child.
- Make sure the Social Worker has shared any previous history and data to help understand the student's needs. Remember the foster parent is the voice for the child in the school setting. Don't be bashful or reticent. You may be your child's best advocate.



The world is moved not only by the mighty muscles of our heroes, but also by the aggregate of tiny repititious shoves of each honest worker.

- Helen Keller

FACT

Foster children often suffer feelings of rejection and poor self-esteem.

Implications

Foster children may be physically reactive and may overreact with verbal or physical aggression or tears.

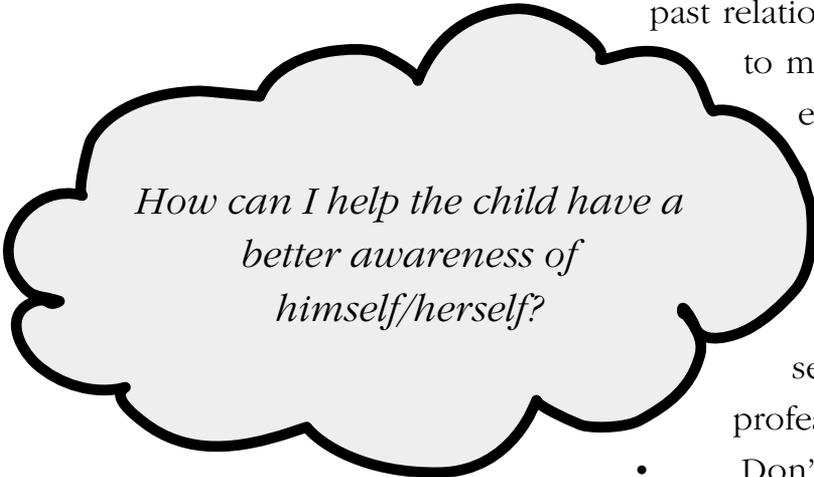
Foster children may be quick to perceive being mistreated or teased.

Foster children may be depressed and have little energy for academic tasks.

Alert the child's teacher about these possibilities. Your social worker can help you.

Suggestions

- Recognize that the child's emotional energies may be tied up in past relationships so she/he is not ready to make use of a more productive environment.



How can I help the child have a better awareness of himself/herself?

- Listen and be supportive, then move on. Don't dwell on the child's problems. Talk to your social worker about a session with a mental health professional if problems persist.
- Don't trigger feelings of poor self worth. Make sure the child's teacher is positive in evaluating the foster child's work. "Good work! Please try to be neater." Is much more encouraging than "Sloppy writing."
- Be extra vigilant to protect the child against teasing and bullying. Give the teacher a heads up here. Ask the teacher to make arrangements so children are supervised during unstructured times when such bullying could occur. Sadly, foster children may be teased about their situation.
- Have a talk with the school social worker or counselor regarding methods of building friendships.
- Discuss with the teacher the possibility of assigning a student buddy to the foster child. This will speed up the foster child's integration into the school setting.

Great is he who can alter a person's state of mind.
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

FACT

Foster children have experienced unhappiness and broken promises.

Implications

The foster child may have difficulty trusting you and his teachers. Holidays and birthdays can trigger sad memories and feelings of loss.

These feelings can reveal themselves both at home and in the classroom.

The child may be defiant or may not believe you care about him/her.

Suggestions

- Make sure the child's birthday receives the same attention as other children's birthdays. Ask the foster child's teacher how birthdays or other events are celebrated in the classroom.
- Assist the teacher in seeing that these celebrations are carried out in a standard way.
- Take time to be aware of and sensitive to the child's reaction to birthdays, holidays or special events.
- If the child reacts negatively to your kind overtures, be patient and don't personalize these actions. Being sensitive in this area may allow you to become a significant and positive force in the child's life.

FACT

Foster children have experienced losses in their lives.

Implications

Many foster children resist forming positive attachments to significant people (foster parents, teachers, etc.).

Foster children may over-react to a temporary rift in a relationship.

Suggestions

- If a loss does occur, give your undivided attention to the child. Listen to what he/she has to say. Offer reassurance and advice appropriate to the situation.
- Don't minimize any loss the child may experience. Letting the child grieve is essential.

Some books are given to us for information, other books provide transformation.

- Unknown

- Discuss with the teacher any assignment that has to do with drawing a family tree or tracing an inherited trait, or bringing baby pictures to school. This can be a particular concern for foster children.
- In your introductory session with the teacher discuss the idea of cooperative games and activities where everyone is a winner. Make sure the teacher knows that you have the serious responsibility of building self-image. Everyone working with the child on a daily basis should be sensitive to the fact that the child should be linked to positive activities. Affirmation is the key to success.

FACT_____

Some foster children do not have much experience owning toys or other possessions.

Implications

The child may become possessive, have difficulty sharing, or take things without permission.

The child may hoard possessions or food both at home and at school.

The child may act deprived or jealous under ordinary circumstances.

Suggestions

- Make sure the child has a special area for his belongings both at home and at school. Label the child's belongings.
- When the child has trouble sharing or steals something, calmly correct the behavior without shaming the child.
- Never give the child Christmas or birthday toys he/she cannot take when they leave.

FACT_____

Foster children have often experienced significant amounts of conflict or aggression within relationships.

Implications

The child may tend to view relationships as adversarial or with winners and losers. For some foster care children all relationships are one-up/one-down. Someone has to come out on top in even the most insignificant events in life.

The child may have developed no skills in negotiating or compromising with others.

*Education's purpose
is to replace an empty mind
with an open mind.
- Malcolm Forbes*



Suggestions

- Demonstrate the benefits of negotiation or win/win situations.
- Make sure the child's teacher is aware of giving the child multiple win/win experiences. Life does not have to be one-up/one-down.
- When the child experiences conflict, role-play appropriate behaviors to resolve the conflict.
- Your Social Worker is familiar with role-play and how important it is in helping children clarify how situations can play themselves out. It's okay to become an actor.
- The teacher may have some ideas about role-play that will help the child in everyday negotiations. Ask! This could be a fun activity in the classroom and at home.

FACT

Foster children often have a history of physical and sexual abuse.

Implications

In addition to the emotional difficulties such abuse can cause, these difficulties may cause immediate problems in the classroom.

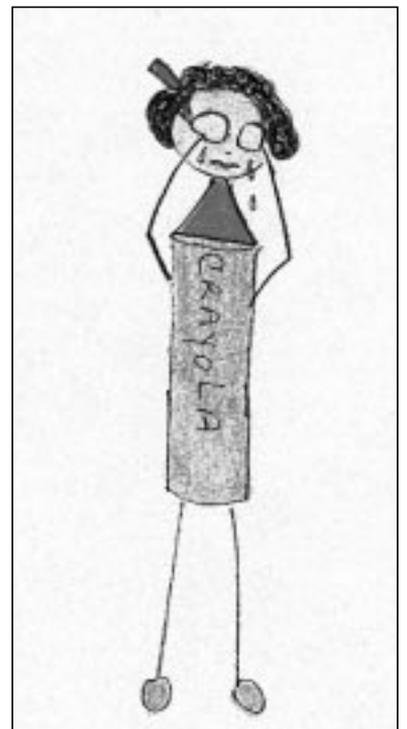
Some of these behaviors may be sexually inappropriate.

Suggestions

- Respect the child's space. Some of your actions may be misinterpreted by the child as threatening or sexual.
- When the child is at school physical education teachers need to be sensitive to children who may be reluctant to participate in gym classes if they are required to change clothes in front of other students.
- It is important that foster parents, caseworkers, and teachers communicate regularly.
- Being especially watchful during the early stages of the child's tenure with you is recommended.

A real friend is someone who overlooks your failures and tolerates your successes.

- Unknown



FACT

Foster children carry a higher load of emotional weight than other children and they may have challenges expressing emotions of joy or sadness.

Implications

The child may not display a sense of humor. He/she may have difficulty laughing with others or enjoying jokes.

Suggestions

- Model ways to have fun.
- Reinforce any appropriate attempts at humor. Don't be afraid to laugh at yourself when being with the child.
- Discover activities that the child enjoys and create extra opportunities for the child to participate in these activities.
- The foster parent and the Social Worker share the responsibility of providing the foster child with educational opportunities that will help him develop intellectually, socially, and physically. Look for church and community activities that will help your child have as normal a childhood experience as his classmates. There will be times when both the caseworker and the foster parents will be involved in making decisions. When there is a problem regarding the child's educational need or educational development, you will need to contact the Social Worker for assistance and consultation.

*It's easy to make friends by
being interested in others. It's
a waste of time and resources
to try to get others interested
in you.*

- Unknown



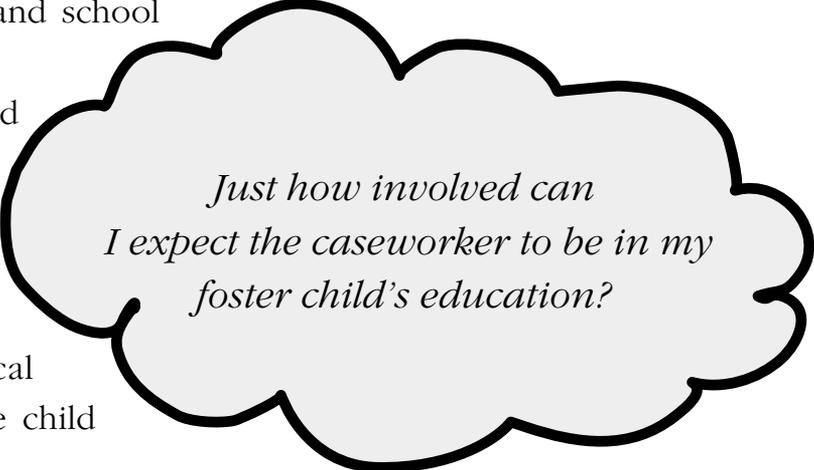
Shared Responsibilities of the Foster Parents and Social Worker

Prepare the young child for his initial enrollment or transfer in kindergarten, day care, or grade school by offering positive support for this experience.

Attend all conferences with teachers and school administrators, etc.

Support and encourage the older child who participates in school activities such as band, sports, clubs, etc. by helping secure transportation, uniforms, equipment, fees, and other necessary resources.

Obtain immunization and/or physical examination and medical records for the child when needed for admission.



*Just how involved can
I expect the caseworker to be in my
foster child's education?*

Particular Responsibilities that Fall to the Social Worker

Selecting the school in cooperation with the foster parent in accordance with local available resources.

Notifying the school authorities of the child's foster care residence for the purpose of enrollment or transfer.

Notifying the school authorities of a child's withdrawal when a child's residence changes.

Obtaining the child's birth records and prior school records for admission.

Making referral to the school requesting that the child be evaluated

Experience is not what happens to you. It is what you do with what happens to you.

- Aldous Huxley

for special education, or more intensive educational opportunities, or tutoring. This includes participating in I.E.P. for special ed children.

Particular Responsibilities of the Foster Parents

Make an assessment of the child's clothing needs prior to the beginning of school and see that the child is dressed in keeping with neighborhood school standards and his/her peer group.

Accompany the child to the educational facility on the first day.

Serve as a surrogate parent for the child receiving special education services. This includes representing the child in all matters relating to the identification, evaluation, and educational placement of the child and the provision of a free appropriate

public education for the child.

Attend PTA meetings and other activities related to the child educational needs.

Apply for free lunches and snacks when available. Send money for lunch and snacks when required.

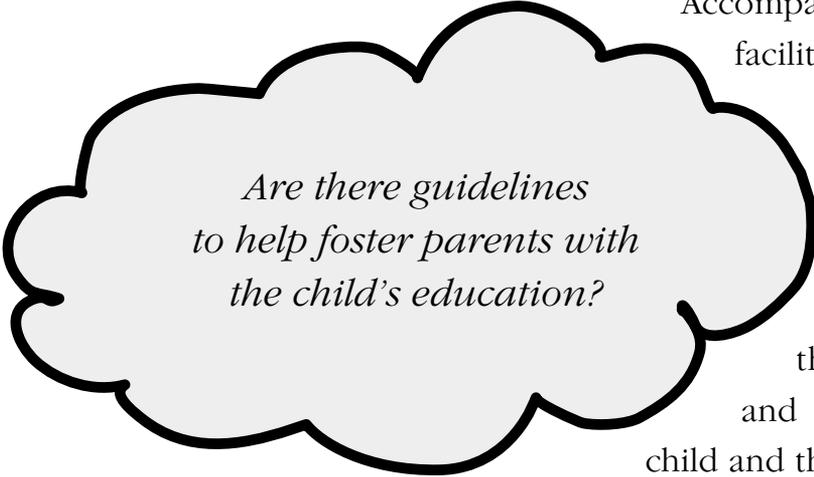
Assist the child with homework and other class assignments.

Provide a quiet, well-lighted place for the child to prepare lessons and assignments.

Provide the child with school supplies (e.g. pens, paper, pencils, notebooks, dictionary, etc.).

See that the child gets to school on time and is picked up on time when the school day ends.

The foster parent, in partnership with the social worker, represents the foster child in the school setting. This, of course, means doing all the things necessary to protect and develop the child from day to day.



Are there guidelines to help foster parents with the child's education?

A concern for living in the 21st century is we often mistake respectability for character.

- Unknown

Important questions asked by teachers and school administrators

Generally, foster parents can give permission for everyday, ordinary events such as field trips or other school activities. However, other school-related issues may be under the legal authority of the birth parents or the court.

Examples of this would be granting permission for testing for the purpose of placement in a special education program or giving permission for records to be released.

The answer to who has authority may also lie in the legal status of the child's placement, since some foster children are temporary wards of the state while others are permanent wards of the state.

In some cases, federal legislation is unclear concerning the legal authority of foster parents, while state laws may be more specific and restrictive.

Make sure to check with the local foster care agency (DHR) to see that school related legal issues are properly handled. Foster parents have the responsibility to see that this question is clearly answered to the satisfaction of everyone.

Schools often have provisions for reporting the progress of students enrolled in special education classes. The traditional system of comparing a disabled student with the rest of the class is inconsistent with the goals of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Some schools make special provisions for the reporting of progress in an alternative manner. Ask if such alternative grading might also be used for the foster child in your class even if he/she is not

*What do I do when I need to get permission of the "parent"?
Is it okay for foster parents to sign forms, permission slips, etc?*

Parents were invented to make children happy by giving them something to ignore.

– Ogden Nash, poet



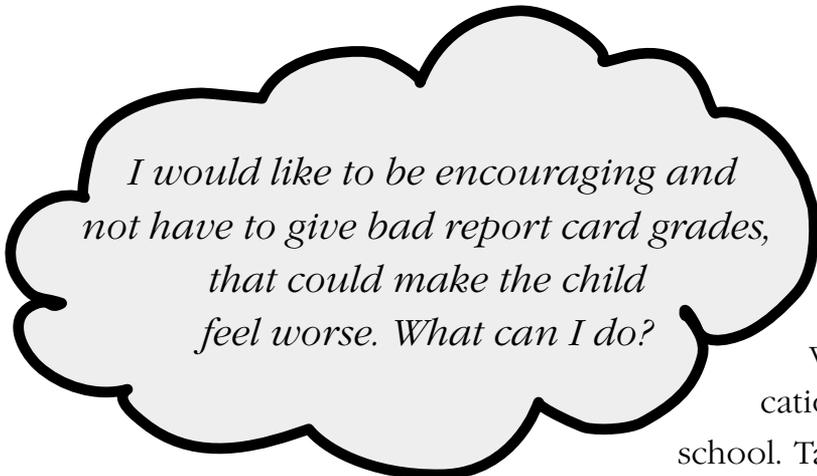
enrolled in a special education class. Such alternative grading systems will provide information about the student's progress without causing the harm of a "bad" report card.

For example, instead of comparing a child to others in his class, the report card could report grades based on effort and individual progress. The report card of a fourth grader reading at a second grade level could indicate the level of instruction as 2-1 to show that he is reading from a book at the first semester second grade level. A grade could then be issued to show progress within this level.

