

Section 2:

Working Together in Partnership



Importance of Working Together in Partnership:

Foster parents can help children reunify with their birth family by continuously working in partnership with the CMO, FSC, FSS, DCF, GAL, courts and the biological family. When children see harmony among the adults that impact their lives, they can relax, let go and just be children. Children will worry less about trying to “fix” the adults around them. As we know, children coming into care often blame themselves for the removal from their home while trying to cope with the loss of no longer living with their parents.

If foster parents commit to working with birth parents, children will feel better about themselves and gain confidence. When birth parents feel supported and included, they will, in most cases, work with foster parents to help ease the emotional stress on their children. This in turn gives children the permission they often seek to live and be happy in the foster home. The more comfortable children feel in their foster home, the more unlikely they are to defy foster parents in order to show loyalty to their birth family. By working together and reducing the perception of divided loyalty, foster parents can work more effectively with the children in their homes. Foster children can feel emotionally safe, and birth parents can learn valuable parenting skills from foster parents.

Remember that just as parents have enough love for all their children, children have enough love for all their parents, even their temporary parents.



The Foster Parent:

Being a foster parent is a tough but **very** rewarding experience. Knowing that you can make a difference in the life of a child, and potentially their entire family, is a priceless gift.

The purpose of this handbook is to assist you in providing the children placed in your home with safety and permanency in order to ensure their well-being at all times. In addition, this handbook will clearly set out what FSSNF expects of you as a foster parent. The following section contains the roles and responsibilities, the bill of rights, the standards for foster care licensure, the Partnership Plan and additional helpful information for the foster parents.





Roles and Responsibilities of the Foster Parent:

As a caregiver, your roles and responsibilities include, but are not limited to the following:

- To ensure the child's safety and well-being at all times.
- To ensure the child's needs for food, clothing and shelter are met.
- To treat the child as your own: providing love, care, guidance and support.
- To assist in taking the child to medical, dental, and mental health appointments.
- To reward and praise the child.
- Ensure the child is given his/her medication in the dosage prescribed by a doctor or psychiatrist.
- To attend court hearings, meetings and staffings, when necessary.
- Cooperate with parental & sibling visitations as specified in the court order.
- Ensure that the children are supervised by an approved caregiver at all times.
- Ensure the child's resource record (red folder) accompanies them when they leave your home and that it is current.
- To hold all information confidential regarding the child and his/her family.
- Complete a minimum of 8 hours of in-service training annually.
- Ensure that any legal action to get custody of the child placed in your home is only with prior DCF consent.
- To notify FSS immediately of any changes in the home, such as the physical address, change of employment, change in household members, etc.
- Work as a member of the team with FSS, DCF, providers, courts, and all the other members of the partnership to ensure the child's continued safety and well-being.
- To ensure the child is available for the FSC to visit a minimum of once every 30 days.
- To contact FSS and local law enforcement immediately, if the child runs away or is missing.
- To work with FSS, providers and the court to ensure the child's continued safety and well-being at all times.



Foster Parents' Bill of Rights:

As a foster parent, I/we understand that my/our rights include, but are not limited to, those listed below. Furthermore, as stated in the FAC 65C-45, I/we understand that serving as a licensed out-of-home caregiver is a privilege and public trust. I/we do not have an inherent right to a license as an out-of-home caregiver.

1. The right to be treated with dignity, respect and consideration as a professional member of the partnership for children and families at all time.
2. The right to be provided with ongoing and pertinent in-service training in order to assist me/us in being able to more effectively meet the needs of the children placed in my/our care and to develop and/or enhance my/our skills.
3. The right to be informed as to how to contact the appropriate full case management agency staff in order to receive information and assistance to access supportive services for the children placed in my/our care.
4. The right to be provided a clear and written understanding of the full case management agency's plan concern the placement of the children in my/our home.
5. The right to be provided a fare, timely and impartial investigation of complaints or foster parent referrals concerning my/our licensure, to be provided due process during the investigation; the right to be provided the opportunity to request and receive mediation or an administration review of decisions that affect licensing parameters, or both mediation and administration review; and the right to have decisions concerning licensing corrective action plan specifically and clearly explained and tied to the licensing standard(s) violated.
6. The right to be provided with a Child Resource Record (Red Folder) on each child placed in my/our home at the time of placement or within 72 hours; the right to additional or necessary information that is relevant to my/our providing continued quality care to the child to be provided as it becomes available.
7. The right to receive timely financial reimbursement – that has been pre-approved by the full case management agency – commensurate with the care needs of the children placed in my/our home.
8. The right to be notified in timely manner of scheduled meetings and staffing concerning the foster child in order to actively participate in the case planning and decision-making process regarding the child placed in my/our temporary care, including individual service planning meetings, administrative case reviews, interdisciplinary staffing, and individual education planning meetings; the right to provide input concerning the plan of services for a child and to have that input given full consideration in the same manner as information presented by any other professional on the team; and the right to communicate with other professionals who work with the foster child within the context of the team, including therapists, physicians, and teachers.
9. The right to be provided, in a timely and consistent manner, with any information a FSC has regarding the child and the child's family which is pertinent to the care and needs of the child and to the making of permanency plan for the child. Disclosure of information concerning a child's family shall be limited to that information which is essential for understanding the needs of and providing care to the child in order to protect the right of the child's family.



