



# **2026 FOSTER PARENT LAW IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**



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## FOSTER PARENT LAW IMPLEMENTATION PLAN OF 2026

### FOSTER PARENTS' RIGHTS

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#### **1. The right to be treated with dignity, respect, and consideration as a professional member of the child welfare team.**

The Baby Fold's Statement of Beliefs expresses a belief in teamwork, open communication, and valuing and respecting each individual.

"Each individual is a unique child of God and as such we value and respect each individual. Teamwork and open communication among employees, clients, board members and volunteers (including foster parents) are essential to our purpose."

The Baby Fold employees value, listen to, are kind to, and encourage others. The Baby Fold employees seek to find common ground, are considerate, seek partnerships, and listen to understand each other. By adhering to each foster parent right, The Baby Fold employees treat foster parents with dignity and respect.

As professional members of the child welfare team, foster parents have the right to receive necessary information as quickly as possible. Child Welfare Specialists ensure the timely transfer of child records so that information can be disseminated to the foster parent. When appropriate, foster parents will have contact with the child's former foster parent so that information can be shared.

Whether a relative, fictive kin, or traditional foster parent, the relationship between the foster parent and The Baby Fold staff is important. Becoming familiar with each other and each other's role on the child welfare team helps the foster parent and the worker develop a mutually respectful and positive relationship.

Child Welfare Specialists are available during business hours to respond to phone calls from foster parents. If the Child Welfare Specialist is unavailable, foster parents may contact the Child Welfare Supervisor. Whenever possible, phone calls will be returned within one



business day. Appropriate child welfare team members will keep foster parents informed about any licensing dynamics, case progression, or resolution of concerns.

Child Welfare Specialists, Family Development Specialists, and Child Welfare Supervisors receive training and supervision that emphasizes the importance of teamwork and the treatment of all team members with dignity and respect. Foster parents are encouraged to be part of the professional team through participation in staffings, and joint training with child welfare team members. Child Welfare Specialists receive feedback from foster parents, while formulating and evaluating service plan goals. Foster parents are informed of court hearings, child and family team meetings, and administrative case reviews, and are encouraged to be present and participate. Video conferencing creates meeting access when foster parents are unable to participate in person. As professional members of the team, foster parents have the right to receive answers to their questions and obtain assistance in problem solving. Child welfare team members recognize foster parents as valued team members. Foster family input and availability is considered when scheduling parent/child visitation, child and family team meetings, and during case planning and decision making. Child Welfare Specialists ensure foster parents receive timely notice of confirmed appointments, including Child and Family Team Meetings. Agency therapist(s) maintain contact with foster parents for consultation and to address any therapeutic concerns related to the child in their care.

The Foster Care Program's monthly newsletter serves as a means for the program to communicate the following information to foster parents:

- Training opportunities
- Available supportive services
- Community activities
- Review of Foster Parent Law and Implementation Plan rights and responsibilities
- The foster family spotlight recognizes the work and dedication of a family nominated by program staff

The Baby Fold provides a foster parent manual to all families regardless of their licensure status. The manual is issued to unlicensed relative foster parents by the Child Welfare Specialist when they initially meet with the family after the child has been placed in their care. The manual is issued to licensed foster parents at the time of their final visit prior to licensure. All families are given a hard copy of the manual and are asked to sign proof of receipt. The manual offers direction to foster families regarding their role on the professional team. The Baby Fold has annual in-service trainings for Child Welfare staff that familiarizes them with:

- The Baby Fold's Implementation Plan and Grievance Process
- Content of PRIDE curriculum
- Licensing Standards
- Foster parent's role as a professional team member



Annually, foster parents who have had placements are surveyed by the Quality Improvement department. They are also given a survey at the time their license is closed/surrendered. These surveys offer foster parents the opportunity to express their level of satisfaction with the treatment they received from the Child Welfare team. The information received from foster parents is provided to staff through quarterly Quality Improvement meetings to enhance program services.

Foster parents are invited to meet with the Family Development Specialists, Child Welfare Specialists, and Supervisors no less than quarterly, to review The Baby Fold's Implementation Plan. The meetings are offered through a hybrid format, and they can attend in-person or virtually. A survey is sent electronically prior to the meeting to collect their feedback and discussed in the quarterly meeting. Through participation in these activities, foster parents can give input on program enhancement. Information received is provided to staff during staff meetings and additional training is provided, as needed, to address the necessary responsiveness to foster parents' expressed concerns.

## **2. The right to be provided standardized pre-service training and appropriate ongoing training to meet mutually assessed needs and improve the foster parents' skills.**

Evaluating training needs is part of the assessment, placement, and monitoring processes. Family Development Specialists begin assessing training needs as part of the initial licensing assessment. Family Development Specialists assist foster families in developing training plans that will address the family's ability to meet the needs of children placed in their home. Family Development Specialists monitor progress toward the completion of training plans and address the ongoing training needs of foster parents at every monitoring visit.

Prospective foster parents are informed about PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training, which uses a co-training approach, during their first contact with the agency. Information about PRIDE module training, educational advocacy training, adoption training, training available in the community, and agency-sponsored training is shared with foster parents, along with the list of resources that have been approved through the DCFS Office of Training. The Baby Fold offers written, audio, and visual resources for foster parents' use. The foster parents can choose what training means they prefer. During each semi-annual monitoring visit, discussions occur with the foster parent that helps them identify their training needs and interests, which will then in turn assist them in developing the knowledge and skills needed to successfully parent the child(ren) in their home. The foster parents' identified training needs are listed on individualized training plans. Family Development Specialists monitor training progress through the DCFS Learning Development Center (LDC).