Other alternative reporting methods include narratives, progress checklists, and portfolios.

Foster parents are encouraged to make sure the Social Worker raises and answers these two critical questions with the school authorities. It is information that all parties will appreciate understanding clearly.

Finally. Your foster care charge may feel, "I have been in many different schools and I don't like school. Why should I try at the new school? I'll be leaving it anyway."



I would like to be encouraging and not have to give bad report card grades, that could make the child feel worse. What can I do?

What can you do?

Be an active educational advocate for your foster child. Work with the social worker if necessary to obtain previous educational records and get them to the new school. Take your foster child to the new school to make the setting familiar before the first day of classes.

Talk to the principal and the teacher to let them know you are there to help them in educating your foster child. If the foster child has any special educational needs, be sure they are provided for soon after school entry.

Stay in communication with school personnel and work cooperatively to provide a good learning situation for the foster child. Remember that the foster child has the same educational rights as any other student.

*Nothing will ever be attempted,
if all possible objections must
be first overcome.*
- Samuel Johnson

Remember, too, that you are in partnership with your Social Worker for the good of the child. He/She will stand with you as you act as advocate for the child.

Health Care

Sunshine, sleep, well-balanced meals, and good dental and body hygiene on a consistent basis are essential for a child's development. Regularly scheduled activities offer a foster child security and stability, which in turn produce a happy, contented, and healthy child.

However, some children entering foster care bring with them health problems (physical or mental). These are problems that cannot be healed with good daily childcare practices alone. Medical treatment is necessary.

Examinations: Children entering foster care should be examined by a licensed practicing physician, pediatrician or through Medical Screening (EPSDT) prior to the placement. In emergency cases when the lack of time prevents a physical examination prior to placement, the child will be examined within ten days after placement. The child shall be examined at least once a year for the duration of the placement.

Known Health Problems: The social worker will discuss with the foster parent the health of any child placed in their care. The worker will provide a list of pediatricians, physicians, and dentists who will provide regular care for foster children. If a child has a known health problem and is being followed by a specific physician, the caseworker may request that the child continue to be seen by that physician.

Treatment Responsibility: Foster parents DO NOT have the authority to authorize medical treatment for a foster child. It is the responsibility of the caseworker to notify the birth parents and get their consent when needed. When the birth parents are not available, the social worker may need to obtain authorization from the courts. Most court custody orders authorize DHR to secure medical care.



*The foster child's
medical care is a concern for me.
What is my responsibility as a
foster parent?*

Blessed are those who acknowledge that there is only one God and have quit applying for His position.

- Max Lucado

Physician Choice: If you have a physician to whom you take your own children and desire to have foster children in your home seen by this physician, it should be discussed with the social worker. He/She will assist you when necessary in making appointments. You will be responsible for seeing that the child keeps these appointments and sharing results of the doctor's diagnosis and treatment with the caseworker. If at all possible, it is the instruction to the social worker to use an EPSDT or Medicaid provider.

Medical Forms: A medical form (BFC-623) provided by DHR is to be completed at the time of the child's annual physical examination. This form must be completed by the physician and given to the social worker.

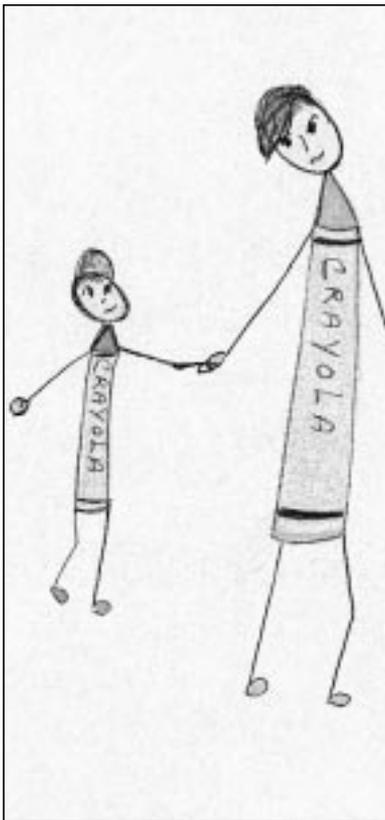
Payment Responsibility: Foster parents are NOT responsible for payment of medical care for foster children in their home. Most children in foster care are eligible for Medicaid. The social worker is instructed to make sure the foster parent is given the plastic Medicaid Card or the Medicaid number. Service providers who accept Medicaid must be used for these children. The card must be presented when the child is taken for medical or dental appointments or when prescription drugs are purchased at the pharmacy. Medicaid will pay for one set of eyeglasses annually. Medicaid does not cover the cost of orthodontic services for children. If a foster child is in need of orthodontic services or other services not covered by Medicaid, the foster parent must discuss the need with the child's social worker, as funding arrangements will have to be made before proceeding with treatment.

Medicaid Eligibility: If a child is not eligible for Medicaid, the child's social worker will be responsible for notifying you on how to proceed with obtaining services for the child. Usually the health service provider submits the bill directly to DHR. If you determine that you might have a medical expense prior to obtaining all the medical cards and eligibility statement, contact your caseworker immediately. This will avoid out of pocket expense that may or may not be reimbursed.

Medical Supplies: Routine medicine chest supplies are covered by the board payment and are not reimbursable to the foster parent.

*Politics is the only profession
for which no preparation is
thought necessary.*

- Robert Louis Stevenson



Medical History: A form has been included in the material the foster parent receives along with instructions to assist you in keeping your child's medical history. Make sure you discuss with the social worker all the forms you should have in the home. The caseworker has a comprehensive list of all the forms you will need.

Immunizations: The Department of Public Health requires that DHR give permission in writing before a foster child can receive an immunization at the local public health department.

Your caseworker will either give the signed authorization form to you as the person accompanying the child for the immunization or submit the form directly to the Health Department.

The caseworker will discuss with the foster parent the information regarding the child's health status. This information will be needed to give to the Health Department on the day the immunization is given.

Immunization Alert: Foster parents should be alert to reactions to some immunizations and obtain immediate medical treatment if needed. See a doctor or go to the emergency room if you observe any of the following symptoms:

- Temperature is greater than 102 degrees and is not relieved by fever medication;
- Prolonged continuous crying or unusual high pitched cry;
- An episode of limpness, paleness, or blue spell;
- Any seizure or convulsion;
- If the child appears very sick or different.

NOTE: Report to the Social Worker any medical treatment obtained.

Medication: The following guide should be followed for dispensing medication to a foster child:

Give prescription medication only with a physician's prescription or authorization:

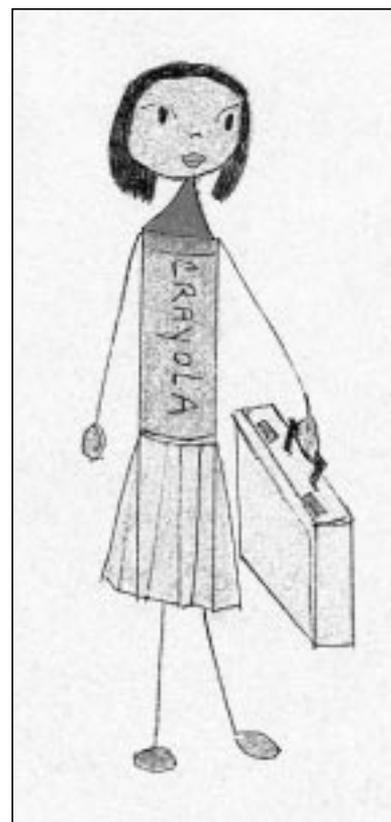
Do not change the prescribed dosage without physician's authorization.

Exercise good judgement in use of non-prescription medications and only in accordance with directions on the label.

Look for potential negative side effects of any medication given and report immediately to the physician.

I do not know what makes a man more conservative—to know nothing but the present, or nothing but the past.

– J. M. Keynes



Keep all medications and medical supplies safely stored, and out of reach of children.

Maintain a medication log for prescriptions.

911 Emergency Medical Care: When a child needs immediate medical care, call or take the child immediately to the child's physician or to the emergency room of the hospital.

Contact the Social Worker or supervisor as soon as possible if the child is ill or injured.

Family Visits and Vacations



What about visits and vacations my family may make? Is there some special procedure we must follow?

You should notify the child's caseworker when you desire to take a child on an overnight trip out of the county. You must notify DHR if the visit is in excess of three days as the visit will require agency approval.

All out-of-state visits of a foster child must have the approval of DHR.

As much advance notice as possible should be given so necessary parental or court approval can be obtained. If such a visit is approved, the social worker will provide you with written approval. Some out-of-state visits may require court approval; therefore it is essential to plan ahead.

If it is necessary to take a trip or vacation without the foster child, notify the child's worker several weeks in advance so adequate plans can be made for the child by the child's caseworker.

Remember communication is essential when any plans are made that disrupts the regular routine. In creating a stable environment for the foster child, foster parents and caseworkers must make sure the child knows what's going on to avoid undue stress. Children need to know that they are not being abandoned or rejected.

At twenty years of age, the will reigns; at thirty, the wit; at forty, the judgement.

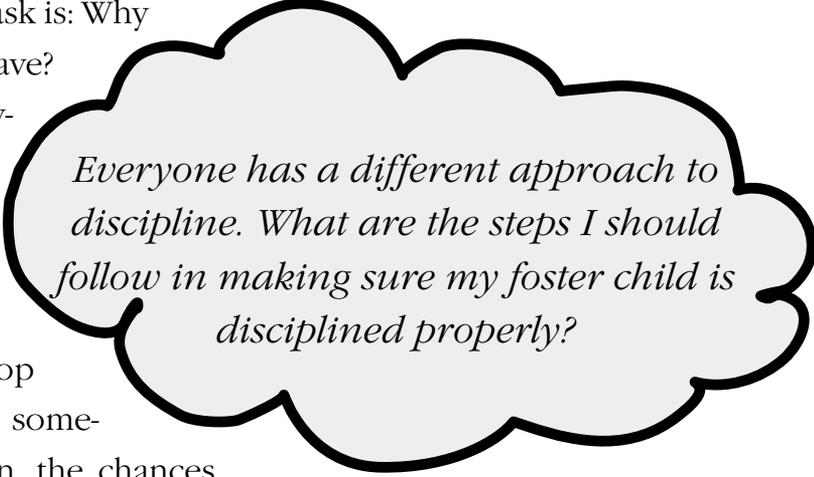
- Ben Franklin, 1741

Discipline and Training

It is important that discipline be fair, consistent, related and proportional to the offense. Discipline must be a positive educational tool to help children develop inner controls. Harsh and humiliating punishment, including physical, emotional and verbal abuse are never an option.

Perhaps the question to ask is: Why do kids behave and misbehave?

We all change our behavior according to the consequences that result. If a child does something and as a consequence gets hurt, chances are the child will stop doing it. If the child does something that brings satisfaction, the chances are he/she will keep doing it.



Everyone has a different approach to discipline. What are the steps I should follow in making sure my foster child is disciplined properly?

Often, specific and tangible consequences are needed to encourage positive behavior or to stop disruptive or non-compliant behavior. Consistency and timing are two factors in using consequences, *both positive and negative*.

Rules should be firm and consistently enforced. Consequences should occur as soon as possible after the behavior you are attempting to change.

Everyone, both child and adult, follows the same pattern in dealing with behavior. Here is a fundamental map you might consider as you look at your own behavior as well as the behavior of children.

Doubtstorms: turbulent days when the enemy is too big, the task too great, the future too bleak, and the answers too few.

- Max Lucado

***Coincidences equal Choices
Choices equal Consequences
Consequences equal Outcomes
Outcomes equal Reflection***

This formula may look more complicated than it really is.

Follow the exercise to gain a knowledge of how the process works.



What do you suggest when unwanted behaviors occur?

Coincidence – Suppose a child is coincidentally left in the kitchen when his mother leaves the room to answer the telephone. The child is all alone and mother has put a pot on the stove to boil some water. The child looks at the pot, the steam coming from the pot, and the pretty blue

flame that is warming the pot. It is a coincidence that he is confronted with the situation.

Choice – The child is confronted with a choice. He can touch the pot or not touch the pot. *You can predict where we're going with this.* He makes the choice to touch the hot pot that his mother has left on the stove. (Never mind the fact that his mother has told him repeatedly never to touch the hot stove.) He takes two fingers and touches the shiny hot pot.

Consequences – The results are predictable. He chooses to touch the hot pot and the consequence is that two of his fingers are severely burned. He screams and cries, of course, and his mother comes into the kitchen and assesses the situation. She scolds him and reminds him that she has told him repeatedly not to touch the hot stove.

Outcomes – The boy's mother has to administer first aid. She puts cold water on the burns and then burn-salve and wraps the two fingers to protect the injury. The boy goes to bed that night with his fingers burning and cries himself to sleep.

*Doing what lies clearly at hand
is better than being able to tell
the future.*
– Unknown

Reflection – Upon reflection the child experiences the discomfort and decides that he will never, ever touch the hot stove again.

Coincidences- Days later the child is in the kitchen with his mother and the telephone rings. . .

Every day everyone is confronted with multiple sets of coincidences. As a result of those coincidences we are confronted with choices. Our behavior is shaped by the choices we make in every situation. We all follow the same pattern. The pattern is predictable; however, the choices we make are not necessarily predictable.

Foster parents, or any parent for that matter, are faced with two important questions in dealing with children:

How can I increase positive/wanted behavior?

How can I stop negative/unwanted behavior?

A common mistake that parents make is to think only of what can be done to stop unwanted behavior. Encouraging positive behavior is most important. Here are some things that can help.

Reward desired behaviors often and quickly. If you praise your foster child's positive behavior as soon as it happens, he/she will be more likely to repeat this behavior.

Be specific in your praise or rewards. Describe the good behavior, "You really made the dirty car sparkle" rather than saying something like "What a good boy."

Point out something fun will follow positive behavior. For example, "after you pick up your toys, you may go outside and play with your friends."

Set a good example. If you want your child to put things away, put your own things away and show the child what you would like the child to do. Your foster child will begin to imitate the behavior he/she sees you use.

Some examples of positive consequences

- Watch a late Television show
- Take him/her special places
- Specific tangible reward (small toy)
- Play an extra game together
- Read an extra story
- Special treats for dinner

Make absolutely sure you correct in yourself the things you despise in others.

- Unknown



Unwanted behaviors can be as varied and complicated as the situation foster children find themselves in. Be assured that negative behavior on the part of a child means that they get attention too. Everybody needs attention (strokes) and sometimes it doesn't matter if the strokes (attention) are negative.

It is good to ignore certain unwanted behaviors. Even negative attention such as scolding will often cause a child to keep behaving badly. For example, if your foster child is having a tantrum, make sure the child is safe and then direct your attention elsewhere. When the tantrum stops, give the child attention. Ignoring is particularly effective with complaining, whining and nagging behaviors.

Punish sparingly using negative consequences. (*A list of negative consequences follows.*)

As with positive consequences, it is important to punish immediately after the negative behavior occurs. When correcting a child, try to use positive language. For example, "Please shut the door quietly next time" is much better than "Don't slam the door."

Always comment on unwanted behavior and not the child. For example, say, "No playing with food" rather than "You're so sloppy!"

Briefly state a reason for punishment such as "Hitting is not allowed."

Avoid physical punishment.

Some examples of negative consequences might be the following:

- Miss favorite TV show,
- Time-out for a short period of time (1 minute for each year of age),
- Removal of some privileges,
- TV is off earlier than usual.

A list of traditional corrective procedures includes:

- Loss of privileges,
- Time out (usually one minute for each year of age—e.g., 3 year olds have a 3 minute time out, 4 Year olds have a 4 minute time out, etc.),
- Grounding to a certain area,



*What is a Time-Out
and when do I use it?*

*Everybody moves toward the
future at the same rate of
speed: sixty minutes an hour.*

- Unknown

- Redirecting the child's activity,
- Developing a behavioral contract,
- Extra chores,
- Restitution by child of other persons' property damaged or destroyed by the child.