Foster Parents’ Bill of Rights (cont’d):

- 10. The right to be given reasonable written notice of any changes in the child’s case plan, any plans to terminate the placement of the child with me/us, or the reason(s) for the change or termination in placement. (Notice shall be waived only in cases of a court order or when the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm.)
- 11. The right to be notified in a timely manner of all court hearings, including notice of the date and time of the court hearing, the name of the judge or hearing officer hearing the case, and the location of the court proceeding.
- 12. The right to be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with me/us is to be re-entered into foster care when such placement would be consistent with the best interest of the child and other children in my/our home.
- 13. The right to have timely access to the full case management agency’s appeals process and the right to be free from acts of harassment and retaliation by any other party when exercising the right to appeal.
- 14. The right to be provided with the telephone numbers that are critical to ensuring a child’s safety, permanency and well-being, for example (1-800-FLA-FIND) in the event the child/children placed in my/our home does not receive a visit from the child’s FSC at least every 30 days and the Florida Abuse Hotline (1-800-96-ABUSE) in the event that I/we suspect that a child or children placed in my/our home has been abused or neglected (including incidents of child-on-child abuse).
- 15. In order for me/us to have a right to be treated as a member of the partnership that helps to create safe havens for children and their families, I/we agree to carry out the responsibilities as delineated on the following page. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following: (a) Participating in the child’s case plan; (b) Supporting the child’s education goals; (c) Fostering normal activities so to ensure the child feels that he/she is a member of my/our family; (d) Co-parenting by working in partnership with the child’s parents; and (e) Immediate reporting of any critical incident.

Caregiver 1

Date

Caregiver 1

Date

Agency Witness

Date



Rights and Expectations for Children & Youth in Shelter or Foster Care:

All children deserve to be treated as human beings with unique needs, feelings, and ideas. As foster children have suffered the loss of being temporarily separated from their parents and family, they need special safeguards, resources and care. As a caregiver, I/we will ensure the rights of the children placed in my/our home is/are respected at all times. A foster child has the following rights:

1. The right to live in a safe home and to be treated with respect.
2. The right to be loved and cared for by a family: his own family, a foster family or adoptive family.
3. The right to attend school; obtain special education services if needed, and to participate in sports, clubs, and extracurricular activities.
4. The right to be represented by an attorney at law in administrative and court hearings so that his/her interests are always protected.
5. The right to receive a high quality of child welfare services including regular visitations with the birth family, unless prohibited by court order.
6. The right to be free from physical, sexual, emotional, and other abuse to include corporal punishment.
7. The right to receive adequate and healthy food and adequate clothing.
8. The right to receive appropriate medical, dental, vision and mental health.
9. The right to private storage space in the home wherein he/she can store his/her personal belongings.
10. The right to receive money allowance using the money given monthly for foster care payments to the foster parent.
11. The right to have his/her personal property and belongings respected, even if he/she is on runaway or has left the placement.
12. The right to have his/her information or records kept confidential in accordance with state and federal laws; including medical, mental health, and educational.
13. The right to attend classes or programs that will prepare him/her for independent living.
14. The right to maintain contact with the biological parents, siblings, foster parents, and any other person(s) important to the child's life - as allowed by the courts and the agency and when in the child's best interest.
15. The right to have things explained to him/her in words that he/she can understand.



Rights and Expectations for Children & Youth in Shelter or Foster Care (cont'd):

16. The right to be told how his/her money, being held by DCF, is being used.
17. The right to being his/her property with him/her when he/she leaves your home.
18. The right to have any person, who asks him/her to fill out or sign a paper, explain to him/her for the form or paper.
19. The right to make a complaint to the Agency or DCF about how they are being cared for by you, the agency or other people providing child services.
20. The right to attend court hearings involving his/her care and to tell the judge what is happening to him/her and when he/she wants.
21. The right to have a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) appointed to him/her by the judge and to have immediate and unlimited ability to meet with him/her.
22. The right to have all efforts in court made without delay in order to ensure the child's permanency is achieved in the shortest amount of time possible.
23. The right to a permanent home or family.
24. The right to enjoy the same rights established in the Constitution of the United States and Florida as every other person in the state: individual dignity, liberty, privacy, pursuit of happiness, and the protection of his/her civil and legal rights.