Foster parents are provided a copy of The Baby Fold foster parent manual to understand agency operational procedures. Foster parents are also given information on how to access



DCFS' Foster Parent Handbook for information that assists them in fulfilling their roles. Child Welfare Specialists and Family Development Specialists are available to answer questions as needed.

Through their Family Development Specialist, Child Welfare Specialist, or the foster child's therapist, foster parents may access written, audio, and visual teaching materials to help assist them to understand and more effectively parent children who have been impacted by trauma. Consultations may occur with The Baby Fold's Vice President of Clinical Operations to discuss specific concerns regarding children in placement. On-going Trust Based Relational Interventions (TBRI) training is available to The Baby Fold's foster parents. They may also access DVD training pertaining to the impact of trauma and TBRI through the child's therapist, the Child Welfare Specialist, or the Family Development Specialist.

Using information obtained through monitoring visits, feedback from implementation plan meeting participants, and foster parent survey results, the agency develops training for foster parents that helps them meet their required training hours while also addressing their expressed needs and interests.

All foster parents are encouraged to increase their understanding of childhood trauma and its impact. The Baby Fold's training coordinator provides trauma-informed training for both foster parents and Child Welfare staff. In addition, The Baby Fold offers training to help foster parents build knowledge in a variety of areas, including understanding birth parents' rights and respecting their decisions (such as religious waivers and haircare), enhancing cultural competence, navigating the court process, supporting permanency goals, and grief and loss. Child Welfare Specialists are informed by email of each training session so they are aware of the upcoming topic and can encourage foster parents to attend those sessions, which may be of particular interest or help to them. The Baby Fold also utilizes its Foster Care Facebook page to highlight upcoming trainings available to foster parents.

The training schedule is developed quarterly and is advertised in The Baby Fold's foster parent monthly newsletter and sent by email. It is also posted on The Baby Fold's Foster Care Facebook page.

Foster parents, as training participants, are asked to complete evaluation forms for the agency training they attend. Foster parents may provide feedback for training through surveys and individual conversations with their assigned Child Welfare Specialist and Family Development Specialist. Foster parent feedback is used to improve existing training structures and for training improvements.

The Baby Fold recognizes the importance of incorporating skilled, experienced foster parents as co-facilitators in foster parent training. Experienced foster parents offer lived perspectives and real-world insight that engenders trust, credibility, and resilience. Utilizing





a co-training model, when available, a current foster parent is invited to co-facilitate trainings on various topics, including ethnic hair and skin care, in a group setting to current traditional and relative foster parents. The group setting allows for connection, networking, and shared experience exchange in a safe space.

### **3. The right to be informed as to how to contact the appropriate child placement agency in order to receive information and assistance to access supportive services for children in their care.**

For each child in their care, foster parents are provided with contact information for the assigned Child Welfare Specialist and Supervisor. Child Welfare Specialists and their Supervisors may be reached on their agency phone or through agency email. Foster parents may also contact a Family Development Specialist or the Family Development and Program Support Supervisor with questions or requests for services. Foster parents are informed that they may contact the Department Assistant Director or Department Director if team members are not available. Whenever possible, phone calls will be returned within one business day.

In the event of an emergency, foster parents are instructed to contact the assigned Child Welfare Specialist directly during business hours. They are instructed to contact the emergency foster care on-call phone number for emergencies during non-business hours. When foster parents call The Baby Fold main number after hours, the voicemail message instructs them how to reach the on-call person for the foster care program.

Foster parents receive a list of emergency numbers, including:

- DCFS phone number to obtain authorization for emergency medical treatment for youth in care.
- Foster care on-call phone number
- Crisis and Referral Entry Services (CARES) Line
- Screening, Assessment, and Support Services (SASS)
- DCFS Child Abuse hotline

Foster parents are provided with the contact information for the DCFS Advocacy Office and the Office of Inspector General at case opening and with each annual Implementation Plan mailing.

The Baby Fold partners with local community agencies and links foster parents to appropriate services, supports, and methods of encouragement.



#### **4. The right to receive timely financial reimbursement commensurate with the care needs of the child as specified in the service plan.**

Care reimbursement checks shall be issued no later than the third Wednesday of the month following the month in which services were provided. Child Welfare Specialists and Family Development Specialists are responsible for providing foster parents with contact information for The Baby Fold Finance Department in the event of a payment concern. Foster parents are required to contact The Baby Fold Finance Office directly if payment is not received within five days after the third Wednesday. Reimbursement will be made in accordance with the level of care approved by DCFS.

Payment Authorization (CFS 906-1) shall be completed within two business days of a child's placement. For relative care providers who become licensed foster parents, the CFS 906-1 shall be completed within two business days of The Baby Fold's receipt of confirmation of license issuance.

Foster parents are provided with a list of approved reimbursable travel expenses in The Baby Fold Foster Parent Manual. Travel expense documentation shall be submitted by foster parents at the conclusion of each month. Reimbursement for approved travel expenses shall be processed and issued no later than the third Wednesday of the month following submission.

Foster parents are also given instructions to get mileage reimbursement for all insurance funded services (e.g., medical, dental, mental health, developmental therapies) through MTM Link Member mobile app. If an appointment is over 100 miles, foster parents are given the member services number (888-513-0703) to get prior authorization. Foster parents will receive a Focus Card, a reloadable debit card issued by U.S. Bank, and all mileage reimbursements will be issued to the card within 7 business days when using the mobile app. If foster parents do not use the mobile app to submit a claim the day of the appointment, they have up to 60 days to submit a paper trip log to get reimbursement.