It is never acceptable to slap, strike, or hit a child. It is never acceptable to hit a child with a fist. It is never acceptable to shake the child. It is never acceptable to use a chemical, drug, or mechanical restraint on a child.
The Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes specifically prohibits these types of punishments.



Foster children need the security that develops from being an accepted part of the foster family. This means sharing and participating in the family's activities, doing chores, obeying the rules and receiving discipline when it is needed. Being consistent and correcting a child's unacceptable behavior in a positive manner is the key to success.

Foster parents should remember that children coming to their home might be coming against their will. They may be confused, frightened, angry or hostile. Their feelings may be expressed through aggressive behavior or indifference to their surroundings. All children are different. It is important that you allow the child to express his or her feelings.

Discipline methods will be discussed with your social worker during the initial evaluation of the home. You should not hesitate to contact the caseworker whenever you are in doubt about how to deal with a behavior problem. Because each child is different, different methods are needed to train and discipline each of them. Certainly, the type of discipline should depend on the child's age, the offense and the method that might be most effective with that child. Praising and rewarding a child's good behavior is a way of preventing or eliminating unacceptable behavior.

Although many adults enjoy their jobs, it is only a lucky few who



would report to work every day without the paycheck they expect to receive. Rewards can be an effective way to provide motivation to help children improve behavior. A ‘bribe’ is when you pay someone to do something wrong or unethical! We propose rewards for doing something right or desirable.

The key is to be specific about the behaviors you wish to help the child increase. The reward system can be set up for those specific behaviors. It is important to include the child’s input in setting up any behavior plan.

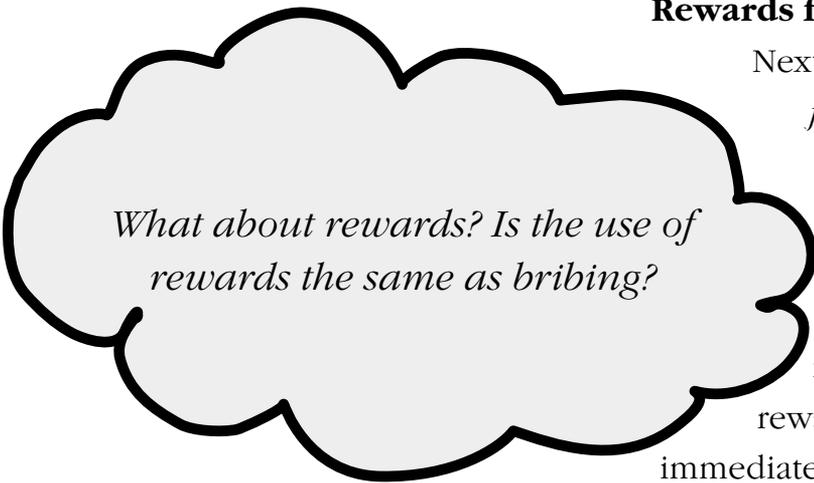
Behavior Plan (Here’s one example.)

First, list the behaviors you wish to increase. These could include feeding the dog, clearing the table after dinner and completing homework by dinnertime. You might want to create a Behavior Chart.

Behavior	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
Sweep Floor							
Feed Dog							
Make Bed							
Pick Up Toys							
Other. . .							

Rewards for Positive Behaviors

Next, decide on a reward (e.g. *30 points = trip for ice cream*) or set up a reward menu with a number of rewards and their point value. Be sure the reward system is appropriate to the child’s age, maturity and ability level. Younger children respond best to highly visible, frequent rewards (*such as stickers*) that can be enjoyed immediately.



Older children often respond well to systems where they earn “points” or stars to be redeemed for rewards at a later date. Again, enlist the child’s input when setting up rewards.

When a reward system is successful, the behaviors will become eas-

ier for the child and will occur more frequently. After a time the behaviors will become habits and another target behavior can be added.

The goal of time-out is for the child to realize that he/she needs to calm down and behave in a more appropriate way. Time-out is not a personal attack on the child. It is simply a calm and non-violent consequence to the child's misbehavior. Time-outs work because the procedure is easy for the adult to learn, and the adult can model being calm and nonviolent. The time out serves as a clear signal to the child that the behavior in question will not be tolerated. Some children have even been known to request time-out when they realize their behavior is out of control.

Time out can be effective for children between the ages of two and twelve. It involves placing the child in a quiet place until a signal that the time out is ended. The place chosen for time out should be away from interesting or rewarding activities such as TV. For a very small child, the spot could be a time out chair. For the older child (about five years), it would be appropriate to place the child in another room with the door to the room open.

The rule of thumb is that the child's age determines the length of time-out, about one minute per year. Behaviors that respond well to time-outs include hitting, spitting, slapping, pinching, and throwing food at the table.

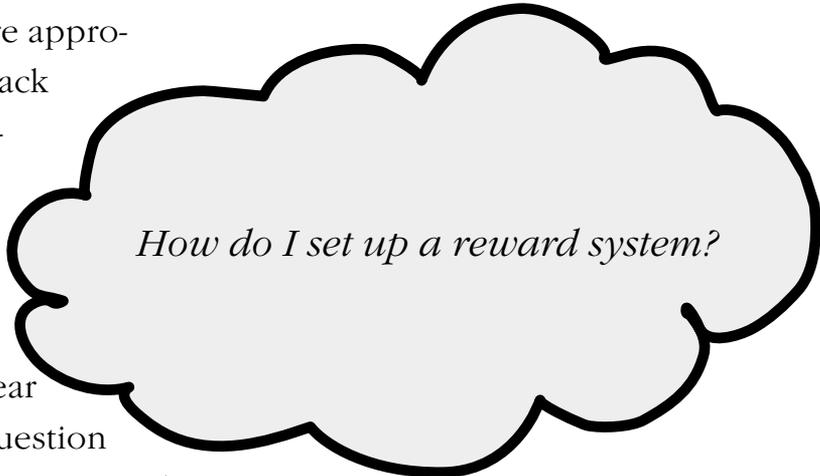
Guides you may use in achieving a positive approach to discipline.

Establish well-defined rules that set the expectations and limits of behavior.

Respect individual differences in children, for example, age, personality, likes and dislikes.

Set realistic goals within a child's ability to achieve.

Try to separate behavior caused by anxiety or tension from deliberate misbehavior.



It is better to try and fail than to successfully do nothing.

- Unknown

Be fair, be firm, be gentle and consistent, and be honest.

Corrective measures should follow the act and not be prolonged or repetitious.

Be aware of disapproving of the act, not the child. Use verbal disapproval of the behavior of the child.

Be accepting of the child; be positive in your approach.

Give recognition and reward for good behavior. Always reinforce acceptable behavior.

Here is a list of absolute “do nots.”

- Slapping, Striking/spanking, Hitting, Shaking
- Withholding meals or forcing a child to eat
- Name calling
- Derogatory remarks about the child or his birth family
- Threats of removal from the foster home
- Denying planned visits, telephone or mail contacts with family members.
- Isolating the child in a locked room or in any closet or other enclosed space.
- Chemical, drug or mechanical restraints
- Permitting a child to punish another child
- Publicly embarrassing child by recounting failures.

Issues for the Child

In many respects foster children are just like any other child. As any concerned parent will confirm, raising a child is rewarding yet difficult and challenging. In addition to all the issues that exist in any parent-child relationship, there are some specific issues that are more likely to surface with foster children.

Issue 1 – *How can I trust anyone?* Many foster children will have conflict in one of the most basic areas of human experience. “Can I trust you? Maybe you act nice, treat me well and say you care, but the last time I trusted someone I was terribly hurt.”



What can you do? Treat the child with kindness and be patient. Set limits on behavior and be fair and consistent. Explain to the child that you are there to care for him/her and he/she can count on you. Keep rules clear and simple and enforce rules the same every day. No matter how you feel on a particular day, treat the child in a consistent, kind manner. Keep all promises. Don't say anything unless you have every intention of doing what you say.

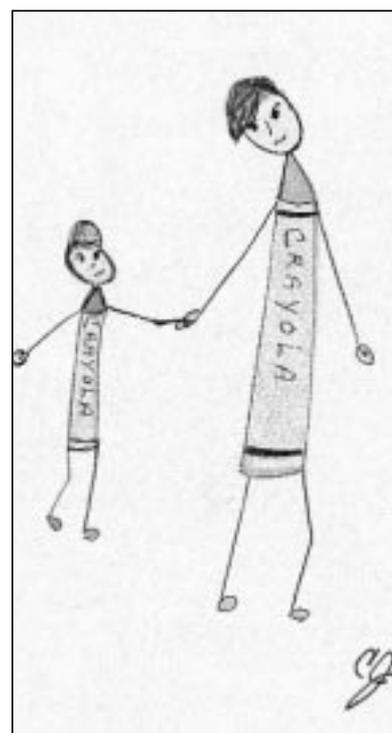
Issue 2 – I am grief-stricken. Being separated from biological parents, siblings, family, school and friends can create overwhelming grief in a child. A grieving child may have little emotional energy to relate to others. Being withdrawn or seeming preoccupied or disinterested in relationships are common signs of grief.

What can you do? Provide the child with a stable routine and opportunities for interesting activities. Recognize the child's feelings but don't dwell on them or try to convince the child not to be sad. Make yourself available in a not-too-pushy manner. Provide a special treat. Arrange for a few extended family members or neighborhood children to meet the foster child. Provide a special seat at the meal table and personalize the child's room. Make the child "feel at home." If possible maintain contact with the birth parents and involve them in events such as birthdays, holidays or other special times in the child's life. Don't make negative remarks about the birth parents.

Issue 3 – I feel that I am no good. I must be worthless. Having been removed from the biological parents, foster children often assume they are to blame. Having experienced rejection they often blame themselves and may try to protect themselves from possible further feelings of rejection by being critical or nasty to adults who reach out to them, such as teachers or foster parents.

What can you do? Discuss with the foster child, at their level of comprehension, the reason for placement in foster care and what will happen in the immediate future. Be caring and avoid criticizing the child's biological family. Help the child form a relationship with a caring adult. Avoid corporal punishment or verbal put-downs. Look for ways to realistically praise the child. Help the child pursue

The greatest mistake you can make is to continue to fear you're going to make a mistake.
- Unknown



hobbies or areas of special ability where realistic pride can be built. Do little things that send the message “you are special.” Make the child’s favorite meal or dessert, fix up his/her room or do something extra with the child.

Issue 4 – I don’t fit in anywhere. Foster children have been uprooted from their biological homes and may have been in a series of placements. Life has been turned upside down and they feel they don’t “belong” anywhere.

What can you do? Show the child that you are stable and organized and that the child is an important part of your plan. Involve the child in decorating his/her room. Visit the school with the child and meet the new teacher. Talk to the child about plans for home, school and activities. Show by your planning and interest that the child fits well into your home and you are eager to make your home a pleasant place for the child.

Issue 5 – You treat me really well and I wasn’t treated well in my biological parent home. I’m confused. Remember your primary role as a foster parent is to provide a temporary home that is safe, comfortable and caring. Children enter foster care for a variety of reasons and often were treated poorly or abused in the biological home. They are upset, confused and may feel disloyal if they relate to you in a positive way.

What can you do? Some foster children want to talk about their birth parents; others never want to discuss them. Resist comparisons between your home and their previous home. Don’t be critical of the birth parents. Be an interested listener but don’t seek to involve the child in prolonged discussions of past events. Be patient and offer the child a consistent, predictable presence. Sometimes there is a period when the child tries to be perfect out of fear of being rejected or just plain fear. Let the child know you are reliable and your positive response doesn’t depend on the child being “perfect.” If you are consistent, kind and fair the child will be more likely to relax and feel less confused.

*There are people who dream
and people who plan. Planners
make their dreams come true.*

– Unknown



Issue 6 – *You are not my real parent. I don't have to do what you say.* Often there is a honeymoon period of particularly nice behavior when a foster child enters a new home. Sooner or later, however, the child may begin to test your authority and challenge your rules.

What can you do? Realize that the foster child has been through big disappointments and may be expressing previous problems by challenging you as the current symbol of authority. Do not take any challenging behavior personally. Stay calm and remind the child that although you are there to be helpful and caring, the child must obey and follow the rules. By staying calm and being consistent and firm, you are sending the important message that the world can be a stable, predictable and safe place. A consistent system that employs basic principles of behavior management is a good way to deal with challenging, negative behavior. Talk to your social worker about books you can read on behavior management. He/She will be willing to guide you.

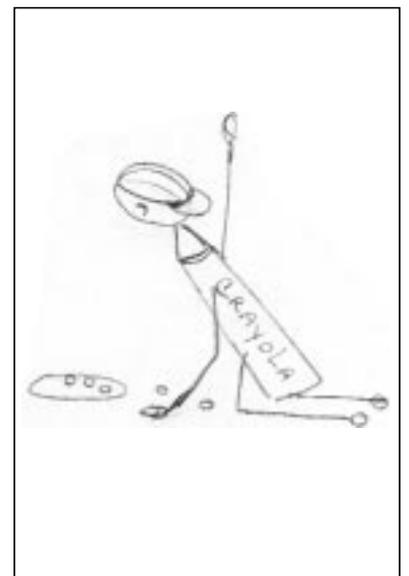
Issue 7 – *I have sexual feelings.* Feelings of a sexual nature occur in various forms at all ages. Foster children may have been exposed to sexual behavior at an early age. These and other factors can combine to create increased awareness of and interest in sexual behavior.

What can you do? Set clear boundaries for behavior of a sexual nature. Discourage intense displays of physical affection such as kisses on the lips, prolonged hugging or sitting in adult laps. Set a standard for privacy and modesty and have clear guidelines for the child to follow. There are many ways to express loving and caring without the type of physical contact that can stir feelings and create conflicts. With foster children we encourage a more rigid code of privacy, modesty and physical contact.

Issue 8 – *I am jealous of your other children or grandchildren or other people in your life.* The foster child will often feel like a stranger in your home and may resent the attention you give to others. With a possible history of emotional deprivation and having been separated from home, the child will have a sensitivity about being slighted or ignored.

People don't think much of a person who is not wiser today than he was yesterday.

- Unknown



What can you do? Within reason, try to divide your time and energy in a fair manner. Show the child by your actions that you care. Never compare the child to other family members or children in the neighborhood. If you have other children or grandchildren in the home, encourage some cooperative projects where there is group success and everyone receives praise and recognition. Be aware of the child's increased sensitivity in this area. Develop habits of offering support and attention on a regular basis without the child having to seek attention.

Clothes



*What about clothes for the child?
What are my responsibilities?*

The clothes a child wears has a lot to do with the image he has of himself. It is essential that the child's clothes be in keeping with those of your own children and the child in the community.

The child may or may not come to foster care with an adequate supply of clothes. If he does not, the Social Worker may shop for the child or give you permission to buy an initial supply of clothes depending on available local funds. Usually, you will be expected to buy the child's clothes on an ongoing basis from the board payment. (The board payment includes an amount for clothing.)

When the child leaves the foster home, it is expected that he will take with him his clothing and other personal belongings.

Some children may need special clothes or shoes. For example, a physically handicapped child may need clothes or shoes specifically designed for him. A child participating in scouts, band, camp or athletic activities will need special uniforms, clothes and shoes. You should discuss these needs with the Social Worker. The worker will assist by attempting to locate public and private community resources that can meet these needs.

*Vision is the art of seeing
things invisible.*
- Unknown

Used clothing for foster children is acceptable if it is in good condition, is the appropriate size and suitable for the child's age. Many foster parents find it helpful to keep on hand clothes that fit children within the age group for which their home is approved. Some foster parents share used clothing with each other by establishing a clothes closet that may be sponsored by the Foster Parent Association. If you plan to make the child's clothes, you should use the same discretion as when purchasing clothes. The material, size and pattern design should be in keeping with the child's age and size.