I/we have read the aforementioned and will support it as it relates to the safety, permanency and well-being of the children placed in my/our home. I/we agree that if I/we encounter a problem resulting in my/our not being able to uphold the terms of this agreement I/we will immediately notify my/our full case management agency for assistance and support.

I/we have been provided with a copy of the Children's Bill of Rights for the Foster Parent form. I/we also understand that a copy of this form will be placed in my/our licensing file.

Caregiver 1

Date

Caregiver 1

Date

Agency Witness

Date



Co-Parenting: A NEW Approach to Fostering

Co-Parenting, or shared parenting, is a new approach providing many benefits to foster parents. Co-parenting is more than just having contact between the birth family and the foster parent. Rather, co-parenting envisions the development of an actual partnership between the birth parents and the foster parents that is focused on the well-being of the child. By working in partnership with birth parents, foster parents are helping the child to let go of anxious behavior and become a child again. When a child sees harmony among the adults in his/her life, he/she can relax and allow him/herself to be a child. The child worries less and spends less time trying to “fix” the adults around him or her.

Seeing birth and foster parents work together can change the way a child functions. When birth parents feel accepted and supported, they are more likely to work with foster parents on issues relating to the child and to give the child permission they feel is necessary to be in the foster home. Hopefully, over time, the child will comfortably settle into the foster home because he/she no longer must prove loyalty to the birth parents through the exclusion of the foster parents. By reducing this tension, foster parents can positively work with and influence the children placed in their homes.

Other benefits of co-parenting include:

1. Birth parents can provide foster parents with vital information and insights about their children. With this information, foster parents can more effectively and more appropriately meet a child’s needs earlier in their relationship. Similarly, foster parents should keep birth parents apprised of all issues relating to the children in their care, as long as there is no safety issue against the sharing of information. This will help birth parents continue to be involved in their children’s lives and prepare them for reunification. An exchange of information between birth and foster parents will decrease many misunderstandings and potential conflicts over issues regarding the children;
2. Co-parenting can increase the effectiveness of the foster parent’s role. When birth families feel supported by foster parents, they support parenting decisions made by the foster parents.
3. Co-parenting creates a bridge between the two families. The foster family serves as a mentor and a support for the birth family. This is especially important with very young children. When the family recovers and the children return home, lines of communication and support should remain open. From the perspective of bonding and attachment, the foster parent and the foster children should remain like an extended “family” despite living in different households. In this way, important attachments are not suddenly disrupted, and the foster and birth families become a support system for one another. This positive connection may prevent children from re-entering care.
4. When foster parents co-parent, they acquire a unique understanding of the parent/child relationship and the strengths and deficits in the family unit. This information is vital to the caseworkers in preparing case plans and assessing permanency goals. Moreover, the information is vital for judicial decision-making. Foster parents can assist the court in understanding the family dynamics and provide the court with valuable information regarding parenting strengths and weaknesses and needed services.



Minimum Standards of Care for Family Foster Homes:

Foster parents must be able to meet the minimum standards for Family Foster Homes as set forth in the Florida Administrative Code 65C-13 and in the guidelines in Chapter 39 and Chapter 409. The standards therein must be adhered to in order to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of foster children in care when they are temporarily placed in a family foster home. When unusual situations make it advisable to waive one or a minimal number of requirements, only the Regional Administrator or the Chief Executive Officer for the Community Based Care Lead Agency will have the authority to grant such a waiver and to provide written assurances that the home can provide for the care and needs of a child. Documentation of any exception to the Minimum Standards must be on file in the foster parent's licensing case file.

Serving as a licensed out-of-home caregiver is a privilege and public trust. No applicant has an inherent right to a license.

1. Skills and Abilities:

Foster parents and the full case management agency (AGENCY) staff must work together as a team with a shared and common goal of permanency planning for children; the primary goal for most children is family reunification. As a team member of the partnership, the family will face many challenges. Foster parents are expected to provide continuity of care while helping a child repair the effects of earlier life experiences. Foster parents must evidence the maturity, stability, fitness, skills and competency to successfully protect, nurture, and meet the developmental needs of children; support the agency's established case goals and Permanency Plan for children placed in their care. Foster parents need to have a number of specific skills:

a. Understanding of the Impact of Fostering

The foster parent must be able to identify their individual and family strengths and needs, and communicate these to the agency. Foster parents should recognize how the addition of a new family member can affect family relationships (including the extended family), life styles and support systems. The foster parent should understand their role in fostering and know the kinds of children whose needs they can best meet.

b. Teamwork and Communication

The foster parent must be willing and able to communicate with the child, the AGENCY, birth parents and other foster/adoptive parents who may have different outlooks because of different experiences, ages and cultures. Consequently, their participation and attendance at the Foster Parent Association Meetings is recommended as this will assist foster families in being able to better understand and fulfill their roles and responsibilities in working with children, birth families, the AGENCY, GALs, professional partners for the child, etc. They must work in partnership to help children be reunified with birth families, be adopted or move into independent living.

