

# INTRODUCTION

*Welcome to Tools for Fostering!*

For over twenty-five years, my husband and I have welcomed numerous children into our home as nurturing Foster Parents. Thus, my expertise in this area is vast and largely first-hand.

**CHARLOTTE**

Foster Care Specialist

Offering advice and support to Foster Parents

- Letter-writing services to authorities in the DCFS e.g. the A.R.A. (\$25-\$35)
- Bi-weekly Zoom sessions to assist with concerns in the volunteer service of Foster Care
- Private meetings (preferably in person) to discuss specific individual issues pertaining to fostering

For further information, please visit  
my web-site:  
[www.cheetahblack.com](http://www.cheetahblack.com)



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## Preparing to Receive a Foster Child into your Home

Thorough preparation from addressing possible problems before they arise, planning ahead and getting as much information as possible, a foster family can make the process of integrating a new family member smoother and less stressful.

Keep track of your preparations with this Pre-Placement Checklist:

### Things to Do

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- Review the information in the potential foster child's (PFC) case file to determine if they would be a good match for your family.
- If possible, participate in pre-placement visits with the PFC. Afterwards, discuss how all parties felt in order to determine if the placement should take place.
- If your own children (biological or acquired) are residing at home, include them in the matching process, within the confines of confidentiality. Ultimately, they should be included in the process of deciding whether or not to foster a child and which one to select.
- Focus on preparing your family for possible changes as a result of welcoming a PFC into your household. Your family structure and dynamics *will* change after accepting a foster child into your family. Family roles and interactions will change due to the presence of a new person in the family. Talk to your whole family about the possible changes that might occur.

### Questions for your social worker:

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1. What prompted the child's entry into the foster care system originally?
2. How many placements has the child been placed in prior to this potential one?
3. Why and/or how did the child's last placement end?
4. What is the child's medical history (medications, allergies, ongoing therapy/treatment, etc.)?
5. What are the child's special needs? Do they have any behavioral, mental, emotional, and/or academic problems or delays? Which ones? How are they being dealt with?
6. What are the child's interests and strengths? What activities is the child involved in, either in or outside of school? Check to see if you can contact significant adults who know the PFC. If this is possible, seek their input about the strengths and/or any challenges of the child.
7. Is there anything specific or more information about the PFC (family history, etc.-)

## **Additional items to know and keep in mind...**

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1. To promote good communication and cooperation between the team members, attend placement meetings with the child's welfare team i.e. Child and Family Team or Permanency Planning meetings. Establish when contact will take place with the assigned social worker and the foster youth's child welfare team.
2. Negotiate, prior to the placement, what supports you may need during the placement.
3. Review training materials from previous foster parent training courses in order to prepare for an upcoming placement. Take additional training classes if necessary or desired.
4. Seek information regarding the foster youth's potential visits with his or her birth family and clarify your role in the process.

If you are not already receiving one, ask your social worker for a Comprehensive Family Assessment (CFA). This assessment can help identify strengths and weaknesses in your family structure prior to placement. For more information on CFA and other assessments.

Please visit the Child Welfare Information Gateway:

[http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/assessment/family\\_assess/](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/assessment/family_assess/)

5. Identify any risks that the placement may present to your own children. Involve your social worker in this discussion and, prior to the placement, identify safe boundary rules. Written contracts on risks can be helpful.
6. Directly preceding a placement, talk to the children already in your home about the new foster child. Go over things like the foster child's name, age, interests, and any other appropriate information to share.
7. Anticipate, as much as possible, your children's reactions to the new foster child as a new sibling. Caring for the needs of a foster child may take up a lot of your time, and rivalries might flare up between your children as they compete for your attention. Expect a certain degree of conflict due to the differences in the life experiences of the foster youth as compared to the life experiences of your own children.
8. Reflect on your own feelings about the upcoming placement and share any concerns you have with your family and social worker.

## Welcoming Your Foster Child

- The beginning of the placement will be overwhelming for all parties—foster parents, individuals already living in the home, and the new foster child.
- Pay close attention to your foster child's reactions and emotional responses to you and your family.

If there are any changes in their behavior, view this as a cue that they might be experiencing stress over their placement.