The foster parent may prefer to shop for the child's clothes. But it is important to keep in mind that older children feel a need to select their own clothes. They enjoy this experience and learn from it. You and the child should be able to come to an agreement regarding the selection of clothes.

Religious and Social Activities

It is not within the foster parent's responsibility to exhibit a religious agenda. If you attend church, it is a perfectly natural choice to have the child attend church with you. The child needs the opportunity for spiritual development; however, the foster parent must keep in mind the child's and his family's religious preference. At no time should the foster parent require or push the child to accept the foster parent's religious beliefs or rituals.

It is the role of the foster parent to provide transportation to social and religious activities. Discuss with the social worker the spiritual and social needs of the child. In partnership with the social worker and the birth parents a plan for development in this area can be addressed effectively.



What is my responsibility with regard to church and other social activities?

Never repay evil for evil. Doing what is right in the eyes of everybody makes a superior person.

- Unknown

Transporting Children

When transporting the children from one place to another, what are the basic rules the foster parent is expected to follow?

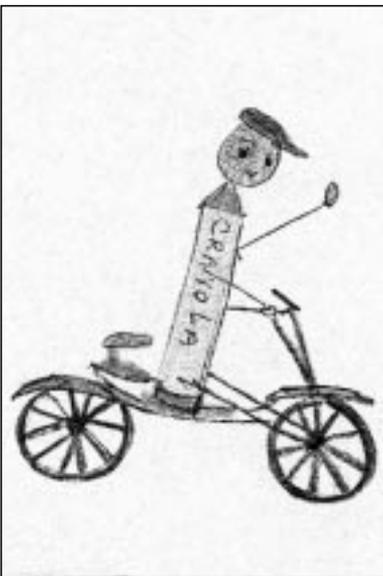
All children under age six must be secured in a child passenger restraint system that meets applicable federal motor vehicle safety standards. The child passenger restraint system for four or five year olds may include seat belts installed by the motor vehicle manufacturer, dealer of owner. Alabama law requires that all passengers in a motor vehicle must use a proper seat belt.

DHR provides car seats to foster parents for use in transporting foster children under age six. If a child under age six is placed in a home approved by DHR. Discuss with the Social Worker if you need DHR to provide a car seat.

Life Books

Children in foster care are entitled to a link with their past. It is their right to know who they are and from where they come. A life book is a way to help the child forge that link. This is done through the collection of pictures, historical data, memorabilia, stories, and the special events in his life that provides the child with a clearer picture of who he is. A life book can help in decreasing the trauma created by losses and separations and help a child understand what is happening to him.

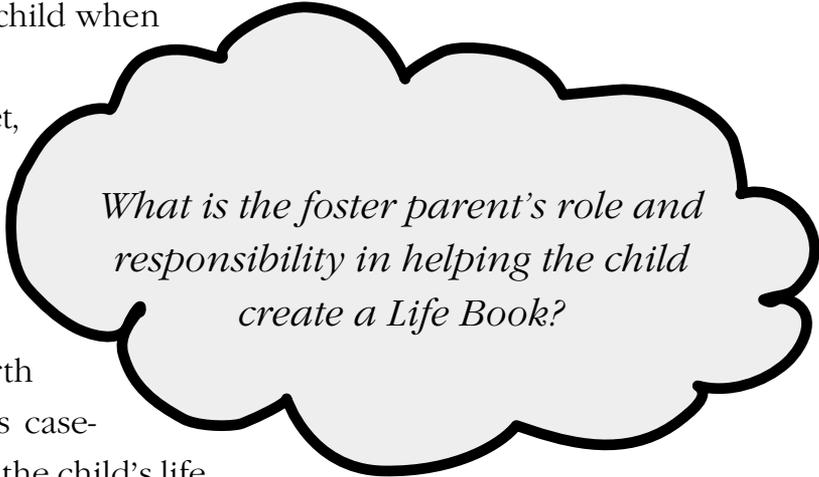
The **Life Book** is an important tool that can be used in the psychological development of the child. Methods for developing a life book should be included in every foster parent's orientation and/or training. A life book is to be prepared for each child entering foster care and is to begin at the time of placement. It becomes a part of the



child's possessions and accompanies the child when the child moves from the foster home.

The **Life Book** may be a folder, packet, picture album, or an especially prepared box that can be used to create a permanent record for the child, the birth family, the foster family or the adoptive family.

When they are available, the child's birth parents can help by providing the child's caseworker with significant information about the child's life prior to placement. Also cards, letters, etc., from the birth parents to the child while in care may be added.



What is the foster parent's role and responsibility in helping the child create a Life Book?

Illustrations of material that may be included are:

The child's birth information (*birth certificate, birth weight and length, time of birth, news events of that date, etc.*).

Family tree (*description and/or pictures of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and the siblings' order of birth, etc.*).

Placement history and significant others who may have been a part of the placements (*foster parents, special teachers, neighbors, friends, social worker, etc.*).

Medical history (*immunizations, hospitalizations, medical facilities where medical services were received, illnesses, allergies, etc.*).

Education history (*dates, grades, report cards, school pictures, class plays, achievement awards, sports events, etc.*).

Letters, birthday cards, special mementos and drawings by child.

Pictures of child and significant others.

Recordings or postcards or souvenirs from vacations or special trips.

The above is not a total listing of information that can be included in a Life Book. It is merely a guide or food for thought. The social worker will assist you with material to be included or deleted. The caseworker will also be adding material that may only be available through DHR. Since the Life Book is for the child's emotional and psychological development, the social worker and foster parents will need to help the child select articles to be incorporated. It is

There are folks who have a clear conscience simply because their heads are empty.
- Unknown

important the child know that the Life Book tells a story and that he is the leading character.

Help! I Need Somebody! Help! Not Just Anybody!

The challenges of being a foster parent in the twenty-first century can impact the entire family in many ways. Stresses and strains of normal life are only amplified when one takes up the challenge. That is why the Department of Human Resources views the work you do with sincere appreciation. We view our work together as a team effort, and we want to be there for you when life is going well and when life is going not so well. We are committed to your entire family. We are a team. That is why we need to be informed every step of the way. We are here to counsel, to rescue, to reach out to the community on your behalf, and to insure that you have the support you need. Therefore, we urge you to never be reluctant to contact DHR about any matter. No one on

our team will be considered inadequate or have to shoulder blame. We are all in this endeavor together.

This is about the children who are at risk; it is not about pointing fingers. There is no question that cannot be asked.

We know how difficult some of the children can be. We are aware of the impact foster parenting can have on the entire family. Your social worker is your lifeline in planning for the child. It is your right and responsibility to keep us informed and request the assistance you need when you need it.

The following was developed by caseworkers and foster parents.

Call for Help when

- The behavior of the child is dangerous to himself or others
- The behavior of the child is bizarre, exaggerated or inappropriate for his age.

*How will I know when
to ask for help?*

*Really great people make you
think you can become one too!*

- Unknown

- The behavior of the child is getting him into trouble at school and in the neighborhood
- The behavior of the child is causing a great deal of extra expense or work for the family
- The behavior of the child does not make sense to you, and is difficult for you to understand with your knowledge of child development and the effects of separation trauma

Call for Help when

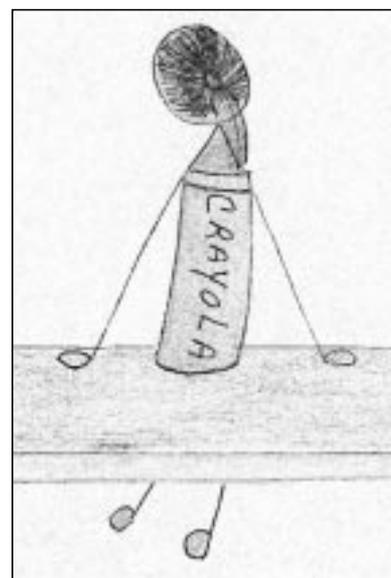
- Your own children are upset or developing problems as a result of conflict
- It is becoming more difficult for members of the family to see the children in a positive light
- You and your spouse, or you and your children are experiencing increasing anxiety or conflict about the foster child
- You are so busy taking care of the foster child's needs or problems that you don't have time for recreation, privacy, or enjoyment of each other
- The foster child gets "too close" to your spouse, and tries to shut you out of the relationship
- You find yourself preoccupied with problems of the foster child; you or someone else in the family is having trouble eating, sleeping, or being able to get away from the child for a few hours
- Your discipline, rules and routines are being violated by the foster child, and you are concerned it will undermine the structure you have for your own children
- The family cannot afford to maintain the usual lifestyle because of financial expense for the foster child
- You are aware that things that go wrong in the family are being blamed on the foster child.

Call for Help when

- The child does not respond to normal discipline
- If the child does not respond to normal discipline, you find yourself needing to escalate the level of discipline. For example, you have tried talking to the child, taking away privileges and nothing seems to work.

Think. How much time do you spend worrying about things that never actually happen?

- Unknown



- The child appears to be attempting to provoke you into more serious physical discipline. For example, the child taunts “*Go ahead and hit me*” or the child who physically lashes out at you
- You find it increasingly difficult to stick to discipline techniques approved in the discipline policy. You are aware that you are starting to want to use discipline techniques which are not allowed because the child doesn’t respond to your best efforts.
- You are feeling frustrated or are losing hope that you will be able to manage the child’s behavior in a productive way.

Call for Help when

- The Medicaid card or foster care payment is late, and there is an immediate need that must be met
- You need assistance in locating a community resource to help the child (*Doctors, dentist, team, scout troop, tutoring, etc.*)
- You have asked for help at a community resource, but you are denied access, or put on a long waiting list
- You are feeling isolated or unsupported by the agency or staff
- You know that you need training or reading materials about a certain problem the child is having
- You have relevant information about the child’s family
- You are concerned that the child is being hurt in some way by the relationship with the natural family or the agency plan
- You need the social worker’s support or advocacy to deal with the school
- You do not believe you are receiving adequate compensation or reimbursement for the expenses of the child, the amount of transportation you provide, the damage done by the child to your home
- You are having difficulty coping with the pressure or criticism of the neighbors about the foster child.

Why is it I seem to enjoy being idle when I have the most work to do?
- Unknown



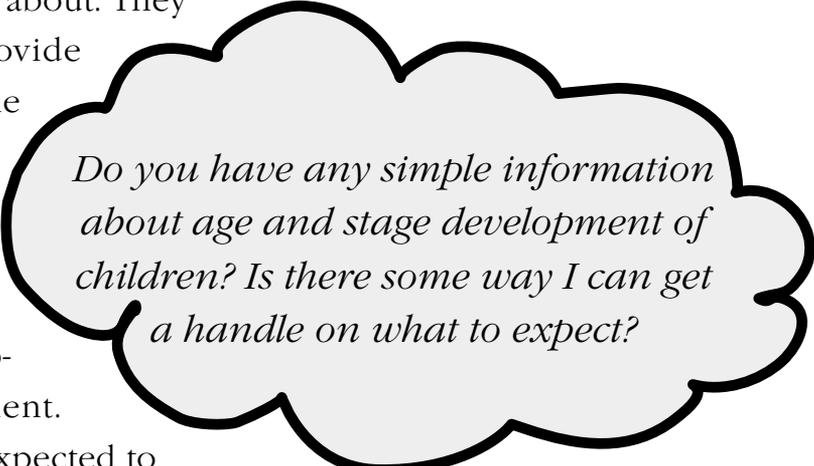
Remember it is your right to contact the social worker for assistance. There are many valid reasons to ask for consultation, not just the ones listed above. If you are concerned about the child, or your family is stressed for any of the reasons listed above, it is important to let the Agency know. We can assist in a plan to handle the child’s behavior. We can connect you with community resources that can help and, we can work together to reduce the stress on your family.

Part 2

Developmental Milestones of Children and the Implications for Parents

Here are some fun characteristics to read about. They are generalizations, however they provide guidelines for understanding some of the age-level expectancies. Not all children will show all the characteristics, especially not at the exact chronological age. Knowing some of the sequences children go through can help adults provide a more “accepting” environment.

Children in a foster home can often be expected to be on a slower timetable, especially in social and emotional growth.



Do you have any simple information about age and stage development of children? Is there some way I can get a handle on what to expect?

Birth to Six Months

Physical Characteristics – the child develops his own rhythm in feeding, eliminating, and sleeping. Growth is rapid. He/she gains early control of eye movements and develops motor control in orderly sequence: balances head, rolls over, pulls self to sitting position, sits alone momentarily, and begins to grasp objects.

Parents need to adapt their schedule to the baby’s rhythm as much as possible. Rapid growth means that a steady supply of adequate food is a must. The baby’s position needs to be changed frequently. Exercise the baby’s arms and legs as you bathe and change him. Supply lots of visual stimuli, such as mobiles, and let the baby grasp your fingers as you pull him up.

Mental Characteristics – the child learns through his senses. This means that he can distinguish his mother from others and is more responsive to her. He coos and vocalizes spontaneously. He may babble in two-syllable words. This means that parents need to provide objects for the baby to see, hear, and grasp. Spend time talking to the child!

Social Characteristics – the baby imitates movements, gazes at faces, and smiles to be friendly. He likes to be played with, tickled, and jostled. He will smile at himself in the mirror and he plays with his hands and toes.

Parents should play pat-a-cake and peek-a-boo and bounce him on their knees. Provide a mirror for the child and allow freedom for his hands and legs.

Emotional Characteristics – the child shows excitement through waving arms, kicking, and wriggling. He shows pleasure as he anticipates a bottle or being picked up. The child cries in different ways when he is cold, or hungry, or wet. He fears loud or unexpected noise, strange objects, situations or persons, and sudden movements.

Parents need to show facial expressions of smiling or frowning. You also need to be able to “read” the child’s cries. Don’t be afraid of spoiling the child. A cry is a main way of communicating needs.

NOTE:

The goal of toys and activities at this age is to stimulate the child’s senses. We want the child to see, hear, touch, taste and mouth safe, interesting objects. Research shows that young babies benefit from being held, gently massaged and cuddled. You are the baby’s most important “toy.” Talk to the baby, play peek-a-boo and interact as much as possible.



*If you have eight hours to chop
down a tree, spend six hours
sharpening your axe.*
– Unknown

Some of the ways to stimulate the baby's development are:

using patterned sheets on the bed, or colorful wallpaper,

provide safe toys to touch, feel and mouth,

a safe mobile is excellent,

make sure the baby gets to hear music of every kind (*classical music and children's songs, for example*).

Heads Up Causes for Concern:

If the baby exhibits no vocalization or fails to respond to sounds.

Call the social worker if the baby doesn't respond as you think he/she should.

Six Months to One Year

Physical Characteristics - the child begins to develop his large muscles. From eight months on he begins to crawl. From nine months on he/she may begin to walk. Small muscle development means the child learns to let go with hands and puts everything in his mouth. He begins to have teeth come in and cannot control his bowels.

Parents need to be sure dangerous objects are out of reach. You must provide experiences that involve arm and leg exercises. And ***play with the child!*** Games that include "*dropping things*" help the child understand the world around him.

It is important to provide him with foods he can eat with his hands, as well as any other activities involving exercise of the fingers.

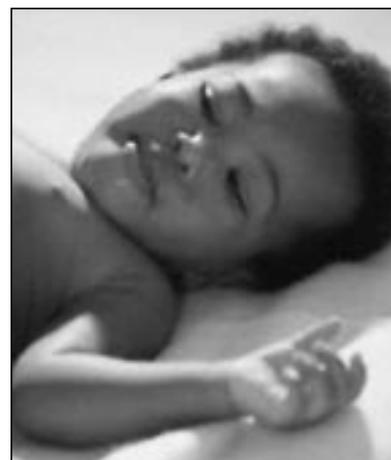
The child may be cranky, so he'll need special patience from you as well as things to chew on. *For goodness sake, do not attempt to potty train the child at this point in time.*

Mental Characteristics - the child learns through his senses, especially his mouth. He likes to do things over and over, and likes to put things in and takes things out. You must provide toys and games that involve hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching. ***Be sure there are NO toys with small or loose parts.*** Repeat words and activities over and over and over and over. You get the idea.