c. Parenting Abused/Neglected Children

Foster parents must be able to effectively parent children who have been abused, neglected, abandoned and/or emotionally maltreated. Families must help children develop a positive self-concept and identity, recognizing that past experiences and losses may have contributed to their poor self-image and identity-confusion. They must help children understand and deal with the past in non-judgmental ways which make them feel good about who they are. Families must be willing to seek outside assistance in order to meet a child's specific needs.

d. Understand Grief, Loss and Attachment Issues for Children In Care

Children removed from their birth families experience profound losses and need help in managing their grief. Foster parents must have resolved their own losses and be able to anticipate the effects of future losses on the family. Since children who have experienced loss often have difficulties attaching, families will need to understand bonding and attachment in order to be able to help the children.



e. Understand, Prevent & Manage Misbehaviors

Children that come into care will exhibit many inappropriate behaviors that reflect the physical and emotional pain they have undergone. Foster families must understand the feelings, the reasons behind the behaviors and be able to help children get their needs met in ways that make children feel lovable, capable, worthwhile and responsible. Foster parents must adhere to the policy prohibiting physical discipline/corporal punishment and use positive methods to modify the inappropriate behaviors.

f. Support Primary or Birth Family Connections

Families must help children maintain and develop relationships that keep them connected to the past, the source of their identity and self-esteem. Since most children are reunified with their birth families, visitations between the birth families and the child – unless there is a court order prohibiting the visitation - should take place as soon as possible. Visitations between siblings should also take place as soon as possible given the unique bond that exists between siblings.

g. Provide a Safe, Nurturing & Healthy Environment

Recognizing that children in foster care are vulnerable to further abuse and exploitation, foster parents must be able to protect children from any form of maltreatment. In addition, foster parents must provide a healthy, safe and permanent environment to the children placed in their care, following all state and local health and safety regulations. Supervision of all children is necessary, but especially so for infants and young children, both when awake and asleep.

2. Background Screening:

Any and all persons residing temporarily or permanently in the foster home along with any frequent visitor to the home and having access to the children must undergo a complete background screening. The screenings shall at a minimum include a local, statewide (FDLE) and nationwide check (FBI). The fingerprinting or nationwide check (FBI) applies to any adult (age 18 and over). The finger printing must be performed via LIVESCAN at one of the full case management agencies. The outcomes to be clearly documented in the licensing case file. Any person between the ages of 12 – 17 must have a local and FDLE check completed. Any and all persons will have a records checks done through the child abuse registry. If the person has resided in any other state over the past five years, a request for abuse and neglect histories must be made of those states and the results obtained will be reviewed and documented in order to ensure our children’s safety and well-being. A civil record checks regarding domestic violence complaints and orders of protection must also be conducted. Any call outs to the home by law enforcement that did not result in criminal charges will need to be obtained for those families pursuing initial foster care licensure.

Persons who are currently licensed as foster parents and any adult household member will be re-screened at least annually as part of the application for relicensing. The annual rescreen shall be limited to a local, abuse and neglect record check, and a civil records check. For a child in the home between the ages of 12 – 17 the FDLE check will also be conducted annually.

If a teenager (16 and older) is used to babysit, a background screening to include an abuse and neglect record check, local and an FDLE check will also be conducted. Documentation to be provided in the licensing case file regarding the foster parent being responsible for ensuring that the baby-sitter is suitable and appropriate for the age, developmental level and behaviors of the children.

3. Income:

A family must demonstrate that they have sufficient income to maintain their family excluding the board rate received for the children placed in the home. Being a foster parent is a privilege and a trust, not an entitlement.

4. Marital Status and Other Significant Relationships:

The prospective foster parent must provide proof of current marriage or divorce, if applicable. If involved in a relationship, this will be explored during one of the home visits conducted. The impact fostering will have on your family as well as our children’s safety and well-being will be assessed. This person will also need to complete a full criminal background and abuse check. In the event the foster parent gets married after becoming licensed, the unlicensed spouse will need to complete the pre-service training within six months. (A foster parent must be at least 21 years of age.)

5. References:

There will be a minimum of three personal references (cannot be related to the applicant) obtained. The person must have known the applicant for at least three years. References will also be obtained from the adult children of each applicant to



determine suitability as a licensed caregiver. An employment reference will be obtained to verify two year employment history. If the applicant has been with the present employer for less than two years, a secondary employment reference will be obtained. (Work hours and flexibility of schedule in case of emergency, medical or school appointments for the children will also be explored.) School references will be obtained from the childcare provider of any preschool age child or from the school of any child residing in the home. Two additional references will also be obtained from neighbors or community members.

6. Confidentiality:

The foster parents along with all adult members residing in the home (or frequenting the home) will be asked to sign the confidentiality policy so to ensure that any information that comes to their attention and knowledge is kept confidential and is not disclosed to anyone other than authorized persons by the AGENCY. A copy of the confidentiality form will be provided to the individual.