At the time of placement, foster parents are informed by Child Welfare Specialists of items that are considered non-recurring expenses. Foster parents may request non-recurring expense payment for children in their care. Foster parents must obtain approval from the Assistant Director prior to incurring the expense. Most often the payment for these expenses is issued by The Baby Fold the provider. When prior approval is obtained, reimbursement will be made to the foster parent within 14 days of submission of receipts.

Foster parents may request up to seven days of paid respite per year for each child in traditional and relative (including unlicensed relative homes) foster care. Foster parents are





eligible for a minimum of 15 hours of paid respite, per month, for each child in specialized foster care. Foster parents are included in the development of respite plans for all youth in care and asked to sign the plan.

The Child Welfare Specialist will complete the respite payment form and submit it to their supervisor within two business days of the final day of respite. The Baby Fold directly pays approved respite providers within 14 days of confirmation that respite has been provided.

- 5. The right to be provided a clear, written understanding of a placement agency's plan concerning the placement of a child in their home. Inherent in this policy is the responsibility to support activities that will promote the child's right to relationships with his or her own family and cultural heritage.**

The Baby Fold utilizes Family Finding Resource Specialists to support the child welfare team in expanding family and kinship resources for children and families involved in foster care. Family Finding is a practice focused on thoroughly identifying extended relatives and other caring adults who can form a strong support network for youth. This intensive approach uses both traditional and creative strategies to locate relatives, fictive kin, and supportive adults who can offer meaningful connections, respite care, permanency, and other positive resources.

The foster home placement agreement expresses the role and responsibilities of the agency and the foster parent related to the child being placed in the foster home. The foster home placement agreement specifically states that the foster parent needs to treat the parents courteously and refrain from criticizing them in the child's presence. The placement agreement also states that the foster parent will plan with the direct service staff before making religious commitments for the child such as baptism, confirmation, church attendance, church membership, and religious holiday celebrations. By signing the foster home placement agreement, the foster parent agrees to support the permanency goals for the child and are encouraged to attend all court hearings and staffings related to planning for the child.

Foster parents receive written notification and are encouraged to attend all Administrative Case Reviews (ACRs). The Child Welfare Specialist provides foster parents with a copy of the child's portion of the service plan. Specific tasks for the foster parent may be added, as they relate specifically to the child in their care. Foster parents are provided with the DCFS Service Appeal Process brochure.

The child's client service plan will note the permanency goal set for the child and the planned achievement date for that goal. The Child Welfare Specialist will ensure that the foster parent understands the permanency goal that has been selected and the timeframe for the planned achievement date. Foster parents are involved in the development, implementation, and



evaluation of service plan goals, for the child in their care, regarding the child's needs in the areas of education, medical care, development of social skills, emotional development, the development of independent living skills, and hair care. Foster parents are included in discussions about the child's adjustment to their placement and participate in completing the child's summary part of the client service plan. Foster parents are consulted in establishing the visitation plan, as to the days of the week and times that are most convenient for the foster parents and child's schedules. Other means of parent/child and sibling contact, such as phone calls and letters are discussed and included in the visitation plan. Foster parents are provided with a copy of the Sibling Contact Information Form (CFS 318). Foster parents are encouraged to host sibling visits and are reimbursed for hosting and supervising sibling visits. When unplanned changes occur in the case plan or the permanency goal, verbal notification will be provided to the foster parent within one business day.

Foster parents are notified in writing 14 days prior to a child being moved from their home, unless there is an immediate safety concern. Foster parents are required to provide the agency with 14 days written notice when they wish to have a child moved from their home.

The Baby Fold uses the monthly foster parent newsletter, email, The Baby Fold Facebook page, and The Baby Fold's Foster Care Facebook Page to provide information about cultural events in the community and to encourage foster families to participate in the events.

- 6. The right to be provided a fair, timely, and impartial investigation of complaints concerning the foster parent's licensure, to be provided the opportunity to have a person of the foster parent's choosing present during the investigation, and to be provided due process during the investigation; the right to be provided the opportunity to request and receive mediation or an administrative review of decisions that affect licensing parameters, or both mediation and an administrative review; and the right to have decisions concerning a licensing corrective action plan specifically explained and tied to the licensing standards violated.**

Foster homes can be involved in different types of investigations. Licensed foster homes can be involved in a stand-alone licensing investigation initiated by the Family Development Specialist in relation to an allegation of a violation to 402 licensing standards. Any foster home may be involved in a DCFS investigation as a result of a report of abuse or neglect made to the DCFS hotline. For licensed foster homes, this will result in an automatic concurrent licensing investigation by the Family Development Specialist.

Complaints concerning a foster parent's licensure come from a variety of sources, including routine contacts with the foster family by agency staff, reports of others outside the agency, and as a result of a report to the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline.



Per 89 Ill. Adm. Code 383, upon receipt of a licensing complaint, the assigned Family Development Specialist initiates a licensing complaint investigation within two days of the complaint. The Family Development Specialist explains that they are conducting a licensing investigation and informs the foster parent of the alleged violations. Foster parents are informed, both verbally and through the receipt of the Foster Parent Rights Related to Licensing Complaint Investigations Form, that they may have their own advocate present; however, they may not unreasonably delay the investigation in order to secure an advocate. Persons chosen to be present must sign the Confidentiality Statement for Authorized Representatives During Licensing Complaint Investigation form.