Language - the child begins to understand such familiar words as "*eat*", "*mama*", "*bye-bye*", "*doggie*", etc. He especially likes to hear you name objects. Say the name of objects as the child sees or uses them. Begin to look at very simple picture books with the child.

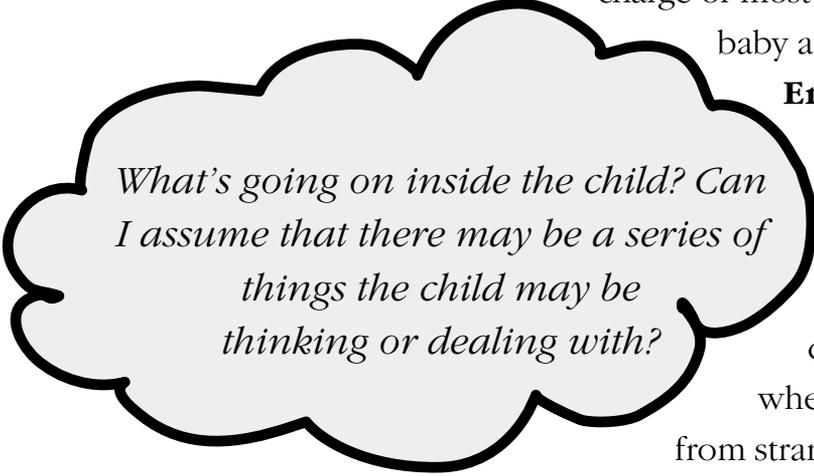
Wisdom begins by placing long-range purposes ahead of immediate pleasures.

- Unknown



Social Characteristics – the child will find mother or mother substitute extremely important. He will talk using babbling sounds and will start to imitate. This time eating is the baby’s major source of social interaction. He will not play with other infants, don’t expect it (he will poke, pull, and push other children instead). At this point one person should be in charge of most of the child’s care. Spend time talking to the baby and do the things you want the child to do.

Emotional Characteristics – the child needs to be held and cuddled with warmth and love. He needs to feel sure that someone will take care of him. Thumb sucking may extend from birth; it is a child’s way of comforting himself. He becomes unhappy when his mother leaves him. He draws away from strangers and continues to fear unexpected and loud noise, strangers and sudden movement.



What’s going on inside the child? Can I assume that there may be a series of things the child may be thinking or dealing with?

Parents are the special persons to provide physical comfort for the child at this juncture. His needs of hunger, cleanliness, warmth, holding, sensory stimulation, and interaction with an adult should always be met. Don’t be afraid of spoiling him; that’s an old wives tale that is groundless. If the mother must leave the child, a special person should provide care.

Note: This is the age of mobility and exploration. The child is typically curious and active. Provide a variety of safe materials for stacking and noise making. Having lots of interaction with objects begins to teach the baby about cause and effect and develops hand-eye coordination. Provide lots of verbal interaction since this is essential to promoting language skill development. Play with the child to provide guidance and give verbal praise and encouragement. Useful toys for this age group includes • household objects such as plastic cups, bowls and pot lids, • unbreakable mirrors, • blocks, boxes and bowls for stacking and, • any kind of pull toys.

Heads Up for Concern - Get in touch with the social worker if the child fails to respond to you, or if there is too much crying or fretting. Even worse is a sad expression and failure to cry. Remember you are part of a partnership and two heads are better than one. We’re in this

Giving or lending. It all costs about the same.
– Unknown

together for the safety and development of the child.

One to Two Years Old

The child is developing rapidly in motor, verbal and social skills. It is necessary for the foster parent to provide a comforting and safe home to promote feelings of security in the child. Feeling safe and secure will better enable the child to explore, to be active and interact. This is essential to learning motor skills and developing social-emotional abilities.

Physical Characteristics -- The child begins to walk, creep up and down stairs and climb on furniture, etc. He enjoys pushing and pulling toys. Children at this age group enjoy play telephones, picture books, balls. He enjoys stuffed animals and any group of safe objects in a large container. Listening to children's musical tapes and CDs are key to development.

Small muscle activity includes feeding himself with a spoon, and he begins to hold a cup. At this age he can stack blocks and he likes to take things apart. Putting things in and taking things out is a popular activity. Taking clothes on and off is of interest to the child. He cannot control bowels.

The foster parent must provide a large, safe space for exercising arms and legs. Pushing and pulling toys help the child to balance in walking. He'll be very messy, but allow the child to feed himself sometimes. Fix food he can eat easily. Get toys he can take apart, stack, squeeze, and pull. Let the child try to dress himself. Do not try to potty train.

Mental Characteristics - The child learns through his senses. He is curious and likes to explore. He wants to touch everything.

Language - he can say the name of some common objects. He uses one-word sentences; e.g., "No", "Go", "Down", "Bye, Bye". He can point to common body parts and familiar objects. He can understand simple directions such as "Get your coat."

Have toys or play games which make sounds, have different "feels" and involve color and shape in play activity. Make sure the area is safe for the child to explore. It is important to talk to the child. Say the names of objects he sees or uses. Talk about activities as you

A genuine leader is a merchant of hope.

- Unknown



bathe and dress him. Take time to teach him the names of body parts.

Social Characteristics -The most important adult in the child's life is the mother. He enjoys interaction with familiar adults, and will imitate and copy other's behavior. He is demanding, assertive, independent, and waves bye, bye. He will play alone quite well, but does not yet play well with others his age. He is very possessive of his things. Sharing is not a concept he embraces.

At this point in time a special person should provide most of the care, usually the mother. Foster parents should make sure they do the things they want the child to do. He is very imitative.

The child will enjoy observing other children; however, he may want to have an adult close by.

Emotional Characteristics - He needs the love and warmth and attention of a special, caring adult. In order to develop trust, the child needs to feel that someone will take good care of him. He may express anger by throwing temper tantrums. Although generally, he is happy. His anger is aroused by interference with his physical activity. When he cries it is because he can't put his wishes into words.

The foster parent should ignore the thumb sucking; calling attention to it will only make it worse. Do not give in to the child's unreasonable demands. It is not necessary to punish the child. He is expressing himself the only way he knows how. Make sure you are not demanding too much of the child.

Heads Up For Concern - At this point in his life the child is very conscious of adult approval and disapproval. Be accepting and nurturing and provide the child with a safe and welcoming lap. Contact your social worker and talk about the child's progress. For the most part, the child will develop anyway.

Two To Three Years

This age is referred to as the "terrible twos" because this is the age of independence. Most children have learned to say "No" with authority and want to do everything themselves. This becomes especially trying if the adult is in a rush to get things down quickly or go somewhere. Foster children should be encouraged to express themselves and do things on their own. The key is to maintain adult authority

*In the deeper reality beyond
space and time, we may all be
members of one body.*
- Unknown



and a firm guiding hand. Don't allow yourself to take the child's defiance or independent attitude as a personal affront.

Physical Characteristics - The child wants to run, kick, climb and throw a ball. He jumps, he pulls, he pushes, and enjoys rough and tumble play. Doorknobs are to be turned and doors opened. He enjoys scribbling. He will write on paper, on doors and on walls.

The foster parent may provide playdough and clay, large wooden beads for stringing, soap bubbles, finger games and songs (*ex. Itsy-Bitsy Spider*). A peg and hammer set is good. You're providing activities that help develop the fingers, small muscle and eye-hand coordination.

The child eats easily with a spoon during this period, he dresses and undresses himself. He can build a tower of six or seven blocks. Most important, he can begin to control his bowels. Bladder control comes slightly later. So you can gradually start toilet training. Talk to your Social Worker if you are unsure of methods.

Mental Characteristics - The child is still very curious and continues to learn through his senses. He has a very short attention span. However his language skills are developing and he uses three to four word sentences. He especially enjoys simple songs and rhymes.

Increase sensory experiences for the child. Allow him to explore and have as few "No-nos" as possible. Don't make him do one thing for more than a few minutes, it won't work anyway. It is very important to talk with the child. Explain things simply. Two to three year olds have very short attention spans and are just not able to focus on anything for very long. Every activity should be short in duration and recognize that the child is developing independence.

Social Characteristics - The child simply does not like strangers. He considers mother very important, still. He imitates and wants to be helpful with adults. At this point you must allow him time to do things for himself and to explore his world.

He enjoys playing by himself. He enjoys having other children near, though he does not play with them much. When he's angry he may punch, kick, bite and push others. His anger is caused by interference with his physical activity or his possessions.

Therefore, the foster parent is encouraged to provide the child

I cannot and I will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions.

- Unknown



with chances for uninterrupted play. Do not force the child to play with other children. And, naturally, do not allow the children to hurt each other.

Emotional Characteristics - Now the child begins to develop a sense of self. He is learning how to do some things for himself. He wants to test his powers and says “NO!” often. He shows lots of emotion in everything he does. *For example, he laughs loud, he squeals loud, he throws loud temper tantrums, and when he cries he cries violently.* Everything seems to be an over reaction. His fears are larger than life, too. He may fear loud noises, close or high places, and large animals. Mother’s departure becomes an emotional event.

Parents need to provide simple experiences in which the child can successfully do things for himself. Praise him often. Still, parents must be firm in following through with your instructions. Remember, it is a rule of thumb to NOT punish the child for expressing his feelings and independence.

Heads Up For Concern - You’re going to experience a lot of laughter and tears anyway. The child may appear self-reliant. He wants to please, but is not yet mature enough to carry out most of his ideas. Do not force the child or ridicule him. Call your social worker if you become frustrated. The child will be three years old soon.



All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

- Leo Tolstoy

Three to Four Years Old

This is a transition period and requires that the foster parent understands there is a wide range of activity. Simply put, the child is very active!

For example, he runs easily and jumps. He begins to climb ladders and starts to ride tricycles. He will try anything, so he bears watching closely. You must carefully supervise opportunities for play. Set limits for distances because he will tend to wander too far.

He cannot tie his shoes, though he dresses himself fairly well. It is important that you provide opportunities for him to practice his skills. He can feed himself with a spoon or fork. He scribbles in circles on paper and on walls. He likes to play with mud, sand, finger paints, and can begin to put together simple puzzles and construction toys.

He takes care of toilet needs more independently. He can stay dry all day but may not be able to stay dry all night. He becomes very interested in his body and how it works. *(Therefore, all body parts should be labeled without judgement. And questions about body functions should be answered simply and honestly.)*

Mental Characteristics - The child continues to learn through his senses. He uses his imagination a lot. He begins dramatic play and enjoys role-playing. Provide simple props like hats, scarves, animal noses/ears, shoes for dramatic play. Most important, he begins to see cause and effect relationships. The foster parent needs to point out and explain common cause and effect relationships; e.g., *how rain helps flowers grow, how dropping makes glass break, how hitting makes a person hurt.*

Language - The child likes to play around with sounds, and understands more words than he can say. He is curious and inquisitive and likes to learn simple songs and rhymes. It is important to explain things to the child. Answer all his questions honestly. When he seems frustrated or angry help him put his feelings and ideas into words.

Social Characteristics - He can leave his mother without stress and tears for short periods of time. Mother is still very important to the child. He begins to notice differences in the way men and women act. He enjoys imitating adults.

The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them.

- George Bernard Shaw



Photo courtesy Alabama Bureau of Tourism & Travel

The child becomes more interested in others. He begins group play and likes the company of others. Group play is loosely organized - *the child is not ready for competitive games*. It is necessary to provide materials for several children to use together. Your goal is to assist the child in discovering socially acceptable ways of dealing with others.

Emotional Characteristics - The child depends on others approval for love and praise and naturally he wants to please adults. When he has troublesome feelings, he may strike out emotionally at situations or persons. He is quite sensitive to the feelings of other people toward himself.

The parent needs to offer approval through facial expressions, gestures, and verbal responses. Avoid negative remarks about the child. Emphasize the teacher's and family's love for the child. Offer love, understanding and patience. This is a time to help him work out and understand his own emotions.

Work to develop a warm relationship with him. Express and show love for him and confidence in him. Encourage him to do things for himself. *And never force the child to participate or ridicule him.*

Moral Characteristics - This is the age when the child begins to know the difference in right and wrong. The parent must provide clear limits. Developing limits and enforcing them will pay off later. Limits must be enforced consistently (*sometimes with much detail*); however, you must never be harsh. Develop the practice of praising the child whenever you honestly can.

Because the child begins to know right from wrong, he looks at his world differently. For example, he finds others' opinions of him are important. He displays increased self-control and much less aggression. (*Some children use verbal threats such as "I'll kill you" in displaying aggressive behavior.*)

Heads Up For Concern -The child is at the very beginning of sex-role development. He will act in ways he sees adults act. The adult must be sensitive to do what he wants the child to do. Talk to your Social Worker about classes that will give you information about sex-role development. Training is offered regularly for Foster Parents in all aspects of child development. We are stronger when we know what to look for.

When a stupid man is doing something he's absolutely ashamed of, he always declares that it is his duty.
- George Bernard Shaw



Four To Five Year Olds

Children in this age group have a growing sense of independence and competence. They often learn by modeling behavior and imitating actions. Foster children may have had limited exposure to consistent, positive role models. Be aware that the child will watch, listen and learn by observing your behaviors.

Activities that promote positive modeling, independence and skill development includes housekeeping toys (*carpet sweeper, broom, mop, dollhouse with furniture and people, toy tools, cooking equipment*).

Physical Characteristics - He will be constantly on the go, and will sometimes become physically aggressive. He experiences rapid muscle growth and would rather play than eat. You will still hear yourself encouraging him to eat.

You will want to provide plenty of play space both indoors and out. Provide opportunities for rest – he will fatigue easily. It is important to make sure ample protein is in his diet. Naps are essential.

Mental Characteristics - This is your chance to provide interesting words, stories, and play word games with the child. He has a large vocabulary now, about 1000 to 2000 words. He has a strong interest in language and is fascinated by words and silly sounds.

Since he is playing with words, he may want to shock you with bathroom language. He asks innumerable questions and will become an incessant talker. Answer his questions patiently, and endure the constant chatter.

He can reason a little, but still has many misconceptions. You will need to provide experiences that will expand his reasoning ability. Riddles and guessing games are good. Make sure you take the time to clarify misconceptions.

Social Characteristics - He really needs to play with others. He likes to imitate adult activities, he has a good imagination and loves to pretend. He may want to exclude some other children from play. This is all part of learning to share, accept rules, and take turns. You will find that he relies less on physical aggression. This is the point at which the foster parents needs to help the child learn positive social behavior. This is best done through modeling rather than punishing or scolding.

Unhurt people are not much good in the world.

- Erid Starkie



Expect him to take simple responsibilities and follow simple rules, such as taking turns.

Emotional Characteristics - You've got to keep your sense of humor. The child may exhibit demanding, threatening and name-calling. He may be bossy and belligerent. You can expect extremes - one moment he will be bossy and then become inexplicably shy. He will test people to see whom he can control.

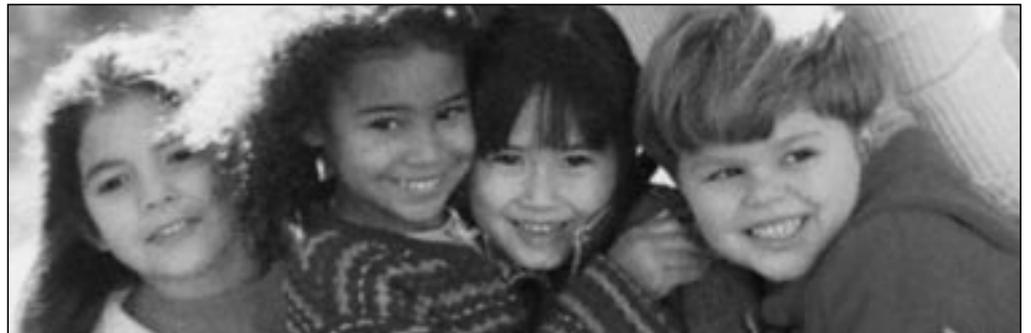
Frequently he will whine, cry, and complain to get his way. The key to staying in control is to establish clear limits and stick to them. It is important for you to provide outlets for emotional expression through talking, physical activity, or creative media (*check with your Social Worker for suggestions here*).