7. Environmental Inspection:

A statement from the local health department indicating that a satisfactory environmental inspection has been completed is required. Fire drills shall be conducted at a minimum of two times a year or whenever a new child is placed in the home. The family will also have a written plan for evacuation in the event there is a disaster. The plan will include where the family will go and information as to how the family can be reached by the AGENCY in the event an emergency occurs.

8. Gas Heaters:

Gas heaters in the foster home must be vented to avoid fire and health hazards. However, unvented, fuel-fired heaters equipped with oxygen depletion safety shutoff systems may be operated in foster homes. It is a good safety practice that all homes with gas appliances (stove, fireplace and water heaters) have carbon monoxide detectors. All electrical wiring shall meet required building codes. Fireplaces, space heaters, steam radiators, and hot surfaces shall be shielded against accidental contact. Access to children under six will be restricted by a barrier.

Extension cords shall not extend from one room to the next with the exception of situations involving an emergency loss of power due to a natural or manmade disaster.

9. Safety Considerations:

Smoke alarms must be present in the home and functioning at all times. The family must also have a first aid kit and a fire extinguisher with a current tag.

Firearms must be locked away from children. Ammunition must be kept locked and stored separately from firearms.

Poisonous chemicals (cleaning supplies and toxins) shall be kept in a locked location. Hooks, child safety latches and other baby proof devices do not qualify as a locked storage for poisonous chemicals. Alcoholic beverages and medication shall also be stored away from children. Combustible items will be stored away from sources of heat.

Homes having a swimming pool must meet all community ordinances to operate a pool. The pool must be fenced with a gate, which is kept locked to prevent unsupervised access by children. Families having a swimming pool or whose home is adjacent to bodies of water unprotected by a four-foot barrier will be required to complete a basic water safety course. Access to swimming pools and bodies of water shall be restricted when supervision is not available and children shall never be left to swim alone.

If there are burglar bars, they must be breakaways so to allow easy access in the event of an emergency.

10. Animals:

Florida law requires that all dogs, cats, and ferrets be vaccinated for rabies. Re-immunizations are required either annually or triennially depending on the vaccine for animals over the age of four months. The family shall also have a secure method to restrict access to potentially dangerous animals so to ensure our children's safety.

11. Health:

A medical history that includes the physical, mental health and other treatments for all household members will be explored. If there is a concern regarding the physical, mental or emotional health of any member of the household and possible



injurious effects on a child, the applicant must supply recent medical reports and evaluations. This licensing counselor completing the home study will explore and document this information in the home study.

12. Pre-service Training:

Licensed foster parents with the Department of Children and Families must satisfactorily complete the pre-service training/preparation as part of the minimal requirements for licensure. The training includes appropriate methods of discipline and emphasizes that corporal punishment is prohibited as well as the importance of maintaining birth family connections.

13. Continued Parent Development:

Foster parents must complete a minimum of 8 hours of in-service training yearly as part of their requirements for continued re-licensure. Half of the training will be completed in the classroom and the other half may be obtained on line, via literature, video or in-home instruction. Newly-licensed foster parents are required to complete psychotherapeutic medication training within 120 days of their becoming licensed.

The foster parent will also need to complete training on fostering the sexual aggressor/victim child. Documentation of all trainings taken must appear in the licensing case file.

14. Appropriate Utilization of Foster Home:

No more than five (5) children, including the children of the foster family, shall be placed in a foster home.

No more than two (2) children under twenty-four (24) months, including the children of the foster family, may be placed in a foster home.

An adult shall be within hearing distance and accessible to the rooms wherein there are children under the age of six (6) sleeping.

Bunk beds shall be equipped with safety rails on the upper tier for a child under ten (10) or for any child whose physical, mental or emotional condition indicates the need for such protection. Bunk beds shall not be bunked higher than two tiers.

No child shall sleep in a bed with an adult.

Each child will have a separate bed.

A child over twelve (12) months cannot sleep in the bedroom of an adult unless deemed to be medically needed. A doctor's note must be placed in the licensing file of the Department and the AGENCY.

Children over thirty-six (36) months must not share a bedroom with a child of the opposite sex unless efforts are being made to maintain a sibling group. In instances where efforts are being made to maintain a sibling group or maintain viable best interests of the children involved. Rationale for any decision made for children over thirty-six (36) months to share a bedroom shall be documented in FSFN.

15. Face-to Face Contact:

At least once every 30 days, the child's FSC shall have face-to-face contact with children in foster care and their foster parent(s). The child's FSC will provide current and proper identification and sign the foster parent's Visitation Log/Contact Log.

16. Employment Outside the Home:

A single foster parent or both foster parents can be employed outside the home if childcare is provided and if able to meet the needs of the children in foster care. All prospective families and licensed foster parents will be asked to identify a relief or back-up person to assist them in providing ongoing care to our children. The identified individual(s) must have a complete abuse and background check done along with completing the required documentation.