The foster parent is informed that there will be a hold placed on their home for any future placements, until the licensing investigation(s) is completed. Every attempt is made to complete a licensing complaint investigation within 30 calendar days of the complaint. Foster parents are notified in writing if 30 additional calendar days are needed to complete the investigation. Foster parents shall be informed that if a DCFS investigation is occurring, the licensing investigation cannot be completed until the DCFS investigation has been concluded.

Within 15 days of completing the licensing investigation, the agency makes a formal determination of whether or not a licensing violation has occurred. Foster parents are sent a certified letter with the findings of the investigation within five days of a determination being made. Each finding is linked to a specific 402 licensing standard. If the investigation is substantiated, a corrective action plan may be developed, which connects the elements of the plan to the specific licensing standards that were violated. Foster parents are informed that they may request a supervisory review within 10 days of the postmark of the certified letter. During the supervisory review they are informed of the right to request an informal review, per Procedure 383.

**7. The right, at any time during which a child is placed with the foster parent, to receive additional or necessary information that is relevant to the care of the child.**

Child Welfare Specialists are trained regarding all information that is to be shared with foster parents concerning the children in their care. Training is provided to Child Welfare Specialists regarding the limitations of confidentiality when sharing information pertaining to the birth family. Supervisors provide support to help caseworkers redact confidential information. Agency staff are transparent with foster parents regarding their ability to share information, including information that may be unknown.

For initial placements, within 60 days of placement the worker will complete the entire Child/Caregiver Matching Tool, adding information that has become available through the



integrated assessment, including school reports, medical records, and psychological or psychiatric evaluations. The completed Child/Caregiver Matching Tool is signed by the Child Welfare Specialist and the supervisor and then filed in the child's case record. In signing the Foster Home Placement Agreement, the Child Welfare Specialist agrees to discuss with the foster parent information regarding the child's family and background in order to assist the foster parent in understanding and helping the child. Child Welfare Specialists continue to evaluate and assess the need for foster parents to receive other pertinent information regarding a child in their care on an individual basis. Such case issues are discussed between the Child Welfare Specialist and the supervisor during supervision. Pertinent information is then shared with the foster parent as it relates to the children in their home.

Child Welfare Specialists and foster parents sign a CFS 600-4 Sharing Information with the Caregiver form within 10 days of placement. This document includes information pertaining to the child, including case information and history, health and medical, educational information and history, placement history, behavior/social information, and emergency placements. Foster parents and GAL (Guardian Ad Litem), are both provided a copy of the completed form within 10 days of placement.

Supervisors are responsible for holding Child Welfare Specialists accountable for sharing pertinent information with the foster parents. Through individual supervision and team meetings, supervisors ensure that pertinent information is regularly shared with the foster parent. If new information regarding the child is received through collateral contacts, the information is promptly shared with the foster parent. Supervisors provide support to Child Welfare Specialists after placement changes to ensure that the new foster home has received all pertinent information.

Child Welfare Specialists and Family Development Specialists routinely check the child's record folder that the foster parent maintains, to ensure that the foster parent has all the necessary information. Foster parents receive updated information through school meetings, medical appointments, staffings, court hearings, and Child and Family Team Meetings that they attend.

Upon request, the Child Welfare Specialist will provide the foster parent with documentation verifying the child's placement, allowing the foster parent to share this confirmation with the child's school or other service providers, such as WIC.

- 8. The right to be given information concerning a child from the Department as required under subsection(u) of Section 5 of the Children and Family Services Act and (ii) from the a child welfare agency as required under subsection (c-5) of Section 7.4 of the Child Care Act of the Children and Family Services Act.**



At the time of placement, Child Welfare Specialists provide all available information to the foster parent, such as the child's medical history, educational history, the child's portion of the service plan, the plan for visitations, and any other relevant background information. Supervisors provide training and regularly review pertinent policies and procedures with Child Welfare Specialists regarding information to share with foster parents at placement.

If the child's information is unavailable at the time of placement, Child Welfare Specialists provide the information as quickly as it becomes available. Child Welfare Specialists and foster parents sign a CFS 600-4 Sharing Information with the Caregiver form within 10 days of placement. The CFS 600-4 is included in the case opening packets used by the Child Welfare Specialists for each newly assigned case. Supervisor oversight and file reviews hold Child Welfare Specialists accountable for completing this process and the form within a timely manner.

Supervisors provide oversight during scheduled supervision to ensure that the new foster home has received all pertinent information if there is a placement change. The Child Welfare Specialist completes the CFS 600-4 for all placement changes and follows all timeline requirements.

- 9. The right to be notified of scheduled meetings and staffings concerning the foster child in order to actively participate in the case planning and decision-making process regarding the child in their care, including individual service planning meetings, administrative case reviews, interdisciplinary staffings, and individual educational planning meetings; the right to be informed of decisions made by the court or the child welfare agency concerning the child; 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.**

All Child Welfare Specialists receive training on the inclusion of foster parents in all staffing's related to planning for the child. Foster parents are encouraged to attend and participate in all staffing's related to case planning for the child in their care. During the monthly foster home visit, the Child Welfare Specialist will receive input from the foster parent, regarding service planning for the child. All foster parents are also invited to attend child and family team meetings. When scheduling child and family team meetings, Child Welfare Specialists determine foster parents' availability prior to scheduling the meetings. When foster parents are unable to attend in person, Child Welfare Specialists invite them to participate over the phone or virtually.