You will want to provide opportunities for talking about self and family. He may be boastful about self and family because he has a growing confidence about himself and the world. Your goal is to strengthen his positive self-concept by pointing out the things he can do for himself. You can work on the child's Life Book. It is an opportunity to assure him of your love and his parents love.

Moral Characteristics - In becoming aware of what is right and wrong, the child usually wants to do what is right. He may want to blame others for his wrongdoing. So you will want to teach him to be responsible for his own actions and behavior. This is where you can teach him the importance of making right choices.

Heads Up For Concern - Remember the child will in all probability not exhibit all of the discussed characteristics, and certainly not all at once. It is a developmental period in which some of these characteristics may or may not be displayed. In age and stage development all children are different. Individual children move through age and stage

*It takes two to speak the truth.
One to speak and another to
hear.*
- Henry Thoreau



development at differing speeds. It is possible the child you are working with may be a little behind the normal development pattern. Discuss with your caseworker your child's development characteristics.

Five To Six Years Old

Adjustment and Change might be the theme ascribed to this age group. And there is such a wide swing to the characteristics children experience during this age development. You can be sure you will never become bored or cease to be surprised at what happens next. So fasten your seatbelt for an interesting year. If you could tape record all the conversations and experiences you are witness to, you could write a book.

Physical Characteristics - At this stage the child can dress and undress himself. He has a tendency to be farsighted, and this may interfere with hand and eye coordination. Don't rush the child into learning skills that require eye coordination such as reading. And for goodness sake don't try to force the child to change hands. If he throws with his left hand or writes with his left hand, let him.

He is able to care for his own toilet needs independently. He knows the difference in the sexes. He shows more modesty, and enjoys bathroom play less. He is interested, however, in where babies come from - you should offer simple, accurate explanations.

He displays a bigger appetite and may have stomach aches or vomiting when asked to eat food he dislikes. This can be frustrating for adults. He prefers plain cooking but accepts a wider choice of foods. The key is to offer an appealing variety of foods **without force**. He is more sensitive to spicy foods than adults.

Mental Characteristics - This is the age when some children stutter if tired or nervous. They usually try what they feel they can



*There lives more faith in honest
doubt than half the creeds.*

- Alfred Tennyson

accomplish. This is only temporary and one shouldn't worry too much. This is the age to begin group experiences.

The child will follow instructions and accepts supervision easily. He knows colors, numbers, etc. He can identify money, nickels, dimes, etc. He may even be able to print his letters and should be encouraged.

Social Characteristics - This is a difficult age for a child to be separated from his mother because his greatest fear may be that his mother won't return to him. His mother is the center of his world. He has invested a lot of his emotional self into bonding with his mother. Separation at this age is doubly difficult for the foster child.

He copies adults, and enjoys observing what adults are doing. Mostly, he seems to view praise from adults as warm sunshine in his life. So foster parents should discover ways to lavish praise upon the child, especially if the child has experienced serious separation anxiety. This child should never be placed in a situation of feeling abandoned.

The foster parents, the social worker and the entire team working with the child should make an extra effort of exhibit warmth, and acceptance, and nurture.

With his peers this age child enjoys playing with both boys and girls. He is usually calm and friendly, and is not demanding in relations with others. He can play with one child or a group of children. The foster parent should encourage the child to find activities at school he enjoys. Your goal is to offer comfort and provide a secure non-critical environment.

Enjoying conversation during meals is an activity this age child likes. An effort should be made to make meal time an occasion for conversation and communication. He may particularly enjoy the process of getting things ready for mealtime. This is an opportunity to offer praise and appreciation.

He may not like school and could develop nausea and vomiting around the school experience. Certainly he is entering an age of conformity and doesn't mind being critical of those who do not conform. What he needs help understanding is that it is okay to be different and individual differences can be appreciated.

We have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than to assume wealth without producing it.
- George Bernard Shaw



Emotional Characteristics - Generally, this age child is reliable, stable, and well adjusted. Though this is not a fearful age, he may show some fear of the dark, of falling, of dogs, or bodily harm. When tired or nervous or upset he may develop tension outlets such as nail biting, eye blinking, throat clearing, sniffing, or nose twitching. Some still suck their thumb. There seems to be an increased incidence of temporary nervous habits. This is normal. Adults need not be overly concerned. Dealing with the cause of the tension is the answer. Never focus on the habit. Offering distractions helps. The child may merely need rest or some quiet time.

One of his concerns is pleasing adults. Also, being easily embarrassed is universal with this age group. This is a chance to show your love. Be sensitive to things that embarrass him.

Heads Up For Concern - This is an age when the child is interested in being good. He may tell untruths or blame others for wrongdoings because he is intense in his desire to please and do right. He is aware of right and wrong; however, he needs help in learning to accept responsibility for his own actions. The goal for the parent is to teach right behaviors and attitudes that can be incorporated into daily living. Therefore, you should take every opportunity to discuss what's right and what's wrong. The child has a willing ear.

Six To Eight Years Old

Children in this age group are heavily involved in formal school learning and expanding their circle of friends. Social development increasingly involves peer interaction and friendships. Foster children may need lots of guidance and support to trust others and develop friendships.

Toys, games and activities to promote learning and enhance positive peer relationships include: involvement in scouting, 4-H, or similar groups; arts and crafts; board games such as Sorry!; also checkers; team sports at a participation level; and educational games and activities.

As children become older, their unique interests will guide you in selecting appropriate toys and activities for them. If a youngster shows an interest in school plays, for example, you may support

The greatest of evils and the worst of crimes is poverty.

- George Bernard Shaw



that interest by seeking a community theater group. A child who enjoys the outdoors might be interested in scouting, sports, camping, or other activities.

Some children may express no special interests. With these children you can lead by offering two or three activities and asking the child to choose one.

Remember that older children may have suffered a great deal of rejection and may not have developed a sense of social belonging. Also be aware that gang membership, sexual activity, drug or alcohol use may have been in their past. If they have been forced to grow up prematurely, they may not be interested in things that appeal to other children their age. They may not have enjoyed close friendships with their peers. Try to support friendships between your foster child and other youngsters who can provide appropriate role models. At first it may be wise to try to encourage a pattern of having youngsters come to your house rather than having your foster child leave the house to visit friends. Encourage your child to bring a friend or two to dinner or to watch a video. Many pre teens and early teens enjoy making their own pizzas or other simple snacks or meals. These types of sharing experiences involving warmth and satisfaction help build positive feelings and promote friendships.

From six to seven years children are vigorous, full of energy, and exhibit a general restlessness. They may be clumsy and experience poor coordination. This might be called the ugly duckling stage. Nevertheless they are driven until they exhaust themselves.

From six to seven years the child may need reminders to do the

*Of all the days that's in the
week I dearly love but one day
—and that's the day that comes
betwixt a Saturday and
Monday.
— Henry Carey*



things he already knows how to do. He is completely toilet trained and accidents may occur only when he is extremely upset. He has a marked awareness of sexual differences and may engage in sex play and show. He may play doctor and hospital, and will probably begin to suppress masturbation. These statements may seem premature; however, it depends on what a child has been exposed to.

His eating habits reveal unpredictable preferences and very strong refusals. He may develop a passion for a particular food (e.g. peanut butter, spaghetti, or pancakes, etc.) He may seem to have forgotten his manners, he eats with his fingers and talks with his mouth full.

He has more colds, sore throats, and other diseases at this age. Therefore, the foster parent should pay close attention to make sure he has been inoculated for chicken pox, measles, whooping cough, diphtheria, German measles, mumps, and that all shots are up to date. If the child is placed in daycare early, many of these symptoms will be exhibited sooner.

He can read and write at this age and begins to have organized, continuous memories. This is a good age to involve the child in his/her Life Book development. One thing he finds difficult is making choices, and he may develop a stutter when he's under stress. Give the child an opportunity to make decisions, though excessive choices may prove difficult.

At this age he wants to blame mother for anything that goes wrong. That's okay because he's in the process of identifying more strongly with father (or other male figure). This is a good time for making sure the child knows that adults care about him, and that foster parents are not attempting to replace his/her parents.

You will find that he doesn't like to be kissed in public and that his friends expand outside the family. However his friendships are often unstable because he/she is sometimes unkind to peers. Being a tattletale is normal.

At this stage he desperately wants to be a winner; therefore, he will change rules to fit his own needs. He has absolutely no group loyalty and may have difficulty in school (he fools around, whispers, and bothers other children) because he can't seem to keep his mind

*In the human human breast
two master passions cannot co-
exist.*

- Thomas Campbell



on his work. As difficult as it may sound, he needs guidance in making and keeping friends, help in learning to be a good loser, and time for peer interaction so he can learn these things. Make sure you allow extra time for breakfast because this age child dawdles. Breakfast could be the most difficult meal of the day.

Because he is involved in a drive toward independence, he may often feel insecure much of the time. He finds it difficult to accept criticism, blame, or punishment. He is at the center of his world and his concern is himself. Emotional extremes and tantrums may appear. When he doesn't win at games, he does not hesitate to accuse others of cheating. All this means is that the child will require more patience from foster parents.

This means that parents will want to set reasonable limits. The key is to explain the limits, and then help the child keep within those limits. Be consistent and avoid games that designate a winner.

Teach the child to be concerned and responsible for his own behavior and how to perfect it. This is the optimal time for instruction of this type because he is very concerned with good and bad behavior, particularly as it affects his family and his friends. A child who often blames others from wrongdoing needs this instruction.

There is no more beautiful experience than when the world expands beyond its accustomed limits.
- Deepak Chopra



From Seven to Eight Years the child will drive himself to exhaustion. Parents will find themselves trying to distract the child before he gets to the point of complete exhaustion. He will seem to have a permanent pout on his face and minor accidents will be the order of the day. Being well established with hand-eye coordination, he loves pencils and drawing projects, however, crayons are no longer a part of his experience - he's outgrown them. He's less interested in sex and you will find a drop in sex play and experimentation. This is the age when he may become very excited about new babies in the family.

He eats less because his appetite is less. He may have fewer illnesses, but will have colds of longer duration. This is also a time to develop nervous habits and assuming awkward positions. Parents must be patient with annoyances and hold their tongue about the awkwardness.

This can be a fun age because the child is eager to learn. You may ask thought-provoking questions to stimulate thinking - *e.g., open-ended stories, riddles, thinking games, discussion of any type*. This is the time to provide opportunities for decision making and selecting what he or she would do in particular situations.

Foster parents will have to show understanding and concern because the child has strong emotional responses to adults. He likes responsibility and anything that leads to his own independence, and he is definitely concerned that he will not do well. Parents will want to assign responsibilities and tasks that the child can carry out. But you must be sure to praise his efforts and accomplishments.

With children his own age he likes loosely organized group play. He is primarily concerned with himself and how other people treat him. You will find him willing to fight and battle out problems. School can be difficult because he may fear being late, he has trouble on the playground, and feels other kids are cheating and that the teacher picks on him. The parent must help the child examine his actions and interactions. This will require asking questions and allowing the child to participate in looking at his actions and reactions.

Emotionally you can expect a lot of complaining. He may feel "*Nobody likes me*" or "I'm going to run away." He needs genuine sympathy at this point. Just as he will need constant reminding and checking because he forgets instructions and directions because he is distracted with himself.

His usual fears are night, scary places, people. He is attempting to control nervous habits (*blinking, headaches, and dizziness may appear*). And you will find him staying on the edge of some scenes in an attempt to build a sense of self through observation. Your work is to help the child develop social skills. So praise is in order. Since you want to build his confidence, use criticism sparingly and look for opportunities to give approval and affection. He has a strong need for acceptance from people his own age, as well as a need to belong. Offer love, patience and sensitivity. Let him know he has progressed and continue to encourage him.

Though he is often self-critical and a perfectionist, he dislikes criticism from others. His interest is in gaining the approval of his peers.

How often misused words generate misleading thoughts.

- Hubert Spencer



That's why he is often dreamy, self-absorbed, and withdrawn. Feeling this way, of course, causes him to be more cautious and definitely less impulsive. Just accept the moods and aloofness and don't take it personally. Encourage him to express himself and to turn his interests to others.

Eight To Nine Years Old

Physical Characteristics - Life changes rapidly for a child from eight to nine years; he is busy, active, speedy, and has frequent accidents. He is animated and responds to situations by making faces, this can be most annoying for adults. When given disagreeable tasks you may find that he immediately wants to urinate (*there is a connection*).

Sexually you will find that he may handle his genitals when worried. He tells dirty jokes, laughs, giggles, and may peep at others - even parents may find their privacy invaded. He wants more information about pregnancy and birth. He may especially question the father's part.

You can take heart regarding his eating. He has a good appetite, though he wolfs down food, belches spontaneously and finds his actions at the table funny when corrected about his manners. He will accept new foods, however. Generally, you will find his health excellent, with only a few short illnesses.

Mental Characteristics - Foster parents will be confronted with a barrage of questions and you must continue to be available to answer those questions. He will want to know the reason for everything. He often overestimates his own ability. His primary frustration is feeling "*I never get anything right.*" Stressing what the child has learned is the parent's role, never focus on the end product. Encourage the child to attempt what he can accomplish. Remember, too, he still needs a challenge.

Social Characteristics - This age group demands a close understanding with mother. With their peers they now make friends more easily; they work at establishing good two-way relationships. They enjoy school and do not like the idea of missing school. Their conversation tends to be more about school. They develop close friends of their own sex - there is still separation of the sexes. And they consider clubs and groups important. It is the foster parents role to find

Live as long as you may, the first twenty years are the longest half of your life.

- Robert Southey



opportunities for the child to enjoy peer interaction on a personal level, in groups, or in clubs. Religious activities provide an excellent outlet for children this age.

Eating habits change again. They are not interested in the family table conversation. They will want to finish their meal so they can go about their own business. Some children may become sensitive to the killing of animals for food. Remain calm, offer a simple explanation for the killing of animals for food. Be understanding about the need to not participate at table in conversations that are “*boring.*” Insist, however, that they come to the table (*not eat alone in front of the television*) and participate in prayers (*if traditional in the family*) and the sharing of any really important family communications.

Emotional Characteristics - This is a time in which the child will want to dramatize everything. He will have more secrets, so he will need a special place to place things that he wants to keep private. A lock box would serve him well. Remember he is very sensitive and will want to keep some things private.

He has fewer and more reasonable fears. He will argue and resist requests and instructions; however, he will obey eventually. Cash rewards are of interest to him now.

Sometimes he is giggly and silly to the point of distraction. Usually affectionate, helpful, cheerful, outgoing and curious; he can be rude, selfish, bossy and demanding. This, of course, varies.

Heads Up For Concern - Between eight and nine years the child experiences and more amplified sense of guilt and shame. The foster parent will want to guide the child toward overcoming negative emotions and developing positive ways of showing interest and enthusiasm for life. You will not want to compare one child to another. Your work is to praise and build self-confidence.



...any cancellation of the worry habit must of necessity involve getting outside of one's self.

- Norment Vincent Peale

Nine To Ten Years Old

It's finally here, the age where girls are beginning to physically develop faster than boys. Implications for parents are a bit more complicated. Parents must never compare boys to girls and should never force them to interact.

Physical Characteristics - Being active is the most accurate description for lifestyle at this age. Rough and tumble play is normal, especially for the boys. This age group has a lively interest in team games, and exhibit good body control. Developing strength, skills, and speed becomes important. Complicated crafts or shop work can also provide interest. The key for the foster parent is to make sure there are a variety of activities that sustain interest. Team games are paramount.