17. Religion:

Children in foster care should be afforded the opportunity to practice the faith of their choice or that of the birth parents as well as be encouraged and supported in the development of their ethnic background. The family's attitudes regarding the prohibition against seeking medical treatment, celebrating holidays or birthdays and discipline practices encouraged by their faith will be explored and documented in the home study.



18. Driver's License:

Foster parents need to have transportation available twenty-four (24) hours a day. They cannot transport children in vehicles such as truck beds, motorcycles, or any other high-risk method of transportation that would endanger our children. No child will be transported on his/her lap. The vehicle to be used to transport our children must be in safe condition, in compliance with the applicable motor vehicle laws of the state and be equipped with seat belts and approved car seats. The vehicle must be smoke-free when foster children are being transported.

The person providing the transportation must possess a valid and current Florida driver's license along with auto insurance. A part of the foster parent partnership expectation is that they provide transportation for children placed in their home. Foster Parents have the sole responsibility to transport and accompany the child to all medical, dental, and/or other appointments. This is critical to providing information to the doctor regarding and receiving information and instruction with respect to the child's care. In the event of an emergency in which the foster parent cannot provide the transportation, then he/she will contact the child's FSC for assistance. Even in an emergency situation, the foster parent must make every effort to be accessible by phone should the doctor need more information. The Department of Vehicles database will be accessed at the initial application for licensure and at each time of re-licensure so to ensure the caregivers do not have any driving violations less than five (5) years old on file relating to driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

19. Foster Home Approval:

Foster parents will be approved as a foster home resource for only one agency; however, they may accept children from another agency with prior approval from their original approving agency.



Recent Changes to the FAC 65C-45 for Foster Care Licensure:

- The FSS licensing department must be immediately notified of any frequent visitor to the home so to ensure fingerprinting takes place within five (5) days.
- A Household Member includes any and all visitors expected to stay an indefinite period of time or college students expected to return to the home.
- All new household members must be fingerprinted within five (5) days of residence.
- All foster parents must complete training regarding psychotherapeutic medications within 120 days of initial licensure.
- Exit interviews will be conducted on those foster children that remain in the foster home for more than 30 days. (Any issues raised in the exit interview will be addressed in the re-licensing summary.)
- Smoking in a vehicle is prohibited when transporting foster children.
- Any change in the foster home must be immediately reported to the FSS licensing: These include but are not limited to the following: (a) law enforcement involvement of any household member; (b) change in marital status; (c) changes in household composition; (d) change in physical address; (e) changes in financial situation; (f) serious health issues; (g) additional changes include home phone number, mailing address, employment and/or work schedule.
- Overnight trips exceeding one night must be approved by the FSC.
- Caregivers shall support the child's effort to learn to drive and obtain a license, www.k2i.us.
- Caregivers are not required to buy auto insurance for a youth.
- Background checks for youth's dating/outings are not required.
- Failure to report a situation that threatens the safety of a child or results in non-conformity with the licensing requirements may be a reason to deny or revoke a license.
- A foster parent that marries or reconciles and the spouse has not had the required pre-service training must secure the needed training within six (6) months of the date of marriage or reconciliation. (No new children shall be placed until this has been satisfied.)
- Serving as a foster parent is a privilege and public trust: applicants do not have an inherent right to a license.
- A respite home must be licensed.
- Babysitters must be at least 16 years old and have received a background screening.
- Babysitting is limited to less than 24 hours in duration.
- Foster children shall not provide supervision to other children in the home.
- The Department is the licensing authority for all family foster homes and has the final authority for approval, denial or suspension of ANY license.



Partnership Plan for Children in Out-of-Home Care:

All of us are responsible for the well-being of children in the custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The children's caregivers along with the Florida Department of Children and Families, community-based care (CBC) organizations, their subcontractors and staffs of these agencies undertake this responsibility in partnership, aware that none of us can succeed by ourselves.

Children need normal childhoods as well as loving and skillful parenting which honors their loyalty to their biological family. The purpose of this document is to articulate a common understanding of the values, principles and relationships necessary to fulfill this responsibility. The following commitments are embraced by all of us. This document in no way substitutes for or waives statutes or rule; however we will attempt to apply these laws and regulations in a manner consistent with these commitments.