# The Baby Fold

All foster parents are notified in person, writing, or electronically of administrative case reviews. DCFS directly sends administrative case review notifications to foster parents. The Baby Fold holds other interdisciplinary staffings, in which foster parents will be notified in person, by electronic communication, or through writing. Foster parents participate in the review of treatment plans for any child(ren) in their care receiving clinical services.

When children receive therapy services at The Baby Fold, the foster parent participates in the assessment and treatment planning process. Foster parents whose children receive therapy may consult with the child's therapist.

Individual educational planning meetings may be attended by the foster parents. All licensed foster homes complete Educational Advocacy training prior to renewing their foster home license. This allows them to become more knowledgeable about their role in the child's educational services.

Child Welfare Specialists notify the foster parents of all upcoming court hearings and the purpose for each hearing. Foster parents may provide their input to the courts for review by the judge, prior to or during the court hearing, which may vary by court jurisdiction. If the foster parent chooses not to attend a court hearing, the Child Welfare Specialist informs the foster parent of any decisions made by the court at that particular hearing.

Information regarding unplanned changes in the case plan or the permanency goal will be provided to the foster parent through verbal notification within one business day. Foster parents are provided with the name and business phone number of the child's GAL. The Child Welfare Specialist will inform the foster parent if they receive advance notice of a cancelled court hearing. There are some situations in which the agency is not notified in a timely manner and will inform the foster parent as soon as they receive the notice.

Foster parents are encouraged to attend all medical appointments concerning the foster child. They are requested to have ongoing contact with the child's school, attending parent/teacher conferences, and all other school staffings. Foster parents are encouraged to have contact with other professionals who work with their foster children.

Specialized foster parents participate in the referral and assessment process when the child is referred for psychiatric evaluations. They are encouraged to attend ongoing psychiatric appointments for the purpose of monitoring effectiveness of prescribed medications.

Foster parents have the availability to consult with The Baby Fold's clinical director regarding a child's behavior and psychological needs. The Baby Fold will help facilitate a referral to a child psychiatrist for children who have an identified need. The foster parents





are included in the consultation process regarding the children in their care. Cases may be referred for consultation to The Baby Fold's interdisciplinary team.

Foster parents are most often notified in person, over the phone, or electronically of opportunities to participate in decision-making regarding the children in their care. Phone and in-person notification is documented in case records.

- 10. The right to be provided, in a timely and consistent manner, with any information a Child Welfare Specialist 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 a 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 rights of the child's family. When a positive relationship exists between the foster parents and the child's family, the child's family may consent to disclosure of additional information.**

Whenever possible, an attempt is made to obtain and provide all relevant information on a child prior to or at the time of the child's placement. For new intakes received from the DCFS Centralized Intake, the information received will be shared with the prospective foster parent. The assigned Child Welfare Specialist will seek additional information from the DCFS investigator, and the current Child Welfare Specialist if applicable. For new cases, at the shelter care hearing, the Child Welfare Specialist will obtain further information regarding the child's behavior, medical needs, and educational placement. This information will be provided to the foster parent.

The Child/Caregiver Matching Tool is completed to describe the child's characteristics and identify their individual needs. The Child/Caregiver Matching Tool is signed by the Child Welfare Specialist and the supervisor and is placed in the case record.

Children not assigned to The Baby Fold, requiring specialized care may be matched to The Baby Fold by DCFS with a referral packet. All relevant information is shared with the foster parents prior to them accepting the child for placement. When children are placed in emergency circumstances there may be little information available. In those instances, the assigned child welfare specialist begins the process of gathering information about the child and sharing all relevant information with the foster parents as soon as possible. Information shared includes medical history and current medical status; developmental and educational history and status; information regarding prior abuse, neglect, previous placements, and relationship with family members and significant others; information regarding child's behaviors, habits, interests, and routines. Information obtained through the comprehensive assessment, regarding the child, will be provided to the foster parent.



The confidentiality of the child's family is protected unless the family member has signed a consent for the release of information. Without violating the confidentiality of the biological parents, foster parents will be provided with as much information as possible regarding the parent/child visits as it pertains to the care and the needs of the child. Information will be shared with the foster parent as soon as possible following the parent/child visit.

The ongoing sharing of information pertinent to the care of a foster child is discussed in weekly supervision between the supervisor and Child Welfare Specialist. Any pertinent new information is relayed to the foster parent as soon as possible.

The Baby Fold encourages all foster parents to attend court hearings and ACRs whenever possible. Foster parents are given the child's portion of court reports, service plans, and invited to attend school meetings. All information learned during court proceedings and ACRs must also be treated as confidential.

- 11. The right to be given reasonable written notice of (i) any change in a child's case plan, (ii) plans to terminate the placement of the child with the foster parents, and (iii) the reasons for the change or termination in placement. The notice shall be waived only in cases of a court order or when the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm.**

Foster parents receive a copy of the updated portion of the child's service plan when there is a change with the permanency goal. When the agency decides to terminate a child's placement, the agency provides a 14-day written notice, per the CFS 151-B Notice of Change of Placement form, to the foster parents outlining the reasons for terminating the placement as well as the process for the foster parents to appeal the decision. Fourteen-day written notice is not required when a court orders removal of the child from the foster home or when the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm.

- 12. The right to be notified in a timely and complete 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, the location of court proceeding and the court docket number of the case; and the right to intervene in court proceedings or to seek mandamus under the Juvenile Court Act of 1987.**

The assigned Child Welfare Specialist informs the child's foster parents, in person, by phone, or in writing, of the next scheduled court hearing related to the child, including the date, time, place, judge, GAL, and docket number. Completion of this task is verified through supervision, documentation of a phone notification in a case note, or by retaining a copy of the written notification in the case file.