Mental Characteristics - This age group likes to collect things so you can count on the room being messy. Reading, writing, using books and references is a definite interest. He likes facts and has a lively curiosity. Most important, he is capable of prolonged interest. His attention span has increased dramatically. Still, you never want to give this age child more answers than he seeks; *don't over explain – he'll stop listening*. Let him figure things out for himself. Allow him time to think, to meditate, and discuss when he want to. This is the parents' opportunity to help with hobbies.

Social Characteristics - Accepting the natural separation of boys and girls is a must at this age. Along with recognizing and supporting their need for peer group acceptance, foster parents must recognize that boys and girls differ in personalities, characteristics, and interests. They may be club or organization oriented, but it is always with the same sex. Boys, especially, will begin to test and exercise a great deal of independence. Friends and activities absorb him. He likes group adventures and cooperative play.

The parent's mission is to establish and enforce reasonable limits. Be very clear about the limits you place on the child because you are going to be challenged. Encourage friendships and help children who may have few or no friends. Talk with your social worker about avenues you may take to help establish peer group friendships.

Emotional Characteristics -This is the age of worry. Pick a topic

How you think determines how you act. How you act in turn determines: How others react to you.

- David Schwartz



and he/she will find something to worry about. If the child is not accepted by others you may count on behavior problems. Along with being working on becoming independent, you may find, surprisingly, that he/she is quite dependable and trustworthy.

Praise his positive characteristics. Use positive guidance and let him know you accept him, even though you do not approve of his behavior. It is a process of condemning the sin and not the sinner. In other words, focus your attention on the behavior, not the child.

Moral Characteristics - Between nine and ten years the child becomes very conscious of what's fair and what's unfair. The foster parent will want to strive to be fair in your dealings and relationship with the child. You may plan on having some arguments over fairness; thus, make sure you have your bases covered.

He/she is highly competitive and has difficulty in admitting to inappropriate behavior or to making a mistake. Nevertheless, the child is learning to accept his own failures and mistakes. He/she is aware of right and wrong, and wants to do what is right. There are lessons to be learned here, so take the opportunity to allow him to take responsibility for his own behavior. Express your love and support for the child often. It's good to have someone with you to back you up when you have to face the consequences of your own behaviors. The foster parent provides that support.

Ten To Eleven Years Old

If you've ever toyed with the idea of becoming a chef or a nutritionist, here's your opportunity. The child may not be interested in food per se, however he is interested in eating. These are growing years when girls may begin a rapid weight increase and become interested in style. Boys are more active and rough, and their motor skills will develop well.

You will find them alert and poised, and ready to argue logically about anything that interests them. What you have on your hands is a little person with the ability to do fractions, who likes to read, and begins to show talents that are unique to him or her. You might want to provide lessons for music, art, or other interests.

Provide lots of books and tapes and music and art. A trip to a

Remember: Big people monopolize the listening; small people monopolize the talking.

- David Schwartz



museum would be a good idea. This is a good time to discuss drug abuse. It is a must that you spend time with the child.

This is a wonderful age because the child finds no problem in being affectionate with parents. He/she may develop a tendency for hero worship. And the mother becomes all-important. Important, too, is to be “in” with the gang. You may find that the child will have one best friend, and that he/she is highly selective in friendship. Revealing his/her pride in father becomes essential.

Mostly you will find a person who likes privacy, and who is casual and relaxed. You won't have to be told that girls are maturing faster than boys. You will need to provide a locked cupboard or box for personal “treasures” and a “Keep Out” sign for the door.

Anger, when it comes out, is violent and immediate. He/she won't cry unless anger is provoked. This is a time to be sympathetic.

Most important, the child will develop a strong sense of justice and a strict moral code. He/she will be more concerned with what is wrong than with what is right. Make sure you take time to understand if the moral code is correct and is consistent with common value structures. You might want to discuss what is wrong and what is right in certain situations. Some call this situational analysis; most folks call it parenting.

*A wise man will be master of
his mind. A fool will be its
slave.*
- Unknown

Eleven To Twelve Years Old

This is a period when some folks think they might get into a lot of tall weeds. This couldn't be farther from the truth. It is a time when foster parents prove they have an understanding heart. What a great opportunity!

Girls begin to show secondary sex characteristics and parents will find that an explanation of menstruation may be necessary. Your social worker may be consulted about a physical check up for the child. There are volumes of information on the subject, and most adults are sensitive to the situation.

Boys are ahead of girls in endurance and become increasingly aware of their bodies too. There is an increase in muscle growth, and some boys show self-consciousness about learning new skills. Rapid growth in both boys and girls will mean an increase in appetite and



a decrease in energy level. Don't be surprised to see a once active person eat large amounts of food and become a couch potato.

This age group becomes more interested in their world and community. Because they have an increased ability to use logic, you may expect challenges about what you know. Don't be alarmed. They don't know everything, . . . yet. Rejoice in the fact that they are getting smarter, and as they grow you'll become smarter, too. They might get involved in community projects that help other people. Faith based organizations provide an excellent environment for development in this area. What better place to expend a lot of energy than on worthwhile projects?

You might find that the child becomes more critical of adults (parents, teachers, others in authority) and even obnoxious to live with. He/she will, perhaps, be quiet around adults and at the same time be struggling mightily for unreasonable independence. Parents will want to provide for organized activities in sports or clubs.

Emotionally you will discover that anger is very common at this age. There is a lot to be angry about; he/she resents being told what to do. Rebelling at routines is only the tip of the iceberg. You might be characterized as the "worst mother in the world." It is a time for large mood swings. There are many fears, many worries, and many tears.

Be understanding. He/she will have a strong urge to conform to group morals. Pay attention!

Twelve To Fifteen Years Old

Go grocery shopping. You're going to have to have more food in the house. The onset of adolescence is usually accompanied by sudden and rapid increases in height, weight and size. This is the time when girls reach physical and sexual maturity. While boys are just beginning their physical and sexual maturity (*the development may be rapid*). Along with greater concern for physical appearance, parents will notice that physical strength will increase greatly. You may even see acne (*talk to the social worker about acne medication, a physical check might be in order*).

Your role is to explain to the child what is really happening, and not to worry if he/she is not like all the rest. Your explanation may

There is a good side in every situation. Find it. See the good side and whip discouragement.

- Unknown



seem to fall on deaf ears; however, a calming word from a significant adult means more than one can measure.

Don't let discussions become arguments. What you have on your hands is a person who thrives on arguments and discussions. Along with his/her ability to have an increased capacity to memorize and think logically, the child is developing an ability to introspect (*that's nothing more than looking at one's own thoughts and feelings and sensations*). He/she will, perhaps, think that you do not have the capacity to be introspective. Get ready for it, your adolescent is going to withdraw from you and you will be labeled "*old-fashioned*." Don't be threatened by the words, you are the only one with a clear concept of the future. Don't feel hurt or take it personally. You're still important, but not in the same way as when they were younger.

At this point, boys will usually resist any show of affection. He might feel that parents are too restraining, and that he needs less family companionship and interaction. What follows is a less intense relationship with those of the same sex. Instead, he/she usually has a whole gang of friends. Girls will begin to show more interest in the opposite sex, while boys won't mature as quickly. Expect annoyance with younger siblings.

Sulking is common. There will be fewer angry responses, but angry responses will be verbal retorts as he/she leaves the room. It can be a stormy period because teens are more concerned about a series of things (*grades, appearance, popularity*). Becoming withdrawn and introspective is normal. Be sympathetic, this too shall pass.

Heads Up For Concern - Twelve to fifteen-year-olds know right from wrong. They are constantly weighing alternatives and want to arrive at decisions by themselves. They should be given opportunities to develop decision-making skills. The careful foster parent will discuss with the social worker just what kind of relationship is being forged with the teen. Though the teen may not tell you a lie, he/she may not tell you the entire truth. Don't be surprised because there's a lot of peer pressure out there. DHR offers training for adults ministering to teenagers. Ask about the help that might be available to you. Remember knowledge is power.

*What counts is not how much
you know about motivation,
but how much motivation
you show.*
- Ken Matejka



Sixteen To Nineteen Years Old

This is the age when you get your Ph.D. in parenting. What you have before you is a human who has essentially completed physical maturity. His/her physical features are shaped and refined. Other aspects of maturing are still in progress.

He/she can generally maintain friendly relations with parents, though sometimes he/she feels that parents are too interested in what's going on with him or her. Direct questions are often considered invasive. He/she dates actively – and there is great variation in maturity. Some are uncomfortable with the opposite sex while others talk freely of marriage. They enjoy activities with friends of the opposite sex. They may have a job that contributes to their independence. Work won't hurt and it will add to their appreciation of the value of things.

This is the period when worry about the future (*what to do*) becomes a priority. In the very early stages of the teen years, the foster parent should help arrange testing at school and talk about the future. You need to find out early if the teen needs academic help in order to achieve his/her goals.

This developing teen may know what is right and what is wrong but, like most human beings, doesn't always make the right choices. Foster parents need to be available to talk and to listen. You will find that this new person will probably think more like the persons who raised him. Though he takes blame well and is not so likely to blame others without just cause, he still needs to be grounded in a value structure that is socially acceptable. All he/she really wants to do is find meaning in life and feel secure in it—exactly the same thing we still search for as adults. (Explore the Independent Living Program for foster teens. I.L.P. offers classes, special training, and support focused upon preparation for adulthood. Contact your caseworker if you serve a child between 14 to 21 years.)

The purpose of any organization should be to create prophets through praise.

– Ken Matejka



A FUN SURVEY FOR PROSPECTIVE FOSTER PARENTS

Take this Fun Survey to Determine Your Strengths for becoming a Foster Parent

<u>Agree</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	
_____	_____	_____	1. I need a foster child so I won't feel so unhappy.
_____	_____	_____	2. Foster children are easy to please because they are so happy to have a home.
_____	_____	_____	3. Providing a foster home is a way to rescue children from a difficult situation.
_____	_____	_____	4. The money paid by the state for foster care will help me meet my household expenses.
_____	_____	_____	5. All that foster children need is a lot of love.
_____	_____	_____	6. I can contribute to a better society by being a good foster parent.
_____	_____	_____	7. I did a pretty good job with all my children so I think I'll be good with a foster child.
_____	_____	_____	8. My child needs a playmate.
_____	_____	_____	9. Having a foster child is a good way to prepare for adopting a child.
_____	_____	_____	10. Childhood can be a difficult time. I feel I can relate to children going through rough times.

Question 1: Give yourself one point if you said "Disagree." If you are unhappy you should think twice about becoming a foster parent. It is not fair to the child to expect their presence to improve your mood. Speak to a counselor first. If you are able to rid yourself of depression for a six-month period, then you can consider being a foster parent for a positive reason.

Record your score: _____

Question 2: You get one point if you said "Not Sure" or "Disagree." While many foster children are happy to have a home, they may not be so easy to please. Some will test your patience by acting up, being sad and/or shy. Don't expect foster children to be extra grateful and obedient. They didn't ask to be put in their position and they don't owe you anything because you accept them for foster care.

Record your score: _____

Question 3: Score one point if you choose "Not Sure" or "Disagree." Folks who have a rescue approach to foster care are likely to resist reasonable contact with the foster child's birth parents. They may also get in the way of efforts to reunite families. Remember that foster care is temporary and the eventual goal of foster parents should be to work with agency professionals so that families are reunited.

Record your score: _____

Question 4: Add a point for checking "Disagree." Being a foster parent should not result in financial sacrifice. However, nobody should decide to become a foster parent because they think it will help them financially.

Record your score: _____

Question 5: Add a point for those who said “Disagree.” While a lot of love is a nice thing to provide, foster parents also must have good parenting skills and an understanding of their role as foster parents. Being patient, consistent and following through on rules and expectations are all important. Love is great, but it takes more than a loving attitude to be a successful foster parent.

Record your score: _____

Question 6: If you said “Agree” give yourself two points. Score one point for “Not Sure.” A good foster parent can put the needs of the child, the child’s family and society ahead of personal needs. Viewing oneself as providing a necessary service to the child and to society is a positive reason for becoming a foster parent.

Record your score: _____

Question 7: One point for those who “Agree” or are “Not Sure.” Having been a successful parent indicates that you have certain skills and personality traits that make you an effective parent. Wanting to use these talents to help out as a foster parent is a plus.

Record your score: _____

Question 8: Give yourself one point if you “Disagree.” Being a foster parent is about caring for others and contributing to society in general. Your need to have a playmate for your child should not be a significant factor in your decision.

Record your score: _____

Question 9: One point if you checked “Agree” or “Not Sure.” Being a foster parent will help you determine your suitability to be an adoptive parent. Be careful, however, about becoming overly attached to a foster child and assuming that you will be able to adopt a foster child. While adoption is occasionally possible, it should not be your primary purpose for becoming a foster parent.

Record your score: _____

Question 10: Give yourself one point if you selected “Agree” or “Not Sure.” If you were a foster child or had other significant hurdles, you indeed “Know what it’s like.” Even if you didn’t have a difficult childhood you feel able to understand how troubling childhood can be.

Record your score: _____

Total Score _____

How did you do on the survey? With a possible score of eleven, (remember you could get two points on item six) compare your total scale below.

Total Score **What it Means**

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 9 to 11 | Your beliefs and attitudes suggest you will be a successful foster parent |
| 6 to 8 | You are a good candidate for being a foster parent but should think about some of your beliefs and attitudes. Your beliefs and attitudes are not consistent with being an effective foster parent. Can you accept the other point of view? Do you hold these beliefs firmly or do you feel you understand the need to modify some of your beliefs and attitudes? Examine your position closely and see if you can accept the need to change your thinking in some areas. |
| 0 to 1 | Think again about your reasons for becoming a foster parent. Talk over your belief system with a professional in the field of foster care. If you can see the areas where |

you need to change and can make changes, you may be a good candidate for being foster parent in the future.

What are the best reasons for becoming a foster parent? The best reasons are those that do not involve intense personal needs such as feeling lonely or wanting the self satisfaction of “saving” a child. If your reasons are based on calm thinking and knowing that can be a positive influence in a child’s life, you are on the right track. It is okay to want to express love and feel that you will be doing something worthwhile for a child. The key idea is that your actions are for others rather than to fill a personal need. If you can say, “my life is good, I’m a reasonably happy person and I care about others,” then being a foster parent is an enrichment of an already fulfilled person. This makes for a foster parent who can make logical choices, be reasonably objective and keep the child’s welfare as the number one priority. (*Foster Care Children, A Guide for Parents and Teachers*)

F . Y . I .

For Your Information

Important questions to ask when you are contacted to accept the placement of a child in foster care.

The Basics

- What is the child's name?
- How old is the child?
- What sex is the child?
- What race is the child?
- What is the child's religion?
 - Does the child require any religious instructions?
 - If so, where? When? Who is expected to provide transportation?

Health Concerns

- Does the child have any allergies?
- Is the child on any medication?
 - If yes, for what?
- Are there any special dietary concerns?
- Are there any medical records?
 - If not, who can the pediatrician contact to get such records?
- Does the child have a Medicaid Card?
 - If no, please get the Medicaid Number.

Educational Needs

- Have any/all arrangements been made for the child to start to school?
 - Have records been transferred?
- Is the child classified?
- Is there an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in place?
- Are there any special arrangements necessary for the child's education?

Developmental Concerns

- Is the child on schedule developmentally?
 - If not, explain.
- If the child is older, does he/she have a history of violence, drug or alcohol use?
- Is the child sexually active?

Emotional/Mental Considerations

- Does the child receive any therapy or counseling?
 - If so, what kind?
 - How often are the sessions? - Where do they take place?
 - Who is expected to provide transportation?

- Has this child been sexually and/or physically abused?
If so, does the child exhibit behaviors (i.e., act out) as a result of this abuse?
- Does the child have any fears (i.e., cats, dogs, the dark)?