1. To ensure that the care we give our children supports their healthy development and gives them the best possible opportunity for success, caregivers and DCF, CBC and agency staff will work together in a respectful partnership.
2. All members of this partnership will behave professionally, will share all relevant information promptly, and will respect the confidentiality of all information related to the child and his/her family.
3. Caregivers, the family, DCF, CBC and agency staff will participate in developing the plan for the child and family, and all members of the team will work together to implement this plan. This includes caregiver participation in all team meetings or court hearings related to the child's care and future plans. DCF, CBC and agency staff will support and facilitate caregiver participation through timely notification, an inclusive process and providing alternative methods for participation for caregivers who cannot be physically present.
4. Excellent parenting is a reasonable expectation of caregivers. Caregivers will provide and DCF, CBC and agency staff will support excellent parenting. This requires a loving commitment to the child and the child's safety and well-being, appropriate supervision and positive methods of discipline, encouragement of the child's strengths, respect for the child's individuality and likes and dislikes, providing opportunities to develop the child's interests and skills, awareness of the impact of trauma on behavior, equal participation of the child in family life, involvement of the child with the community and a commitment to enable the child to lead a normal life.
5. Children will be placed only with caregivers who have the ability and are willing to accept responsibility for the care of a child in light of the child's culture, religion and ethnicity, special physical or psychological needs, unique situation including sexual orientation and family relationships. DCF, CBC and agency staff will provide caregivers with all available information to assist them in determining whether they are able to appropriately care for a child. Caregivers must be willing and able to learn about and be respectful of the child's religion, culture and ethnicity, and any special circumstances affecting the child's care. DCF, CBC and agency staff will assist them in gaining the support, training and skills necessary for the care of the child.
6. Caregivers will have access to and take advantage of all training they need to improve their skills in parenting children who have experienced trauma due to neglect, abuse or separation from home, to meet these children's special needs and to work effectively with child welfare agencies, the courts, the schools and other community and governmental agencies.
7. DCF, CBC and agency staff will provide caregivers with the services and support they need to enable them to provide quality care for the child.

The Birth Parents:

When you initially went through the PRIDE pre-service training, we made you aware of some of the possible challenges you may encounter in temporarily foster a child. We asked that you look at being a foster parent as one family helping another family: the child's birth parents. We informed you that visits were one of the first opportunities to develop the alliance between the birth family and the foster parent. Both sets of parents should have a strong common bond to ensure the best interest of the child. When you support birth parents in their efforts for reunification, the goal is more likely to be achieved. The children are less likely to feel divided loyalties and fearful about their future if they can see the important adults in their lives working together: this assists in the child's adjustment in your home as well as promotes a better relationship between you and the child. The child will not see you as his enemy but as his/her ally. As foster parents, you play an important role in creating the partnership with the birth parent.

We understand why you may find it difficult to commit to the goal of reunification, especially when you have viewed the effects of maltreatment on the child firsthand and do not want to jeopardize the child's safety and well-being. However, it is important to always focus on what is in the child's best interest – the opportunity to be raised in their own family. Commitment to this belief and goal makes the partnership possible! As one of the most important members in the family partnership, we need to remember that birth parents also have rights to their children, unless their rights have been terminated by the courts. On the next page, we have defined some of these rights.





Biological Parents' Bill of Rights:

When any child is placed in the custody of the state, Biological Parents are still able to maintain many legal rights until and unless a determination is made by the courts with legal jurisdiction that those rights should be terminated. Additionally, good child welfare practice requires that the respect for the right of parents should continue to the greatest extent possible. These rights include but are not limited to the following:

1. The right to be provided with information regarding the child's medical, dental, mental and psychological status while in temporary care;
2. The right to translation and interpretation services in order to be able to communicate effectively with the Department of Children and Families, Full Case Management Agency (FSS), courts, and other professionals regarding the safety, permanency and well-being of their child;
3. The right to be notified and be able to participate and provide input in the case planning and decision-making process involving the child;
4. The right to assistance, if needed, with transportation, to ensure they have an opportunity to attend court, medical appointments, etc. as it relates to ensuring the return of the child;
5. The right to receive a written copy of the case plan as well as be able to discuss any issues or concerns as noted therein with the CMO;
6. The right to be treated by the Department of Children and Families, FSS, and the other partners with dignity, respect, and trust;
7. The right not to be discriminated against on the basis of religion, race, color, creed, gender, marital status, national origin, age, or physical handicap;
8. The right to receive information from the FSS on how to access economic services or financial aid and any other assistance, and reach personnel 24 hours per day, seven days per week;
9. The right to have ongoing visitation with the child, unless there is a court order prohibiting the visitation. The visitation should take place at a mutually-agreed upon, convenient and easily-accessible location;
10. The right to be notified in advance, in writing and via telephone, by the CMO or the court of any hearing or review where the case plan or permanency of the child are an issue, including periodic judicial reviews held by the court or Court Review Panel;
11. The right to have the child continue with his/her own birth family values and beliefs, while in temporary foster care, unless it jeopardizes the child's safety and well-being;
12. The right to be apprised of information, laws, and guidelines and any changes in policies and procedures, that would delay the safe return of the child.