Watch out for: increased isolation and health concerns; change in activity level, school interest and/or performance; change in sleeping habits, noticeable distress, etc.-

- Understand that, in most cases, foster youth are being placed with strangers. This often will amplify their needs for safety and support. Adjust your actions as needed for the benefit of the child.
- Allow time for your family to adjust to the new family member and the changes in family dynamics as a result. Relationships between family members may suddenly become closer or more distant as the family is shuffled around into their new roles.
- Schedule and follow up with individual “check-ins” with your own children and the foster youth to address any concerns that develop. This is especially true if you notice any major changes in behavior during the placement.
- Expect that issues of fairness, dissimilarity, and risk factors will surface amongst the children in your home. Respond directly to the challenges as they arise.
- Involvement in a **Foster Parent Support Group** is a good idea. Foster parent support groups can be beneficial for many reasons, including talking out problems, feeling emotionally supported, and learning from the experiences of other foster parents.  
You also may want to consider **Online Supports** for foster parents, such as message forums, blogs or even online training courses (offered on the FosterParentCollege.com web-site).
- Check with your social worker to see if there are other foster parents who are open to mutually mentoring each other. Under the circumstances, community is important.

## Rules for the Foster Home

All foster homes are different, however, there's a list of general rules for establishing clear standards combined with state regulations for all of the individuals living in the foster home.

The most effective house rules are based on mutual respect and are ideally embraced by the entire family. Also, the plural, first-person pronoun 'WE' is preferable when referring to guide-lines that affect everyone in the house-hold.

Check with your agency and social worker for compliance if you are in doubt regarding any of your home standards with state regulations.

- 1. We respect one another in our home.**  
No verbal, physical or emotional abuse will be permitted nor swearing, name-calling, yelling, threatening or intimidating behavior.
- 2. We respect the personal property of our house-mates (each house member).**  
No borrowing of personal belongings without prior permission which includes selling anyone else's personal items.
- 3. We respect each other's privacy in our home.**  
Entering into the bedrooms of other children or our foster parents without prior permission is prohibited.
- 4. We respect the law in our home.**  
No weapons, drugs, alcohol, pornography, tobacco products are permitted.
- 5. We respect order in our home.**  
Violations of the house rules including curfew or home safety boundary violations will be discussed and logical consequences such as "time-out" and the loss of house privileges will be used as discipline.
- 6. We value the voice of each family member.**  
Weekly meetings where we meet as a family will be held to discuss activities, news and issues.
- 7. We value cleanliness in our home.**  
Every family member will bathe, groom and dress each day and complete as assigned household chore including keeping our room's tidy.
- 8. We respect the importance of academics in our home.**  
Each family member who attends school will complete classroom and homework assignments.
- 9. We value individual achievements in our home.**  
Enrollment in organized activities such as sports, clubs and the arts will be encouraged and supported.

## Identifying Foster Home Safety Boundaries

Develop a written agreement that identifies safe boundaries while incorporating relevant input from all of the individuals living in the foster home. Explain the boundaries, the consequences for violating them and then have all of the individuals sign the agreement.

The written agreement will over-lap with foster home rules, but are more inclusive with adaptations for younger children i.e. children-friendly language.

### **Contracted boundary issues should include:**

- Safe and/or necessary touching
- Rules on being alone in the home
- Property rules
- Appropriate behaviour in general and when visiting each other's bedrooms
- Appropriate language behaviour
- Appropriate clothing expectations

### **Child-friendly adaptations might include:**

- Using words and terms identifiable to the child that they will be able to understand (e.g. when discussing body parts or functions, explaining chores, etc.)
- Utilizing a non-threatening body posture and/or talking to the child on their physical level
- Communications tailored for a child's attention span
- Scheduling individualized, more frequent and specific check-ins
- Minimizing distractions in the environment around the child when engaging with them about any issues

## Caring for Self = Self Care

As a foster parent/family, it is vital to find, maintain and schedule helpful activities to manage your individual or collective stress. To be an effective foster parent, you need your own time to decompress and unwind.