Family History

- What visitation schedule has been established?
How often do the visits occur?
Where will they take place?
Who is expected to provide transportation?
- Does the child have any siblings?
Are they in the state's custody?
If so, where? - Are there visits with siblings?
How often do the visits occur?
Where will they take place?
Who is expected to provide transportation?
- If the birth parents have more children, will I be called to take them?

Involving DHR

- When was child brought into foster care?
- How many placements has he/she had?
- Who is the caseworker?
What is her telephone number? pager?
- Who is the supervisor?
What is her telephone number? pager?
- Who is the GAL?
- Is the child coming from another foster home?
Why is the child being removed from that home?
May I contact the former foster parents concerning the child?
- What is the Board Rate for this child?
When will I receive the first payment?
- Is there a current Individualized Service Plan (ISP)?
If yes, will you bring a copy with the child?
If no, when is the first ISP meeting?
- What is the permanency plan for the child?
- What is the anticipated length of stay for this child?
- Does the child have clothing or any other belongings with him/her?
- If there anything special I should know about this child?
- Is a car seat available, if needed?

Additional Questions



THE FACTS ABOUT FOSTER CARE

Children in Care

Total Population: There are more than half a million children and youth in the U.S. foster care system, a 90% increase since 1987.

Population Distribution: For every 1,000 children under age 18, nearly 8 are in foster care—up from nearly 5 in 1990.

Age Range:

Under 1	4%
1-5	25
6-10	26
11-15	28
16-18	16
Over 18	2

Ethnicity: Children in foster care come from many racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Caucasian	36%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1
African American	42
Hispanic	15
American Indian/Native Alaskan	2
Unknown	4

Older Youth

Youth in Transition: Each year more than 20,000 young people age out of foster care and continue to need services.

Youth In Need: Three of 10 of the nation's homeless are former foster children. A recent study has found that 12-18 months after leaving foster care:

- 27% of the males and 10% of the females had been incarcerated
- 33% were receiving public assistance
- 37% had not finished high school
- 50% were unemployed

FOSTER PARENTS

For the Right Reasons:

Some of the reasons cited by people who choose to become foster parents:

- helping children
- giving back to the community
- possibility of becoming an adoptive parent
- love of children.

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FOSTER FAMILIES

<i>Age:</i>	Foster parents can be any age but are generally middle-aged with the majority falling between 35-50 years of age.
<i>Family Structure:</i>	The majority of foster families has a female caregiver present and consists of a married two-parent household.
<i>Single Parents:</i>	An estimated 25-50% of foster parents are single.
<i>Race:</i>	A majority of foster parents are Caucasian, and the number of African-American foster parents has decreased since 1980.
<i>Education:</i>	Foster parents are usually high school graduates with some college education.

ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FOSTER FAMILIES

<i>Employment:</i>	Fifty-nine percent of foster parents reported that they worked outside the home, and only one-third of the foster mothers were full-time homemakers.
<i>Financial Assistance:</i>	The national median monthly foster care basic maintenance payment in 1998 was: Age 2 – \$317 Age 9 – \$365 Age 16 – \$423 (These basic maintenance rates do not always reflect the actual payment made for the care of the child. Most states or counties supplement these payments.) The average national annual expenditure on children for husband/wife families in 1999 was: Age 2 – \$704 Age 9 – \$720 Age 16 – \$794

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT. . .

- The number of licensed, certified and approved family foster (non-relative) homes in the United States continues to decline, with approximately 133,000 homes available in 1999.
- Foster homes are licensed for fewer children today than they were prior to 1985, so additional foster homes are needed for the same number of children.

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Crenshaw County Post Office Drawer 151 Luverne 36049-0151	Paul J. Butler	334.335.7000
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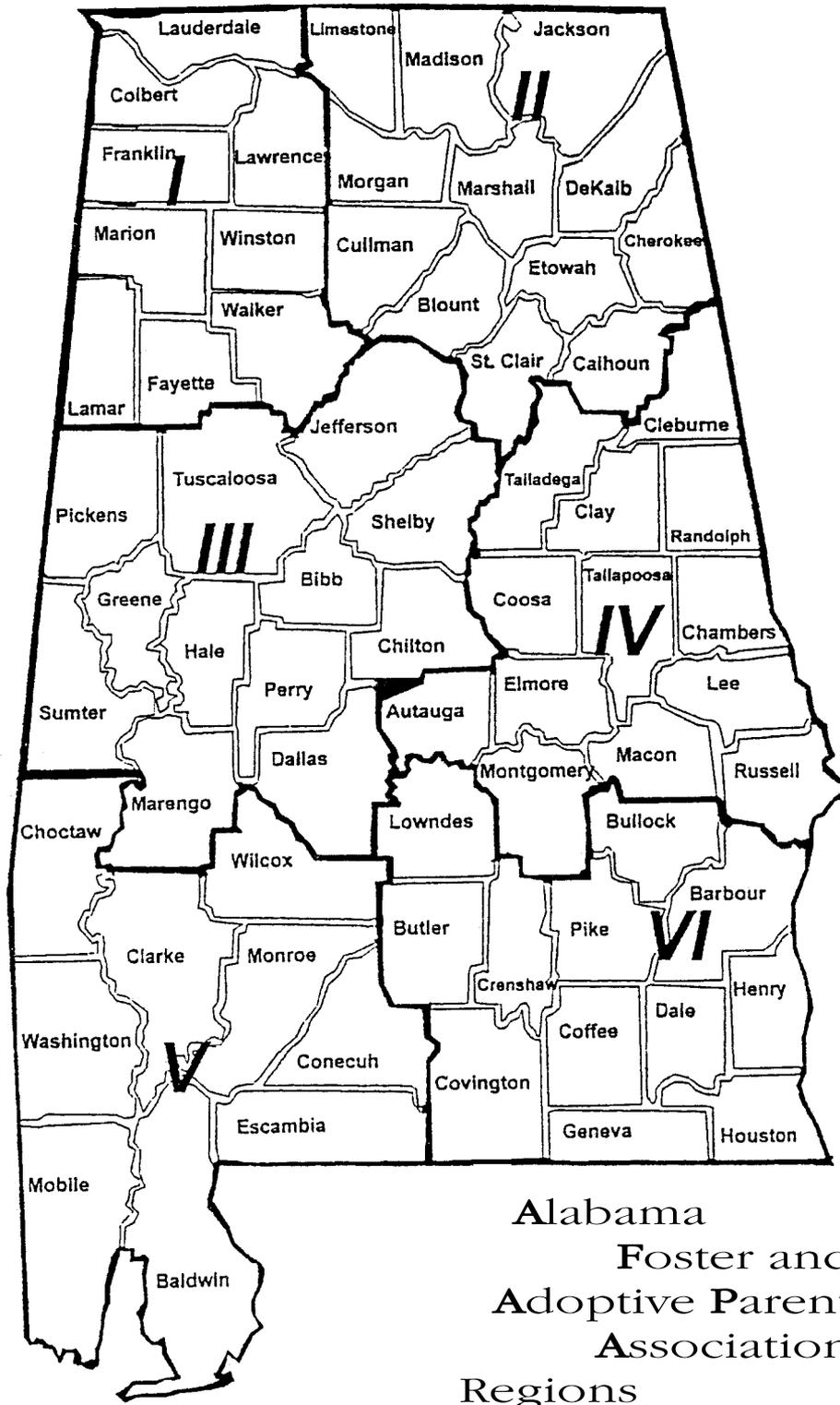
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Bessemer Food Stamp Office: 1615 Carolina Avenue Bessemer 35202-5898		205.481.2600
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Child Support 501 Bel Air Boulevard Mobile 36606 Mailing: P. O. Box 1906 Mobile 36633-1906		334.450.1700
Child Welfare 501 Bel Air Boulevard Mobile 36606 Mailing: P. O. Box 1906 Mobile 36633-1906		334.450.9100
Child Protective Services/Investigations 501 Bel Air Boulevard Mobile 36606 Mailing: P. O. Box 1906 Mobile 36633-1906		334.450.9135
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About the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

The purpose of the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (AFAPA) is to act as a unified voice in serving, advocating, promoting, and encouraging foster parents, foster children and their parents.

The AFAPA operates according to a constitution and by-laws. Management of AFAPA is overseen by a board of directors consisting of four executive officers, six regional representatives, four members-at-large, and two advisors.

Membership is free to all state-licensed and private agency foster parents. Social workers, concerned citizens, and others interested in foster care may join for \$10 per year. Please e-mail the AFAPA secretary if you would like to join the AFAPA as a supportive or chapter member. [cowikee~zebra.net]

The goals of the Association are as follows:

1. To advocate on behalf of foster parents and children in foster care.
2. To provide and enhance partnership among foster parents, foster parent or foster care associations, birth families and all child caring agencies.
3. To improve services to children in foster care and their families.
4. To actively participate in the recruitment and retention of foster parents and others working in the field of family care.
5. To inform the membership of AFAPA and others of current information pertaining to the well being of children in care and their families.
6. To develop ways to track and increase membership.
7. To maintain a secure financial base to support AFAPA goals.

The AFAPA publishes a quarterly newsletter; sponsors quarterly regional network meetings; sponsors an annual training conference; provides support and assistance to local associations; awards two scholarships each year; networks with other organizations within the state and across the country; and works to stay informed on policy, legislation and trends that provide service to children.

To get more information about AFAPA go to:
<http://www.aflosterparentasso.org/links.html>

Reading Suggestions

1. ***Foster Care Children: A Guide for Parents and Teachers***
By Anita Bosky, Ph.D., Richard Brozovich, Ph.D., and Linda M. Chase, Ph.D.
This book is written for the potential foster parent and the teacher. It focuses on helping potential foster parents make informed decisions when applying to become foster parents. It raises issues for teachers and professional school personnel to consider when working with a foster child. This is a must read for foster parents.
2. ***The Healing Power of the Family***
By Richard Delaney, Ph.D.
This book offers a non-technical, user-friendly approach to the understanding and treatment of disturbed foster and adopted children. It is written for parents as well as professionals.
3. ***Families at Risk***
By Jodee Kulp
This book is a guide to understanding and protecting children and care providers involved in out-of-home or adoptive care. It is an attempt to balance the need to protect children with concern for the well being of foster care families. It is instructive and explores options for foster parents and social workers.
4. ***Living With Children***
By Gerald R. Patterson, Ph.D.
This book is designed to teach skills for behavior management of children. The format guides the reader to respond to questions and statements. This is an effective teaching method. The book provides practical advice on dealing with key areas of behavior difficulties.
5. ***Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes***
By the State of Alabama Department of Human Resources
This book contains a detailed review of all the standards governing childcare facilities and agencies. It covers the principles, regulations, and procedures for meeting the needs of dependent and neglected children in the State. It was updated in the year 2000 and will be available in the second quarter of 2001.
6. ***Spare the Rod***
By Phil E. Quinn
This book sweeps aside popular myths such as “spare the rod and spoil the child,” and persuasively argues that hitting children—even in “acceptable” ways like spanking—is never justified as a parenting technique.
7. ***Solving Child Behavior Problems at Home & at School***
By Elaine A. Blechman
A set of solutions aimed at promoting environmental change and fostering competence by improving adults’ and children’s communication, problem solving, and behavior-management skills.
8. ***Where is Home? Living Through Foster Care***
By E.P. Jones
The book tells the story of E.P. Jones. She was part of the foster care system and survived. Today Ms. Jones is a counselor in the system that fostered her. She has devoted her life to helping young people.
9. ***Facilitating Developmental Attachment***
By Daniel A. Hughes
Mr. Hughes focuses on building blocks for strengthening relationships. He deals with emotional recovery and behavioral change in foster and adopted children.
10. ***Remember Tomorrow, A Woman’s Companion***
By Charmaine Mandell
Published by Peanut Butter Press, Seattle, Washington (ISBN 0-89716-822-4). The writer’s premise is: “When we remember tomorrow we make wise choices today.” Ms. Mandell’s work is nonfiction and focuses on foster children and why they have become foster children. Written for a wide audience, this book is a must read. The writer poses a set of problems that foster children have and offers solutions born from experience. The writer’s web site is: www.remember tomorrow.com. She can be reached at P.O. Box 1984, Port Townsend, WA 98368 USA.

Sources

The following sources contributed to the compilation of the updating of the Foster Parent Handbook. We are grateful for permission to use their materials in compiling these materials.

1. Dr. Richard Brozovich, Co-author
Foster Care Children A Guide for Parents and Teachers
Oakland Schools
2100 Pontiac Lake Road
Waterford, Michigan 48328-2735

Special thanks for permission to use portions of his book in compiling The Foster Parent Handbook. Oakland Schools has done some very innovative work in communicating to educators, foster parents, and children. We recommend that our readers call Karen Keiser at 248.209.2351 to obtain a copy of this book, along with other publications published by the Oakland Schools group. We encourage all sixty-seven Alabama DHR offices to obtain copies of the Oakland Schools publications.

2. *About Foster Parenting*
The National Foster Parent Association
(800) 557-5238

The National Foster Parent Association exists to assist foster parents and others in building a better climate for the care of America's children. It is an excellent place to start in gathering resources for information on children and foster parenting.

3. **The National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning**, Hunter College School of Social Work of the City University of New York, 129 East 79th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021. The Center produces two newsletters a year titled *Permanency Planning Today*. Their Web Address is www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp.

4. **Child Welfare League of America**
Headquarters 440 First Street NW, Third Floor
Washington, D. C. 20001-2085
202.638.2952 www.cwla.org

A Community Outreach Handbook for Recruiting Foster Parents

By Kathy Barbell & Lisa Sheikh

Funded by the Casey Foundation, CWLA is a primary resource for persons interested in foster care at any level. Their web site is a source of valuable information. Their reason for being is to provide resources for family support.

5. **National Advocate**
National Foster Parent Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 81
Alpha, OHIO 45301
1-800-557-5238
www.nfpainc.org
www.connectforkids.org

Provides timely information for foster parents and social work professionals. This publication should be in the hands of every foster parent and social work professional.

6. *1990 Foster Parent Handbook*

The 1990 edition of the Foster Parent Handbook provided the initial direction for the shaping of the new edition of the handbook for foster parents (April 2001). Recognition and appreciation is expressed to the people who created the decade old handbook.

7. *Families at Risk*

By Jodee Kulp

Published in 1993 this book is a guide to understanding and protecting children and care providers involved in out-of-home or adoptive care.

FOSTER PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

Child's name _____ DOB _____
Blood Group _____ Allergies _____
Worker's name _____ Phone _____
Supervisor's name _____ Phone _____
Program Supervisor's name _____ Phone _____
Child's Medicaid # _____ Child's SS# _____
Birth Parents _____ Phone _____
Child's nearest relative _____ Phone _____
Health Needs _____
Medicine _____
Pediatrician _____ Phone _____
Doctor _____ Phone _____
Nurse _____ Phone _____
Other Health Professional _____ Phone _____
Dentist _____ Phone _____
School _____ Phone _____
Payment Child will receive: _____
SSI Amount _____ Date to be received _____
Regular Board Payment _____ Amount Date to be received _____
Special Supplement _____ Amount _____ Date to be received _____

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Editor's Salute to Special Friends

Miracles occur in the lives of Alabama's children everyday because foster parents and DHR professionals are willing to stand in life's storm with them. The love and nurture these people provide often determines if a child survives. Knowledge of their heroic work is humbling. Their willingness to be woven into the "tapestry of turmoil" provides hope for children and families.

I am grateful to Commissioner Bill Fuller for the opportunity to work on this writing project. His guidance and encouragement has been a source of spiritual energy. I am grateful, also, for the many foster parents and social work professionals who have provided me with information. Not one person ever refused to receive me graciously or withhold their wisdom. Without their cooperation this work could not have been written.

My hope for the book is that it may contribute to developing the partnership that must exist between social work professionals and foster parents. It has been my intention to pose the questions that I would want answered if I were to become a foster parent. I hope I have asked the questions that you want answered.

No part of this handbook is bound by copyright restrictions.
It is dedicated to the betterment of the lives of children;
therefore, all or any part of it may be used to that purpose.