The Family Service Counselor (FSC):

As valued members in the partnership for children and families, Foster Parents need to ensure that they communicate regularly with the child's FSC. Foster Parents and FSC's need to communicate often and effectively, respect each other's roles, make decisions together, solve problems together, and resolve conflicts. All members of the team have a common goal: to provide a safe, nurturing environment for the children in care. When communication is open and mutual, it is easier to accomplish this goal.





Role of the FSC/CM:

One of the other key members of this partnership that you will be interacting with regularly includes your foster child's FSC. Their responsibilities include but are not limited to the following:

1. The FSC shall have face-to-face contact a minimum of once every thirty (30) days by visiting the child in the out-of-home placement.
2. The CM shall discuss with the caregiver the case plan's progress and the child's progress, development, health and education.
3. The FSC will ensure that the date in the Department's system of record, FSFN, always contains accurate and current information regarding the child. This includes but is not limited to the child's placement history, home visit date, etc.
4. The CM will provide any and all available background information on the child: social history, medical, psychiatric and educational information.
5. Within two (2) days of the receipt of the case file, the FSC will contact the Foster Parent and inform them that he/she has been assigned to the specific child's case and to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the child. Contact information will be provided to the Foster Parent at that time: Office & cell numbers, along with their supervisor's information.
6. The CM will inform the Foster Parent of any upcoming staffing, conference or court hearing, at least within seventy-two (72) hours, in order to allow the Foster Parent an opportunity to participate and provide input with regards to the child's safety, permanency and well-being.
7. The FSC will provide a copy of the home visit form to the Foster Parent at the time of the home visit is made (SAMPLE HOME VISIT FORM CAN BE FOUND IN THE FORMS SECTION).
8. The CM will inform the Foster Parent of any changes relating to the child's psychological, physical or educational needs.
9. The FSC will inform the Foster Parent of visitations between the birth parents and the child and/or the child and his/her siblings. Visitations are to take place as soon as possible.
10. The CM will treat the Foster Parent with respect, dignity and courtesy at all times.
11. The FSC will ensure that the Foster Parent has a Child Resource Record (Red Folder) for each child that is placed in the home. The Red Folder will be given at the time of placement or within 72 hours of placement.
12. The CM will ensure that he/she provides the child's Medicaid card to the Foster Parent. If the Medicaid card is not available, the CM will ensure that he/she completes the application and submits in timely manner.
13. The FSC is to present proper identification to the Foster Parent at the time of the home visit along with ensuring that he/she signs the Visitation/Contact Log.
14. The CM will show support by responding within twenty-four (24) hours, whenever possible, to the Foster Parent's telephone messages and written correspondence.

The Child:

Your job is truly unique because each child that enters foster care is unique. For reasons beyond his/her control, separation from the home and family has occurred. Each child needs special attention and understanding for the many fears, worries and anger they may be experiencing. Consequently, the foster child placed in your home may be in shock. You will care for, worry about, scold and love this child as you would your own child.

You take the foster child "as is." You will not start at the beginning as you did with your own. Your foster child will come to you with a definite personality, range of habits, expectations and attitudes - all shaped by relationships formed in the past. This is a child you will share: a child to be enjoyed by your family and his family; a child destined to bring both sunshine and rain; but most importantly, a child needing your ever-present love and support!





The Child's Rights:

As a child I have the right to.....

1. Live in a safe home.
2. Be treated with respect.
3. Be treated as a member of the family.
4. Be accepted and loved for who I am.
5. Go to school.
6. Be in sports, clubs or afterschool activities.
7. Not be touched in any way I do not want or feel comfortable.
8. Not get hit when I do something wrong.
9. Eat a healthy and balanced meal each day.
10. Have enough summer and winter clothes that fit me.
11. Go to the doctor and dentist.
12. Have my own space to store my personal belongings.
13. Receive an allowance.
14. Not have information about me shared with strangers.
15. Speak to my counselor or guardian.
16. Go to court and speak to the judge.

Youth's Name

Date

Caregiver's Name

Date

FSC's Name

Date



The Guardian Ad Litem (GAL):

Many children in the custody of the Department of Children & Families are represented before the court by a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). A GAL is a court appointed, specially-trained, volunteer who serves as an officer of the court to ensure that the best interests and wishes of the child are represented at legal proceedings. The GAL is there to help and provide a strong voice in court and a positive systemic change on behalf of abuse and neglected children.

GAL responsibilities:

- Investigates abuse allegations independently
- Monitors services provided
- Makes recommendations to the court
- Conducts monthly home visits with child/children

The GAL has the right to interview the child they represent and to be involved in making major decisions which affect the child. If you want to know if a GAL has been appointed to the case, please ask your child's FSC.

Guardian Ad Litem for Duval, Nassau & Clay counties:

214 N. Hogan St. 32202

Phone: (904)255-8440



GAL

Guardian ad Litem

**A POWERFUL VOICE FOR
FLORIDA'S CHILDREN**

**FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM
PROGRAM**