Foster parents learn of their right to intervene in court proceedings or to seek mandamus under the Juvenile Court Act of 1987, through PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training, in reviewing the DCFS Foster Family Handbook, and/or from agency staff.

Foster parents can submit input to the court for the judge's review before or during the hearing, with processes varying by jurisdiction. They can also provide input to the GAL prior to the hearing. The Child Welfare Specialist will inform the foster parent if they receive advance notice of a cancelled court hearing. There are some situations in which the agency is not notified in a timely manner and will inform the foster parent as soon as they receive the notice.

**13. The right to be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parents 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 the home.**

When a child re-enters care, it is imperative that the child's previous placement history is fully explored to identify potential placement options that would serve the best interest of the child. DCFS along with The Baby Fold staff will utilize the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS), Augintel, and The Baby Fold's Service Documentation System (SDS) to review and verify the child's previous placement history and any placement of sibling(s). When evaluating the best interests of the child, factors taken into consideration include but are not limited to the child's age, needs, child's identity, culture, child's sense of attachments, family situation, educational placement, family's home community, and the youth's permanency goal. When deemed appropriate and in the best interest of the child, all former foster parents of the youth will be contacted to further assess placement for the child. In situations where siblings are separated, the caregiver of the sibling will be contacted, as this may supersede other placement options. A copy of the child's closed file will be requested from DCFS. There are circumstances when The Baby Fold may not be contacted or involved in the decision for placement when a youth re-enters care.

Placement decisions involve collaboration among Child Welfare Specialists, Supervisors, Family Development Specialists, and any other members of the multidisciplinary team. The Child/Caregiver Matching Tool is completed to determine the child's current needs and whether the former foster family is willing to care for the child. The Child/Caregiver Matching Tool must be signed by the Child Welfare Specialist and the supervisor. Completion of the Matching Tool helps support whether the placement is consistent with the best interest of the child



**14. The right to have timely access to the child placement agency's existing appeals process and the right to be free from acts of harassment and retaliation by any other party when exercising the right to appeal.**

Information is included in The Baby Fold's foster parent manual on The Baby Fold's foster parent grievance process. A copy of the agency policy and procedure for foster parent grievances is provided to the foster parent at the time of placement of a child in the foster home. A copy of the grievance process is also provided to foster parents on an annual basis when they receive a copy of the updated implementation plan. The process is also reviewed annually by the foster parents and staff who provide feedback on the implementation plan. Foster parents are informed that this grievance process may be used to address alleged violations of the Foster Parent Law. Inclusion of the Department Director, Assistant Director, Chief of Operations, and the Chief Executive Officer in the grievance process ensures that acts of harassment or retaliation are prevented.

Foster parents are provided with the DCFS The Service Plan Process brochure, and they are informed that they may file a service appeal with DCFS. When appropriate, agency staff will assist the foster parent in writing the appeal if technical assistance is needed.

**15. The right to be informed of the Foster Parent Hotline established under Section 35.6 of the Children and Family Services Act and all of the rights accorded to foster parents concerning reports of misconduct by Department employees, service providers or contractors, confidential handling of those reports, and investigation by the Inspector General appointed under Section 35.5 of the Children and Family Services Act.**

Foster parents learn about the DCFS Advocacy Office (1-800-232-3798) and the Inspector General's Office during PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training and through review of the DCFS Foster Family Handbook. The Baby Fold's foster parent manual lists the toll-free number for the Office of the Inspector General (1-800-722-9124). Foster parents are provided with DCFS's brochure The Office of Inspector General, which explains the role and purpose of the office. This brochure is provided to foster parents at the time they are provided with the implementation plan. Agency staff remind foster parents of these resources when foster parents question or disagree with DCFS or agency policies, practices, or decisions.

## FOSTER PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES

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## **1. The responsibility to openly communicate and share information about the child with other members of the child welfare team.**

PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training prepares prospective foster parents for their roles as team members and emphasizes the value of open communication. The Baby Fold's policy on Principles of Communication is shared with foster parents via The Baby Fold's foster parent manual. Agency staff encourage open communication and the sharing of information among all members of the child welfare team. Foster parent involvement in Child and Family Meetings, court hearings, Administrative Case Reviews, Integrated Assessments, and home visits provides a forum for open exchange of information. Foster parents also need to notify their Child Welfare Specialist of any significant events regarding the child(ren) in their care.

## **2. The responsibility to respect the confidentiality of information concerning foster children and their families and act appropriately within applicable confidentiality laws and regulations.**

Issues of confidentiality are covered in the PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training, the DCFS Foster Family Handbook, The Baby Fold's foster parent manual, Rule 402-Licensing standards, and The Baby Fold foster home placement agreement. Agency staff work with foster parents to help them identify confidential information and the reasons for adherence to it. Confidentiality is reviewed with licensed foster parents at every bi-annual monitoring visit. Through discussion, Child Welfare Specialists, Family Development Specialists, and supervisors assist foster parents

## **3. The responsibility to advocate for children in the foster parent's care.**

Agency staff are trained to recognize the role of foster parents as advocates for children in their care. PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training, Educational Advocacy training, annual court training, the DCFS Foster Family Handbook, DCFS Service Appeal training, and The Baby Fold Foster Parent Manual help inform foster parents regarding their roles as advocates. Foster parents are encouraged to advocate for their foster children in all arenas, including Child and Family Team meetings, Administrative Case Reviews, Individual Education Planning, Integrated Assessments, Clinical Intervention to Placement Preservation, multi-disciplinary staffings, court hearings, and meetings with the GAL.