Self-Care Support for Foster Families may include the following:

- **Respite Care (for the foster family and the foster youth)**  
If possible, schedule respite ahead of time so that everyone knows when a break is coming and can prepare. Respite care in peaceful times as well as during stressful ones can maximize benefits to the family unit.
- **Becoming involved in a foster parent support group**  
Input from other foster parents can be a valuable and effective way to receive support on the numerous, tough issues that can come up when a foster youth is placed into your home. Some organizations also offer support groups for the children of foster parents.  
If there are no local support groups, research foster parent support networks on-line.
- **Joining a local, state or national foster parent association**  
Since fostering is a highly skilled role, it would be both valuable and supportive to foster parents to receive significant recognition by active involvement with these organizations. Relationships and camaraderie with other foster parents is beneficial which can also flourish through membership with associations.
- **Seeking family therapy (if necessary)**  
If there are family concerns that materialize while providing foster care, consult with a therapist who understands child welfare/family dynamics.
- **Reviewing training materials**  
This could be helpful when/if specific issues or problems arise. These topics may have already been covered during previous trainings.
- **Pursuing additional training**  
More information can be obtained, in a number of formats, such as reading materials, online courses, training DVDs or other foster parents with expertise in your noted area.
- **Preparing for your social worker's visits**  
Make sure that the issues you would like to address are discussed by preparing as many details as possible. Documenting any incidents after they occur (while they're fresh in your mind) can be very helpful. The objective is to give the social worker the best picture about the matters taking place in your home so they can assist with brainstorming, planning and responding to challenges.
- **It's okay to refuse a placement**  
An often over-looked area of self-care is feeling comfortable with saying NO. Foster parents are frequently asked to take placements as a result of not having enough foster homes for children. However, by accepting, foster parents and their families can over extend themselves, which can result in negative consequences for themselves and the foster youth.

## Departing the Foster Home

It is natural to expect an impact on the foster parents family when youth being fostered leave their home.

- Before the foster child leaves your home, provide lots of reassurance, support, and consistency. Offer to give the child a memento from your home or for the child to leave something with you to remind you both of each other. This can help ease the transition, especially for younger children.
- Expect all members of the family to experience grief and loss of some kind at the end of the placement. Allow family members to process these feelings at their own pace and in their own way. Give each person the opportunity to talk about their feelings through individual check-ins or family meetings.
- Post-placement is a time for reflection. Use this time to assess the placement that has just been completed. Involve your children in the assessment.
- If the placement was difficult, take some time for your family to re-group before considering taking on another foster child.
- Request a post-placement discussion with your social worker.
- Continue attending foster parent support group meetings to help process the feelings you may have after the placement has ended.
- Most importantly, **LEARN FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE**. Providing foster care is challenging, yet it can be a rewarding experience for all involved.

# KNOW

It is helpful to view a foster placement in three phases:

**PRE-PLACEMENT** - Preparing for the change.

**PLACEMENT** – This gives you the opportunity to use your resources.

**POST-PLACEMENT** – A great time to review what worked and what needs to be worked on.

- Providing foster care affects the roles, interactions, communication patterns and disrupts routine systems for the whole family. Of course these changes will vary according to all the children's developmental needs and age. However, most changes and probable challenges can be responded to.
- When a foster youth enters a family foster parents' children miss the time, security, and routine of the relationship that they had with their parents.
- The impact of providing foster care can create conflict between adult partners as their family's equilibrium is disturbed by the introduction of a new person, especially a youth with special needs. Some adult partners become closer, while others can experience conflict, even extreme conflict.
- Parents will experience many new challenges within their family from both the new foster child and the children already in their home. At times, youth will play parents against each other, which can undermine the parents' working together. If parents don't work together, parental confusion and inconsistency will surface.
- In emergency situations foster care placements are needed quickly. When a placement is rushed upon a family, this does not mean that foster parents should overlook risk and match characteristics in regards to their birth and/or adopted children.

## **Bibliography:**

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*The information in this booklet was adapted in part from:*

- (1) *The Children's Research Triangle* (<http://www.childrensresearchtriangle.org/>)
- (2) *"Making Your Foster Care Successful"* available from the Professional Services Group and Community Impact Programs.  
(<http://psgcip.com/becomeafosterparent/training/makingyourfostercareplacementsuccessful.php>).
- (3) [www.FosterParentCollege.com](http://www.FosterParentCollege.com).