According to the foster home placement agreement, foster parents are to be active participants in the child's education by facilitating the child's educational program,



maintaining regular contact with school staff, and attending all meetings/staffings. Foster parents are made aware of their responsibility to attend these meetings and receive notice of these meetings requesting their attendance. Foster parents are required to complete the Educational Advocacy Training, per licensing standards, prior to renewal.

Foster parents receive service appeal brochures and training on how to utilize and access the appeal process for children in their care by the Child Welfare Specialist or Family Development Specialist. Foster parents are also given contact information for The Office of the Inspector General and The DCFS Advocacy Office as resources to consider to use in their role as advocates. The Baby Fold's grievance process is provided to foster parents annually and is also included in the Foster Parent Manual.

#### **4. The responsibility to treat children in their care and their families with dignity, respect and consideration.**

PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training, licensing standards, and the foster home placement agreement all emphasize the responsibility of foster parents to treat children in their care and their families with dignity, respect, and consideration. Sensitivity to children and birth families is an integral part of the ongoing trainings and conversation among staff and foster parents at The Baby Fold.

The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Manual includes the agency's Christian values. The manual includes a copy of the Client Rights form, outlining the rights to which children and clients are entitled. Information is included regarding relationships between foster parents and biological parents. Through the Foster Parent Manual and discussion with foster care personnel, foster parents are informed of the role of the Child Welfare Specialist in assessing the safety and well-being of each foster child and are made aware that private face-to-face contact will be made with the foster child at least one time per month.

Foster Parents are expected to participate in the initial Child and Family Team Meeting within 14 days of case opening. The purpose of this meeting is to initiate contact and communication with birth parents and provide an opportunity for foster parents to build connections with the birth families. Foster parents are also expected to participate in ongoing Child and Family Team meetings. Their participation provides an opportunity to share information and develop strategies that may assist birth families in meeting their goals. Foster parents also are encouraged, when deemed appropriate, to involve birth parents in as many medical appointments and educational meetings and activities as possible. Child Welfare Specialists and other staff help facilitate a family's involvement by keeping birth parents informed of dates and times that appointments and activities are being held.





Training is available on trans-cultural parenting for foster parents to further enhance their abilities to understand and work with children and families of other races and cultures. The Baby Fold values getting feedback from families on what training topics they would find helpful. Foster parent input drives what trainings staff holds in person or virtually.

Agency staff reinforce this responsibility with foster parents in their regular contacts with foster families. This includes weekly or monthly case management contacts by the Child Welfare Specialist and semi-annual monitoring visits by the Family Development Specialist. During these contacts staff will model dignity, respect, and consideration through their discussion of the family and the foster child with the foster parent. As needed, staff will reiterate licensing standards emphasizing appropriate treatment of the foster children and their families.

When there is a concern that a violation of 402 licensing standards has occurred, a meeting will convene between Child Welfare team members. If it is determined that there has been a potential violation of a licensing standard, The Baby Fold's Licensing Complaint Report will be completed, signed by the staff member making the report, and their supervisor, and given to the Family Development Specialist Supervisor.

**5. The responsibility to recognize their own individual and familial strengths and limitations when deciding whether to accept a child into care; and the responsibility to recognize the foster parent's own support needs and utilize appropriate supports in providing care for foster children.**

The agency and foster family engage in a mutual assessment process at the time of licensing and through continued monitoring visits. The assessments include an assessment of family strengths and limitations, and the types of children whose needs can be met by the foster family. Foster parents complete a Foster Parent Preference Checklist that allows them to state demographic preferences and give placement preference information based on their personal strengths, limitations, and desires. At the time of the six-month monitoring visit with the Family Development Specialist, the foster parent may make changes to their preferences. Through completion of successful placements, the strengths, capabilities, and talents of the foster family are noted. These factors are taken into consideration when the agency considers foster families for possible placements. The agency utilizes the Child/Caregiver Matching Tool to ensure that the needs of each child will be met in the proposed foster placement. Agency staff urge foster parents to consider their strengths and limitations when the agency presents them with the referral of a child.

Through the Child/Caregiver Matching Tool, the areas where the foster parent may need more assistance are identified. Once a child is placed, the agency works with the foster family and includes them as a member of the professional child welfare team to help



identify the supports and resources needed to meet the needs of the child. Family Finding Specialists are assigned to each youth in care and provide additional assistance with identifying supports and resources for the child. Child Welfare Specialists make referrals for needed services for foster children on their caseloads. Child Welfare Specialists and Family Development Specialists reinforce normal and prudent parenting and foster parents are provided with a copy of the normalcy policy guide.

The Baby Fold partners with The Forgotten Initiative and Side by Side Ministries. Foster parents are encouraged to use the offerings of encouragement, support, and services provided by this group.

Training needs are examined throughout the time that a family is licensed with the agency, both relating to the needs of an individual child as well as training that applies to foster parenting in general. The foster parent's training logs are reviewed with them at each monitoring visit. Training that is pertinent to the foster parent's needs is discussed and training options are noted. Child Welfare Specialists are offered the same training opportunities available to foster parents.

**6. The responsibility to be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations in improving the quality of care and service to children and families.**

Foster parents learn of foster parent associations and support groups through PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training, the DCFS Foster Family Handbook, The Baby Fold's foster parent monthly newsletter, and The Baby Fold's foster care Facebook page.

Family Development Specialists discuss the foster parents' ongoing training needs during the licensing monitoring visits and inform them of workshops and conferences available to them.

The Baby Fold offers a monthly newsletter for foster parents. It notes opportunities for family focused activities and community support groups.

The Baby Fold holds an annual Foster Parent Appreciation event. This offers foster parents the opportunity to meet staff and other foster parents in order to encourage networking and support. Additionally, The Baby Fold offers a quarterly in-person training that allows foster parents to connect.

Agency foster parents utilize one another to provide respite.



## **7. The responsibility to assess the foster parent's ongoing individual training needs and take action to meet those needs.**

Foster parents receive information regarding ongoing training requirements through receipt of the licensing standards and The Baby Fold's foster parent manual. Family Development staff and foster parents together assess training needs and complete and sign the Licensing Monitoring Record form, which addresses those training needs.

Through regular monitoring visits and case planning activities, foster parents and the agency identify training needs, as they pertain to the care of the children currently placed in the home, and in preparation for accepting future placements. The Caregiver Matching Tool is used to identify areas in which the foster parent may need assistance through additional training. The Baby Fold informs foster parents through personal contacts, the monthly newsletter, and The Baby Fold Foster Care Facebook page of ongoing module training, agency training, and outside training that can meet those training needs. If necessary, the Family Development Specialist will seek a training resource to fulfill a particular need. As stated in The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Manual, The Baby Fold will reimburse foster parents for travel expenses to attend agency-approved training.

Foster parents are informed of information resources, such as articles, books, webinars, websites, and community support groups. They are encouraged to use the DCFS Learning Development Center.

Through the foster parent newsletter, the foster parent implementation plan meetings, and foster parent annual survey, foster parents are invited to suggest training topics that can be addressed through the foster/adoptive parent training sessions. Foster parents can access training through the Trust Based Relational Interventions (TBRI) Healing Families DVD series. The Healing Families series includes: TBRI Overview, Attachment: Why It Matters, Children From Hard Places and the Brain, Playful Interaction, Healthy Touch, A Sensory World, and Trust Based Parenting.

Child Welfare Specialists and Family Development Specialists participate in monthly clinical consultation meetings with The Baby Fold's clinical team. These meetings provide opportunities for collaboration and for identifying specialized training needs that may benefit foster parents. In addition, Child Welfare Specialists may request a clinical consultation with DCFS to obtain further guidance when needed.

## **8. The responsibility to develop and assist in implementing strategies to prevent placement disruptions, recognizing the traumatic impact of placement disruptions on a foster child and all members of the foster family; and the responsibility to provide emotional support for the foster**



**children and members of the foster family should preventive strategies fail and placement disruptions occur.**

Child Welfare Specialists utilize the Caregiver Matching Tool, the social history information, and placement information to identify the early signs of children who may be at risk of disrupting from or creating disruption within the foster home. These pieces of information help to identify areas for developing strategies to prevent placement disruptions. A plan is then developed for prevention of disruption. The plan may include additional support services and further training for the foster parent.

When a Clinical Screener or Child Welfare Specialist completes the initial or ongoing Integrated Assessment, the foster parent is involved in the assessment process. Through this process, risk factors are noted and the child's needs and corresponding services are identified. Recommendations may include specific training for the foster parent, increased Child Welfare Specialist contacts, and additional Child and Family Team meetings.

Through PRIDE, the DCFS Foster Family Handbook, and The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Manual, foster parents learn of available support and stabilization services that can be accessed in order to maintain placements.

The Baby Fold and foster families work together to access Intensive Placement Stabilization services, SASS services, respite, counseling, and other services needed to prevent a disrupted placement. Child Welfare Specialists will maintain the required in-person contacts to assess problems, work with the foster parents on problem solving, and assist in seeking appropriate supportive resources. Linking foster parents with another foster parents may be used as a source of additional support.

When respite care is utilized as an intervention strategy to prevent a placement disruption, the Child Welfare Specialist, supervisor, and the foster parents will discuss the issue and develop a plan to address the issues that are resulting in struggles for the child and foster family.

Family Development Specialists and Child Welfare Specialists encourage foster families to utilize needed services to ensure that foster children and members of the foster family receive emotional support when placement disruptions occur. Upon receipt of a written notice from a foster parent for the removal of a foster child, a plan will be made for supporting the foster child and the foster family through the transition.

Foster parents may request counseling, training, or support services for themselves and their family members should placement problems or a placement disruption occur. Foster parents are encouraged to seek assistance and support, as needed, from other social



service agencies, their church/pastor, or local support groups. When possible and appropriate, foster parents may maintain contact with a foster child following the disruption of the placement.

The Baby Fold staff are available 24 hours a day to assist foster parents when problematic behaviors arise. The on-call worker can provide assistance themselves or can contact the Child Welfare Specialist, supervisor, or therapist involved in the child's case. A response form is completed by the on-call worker, informing the assigned Child Welfare Specialist and supervisor of the reason for the call, any response given, and anything requiring further follow-up by the worker is noted. This form is provided to the assigned Child Welfare Specialist the following business day.

When critical incidents and/or unusual incidents occur, the required forms are completed that include a plan for resolution of the problem.

Foster parents have the availability to consult with The Baby Fold's therapist and/or Clinical Director regarding the child's problematic behavior in order to reduce potential placement disruption. Information is collected from the child welfare team and the foster parents, and clinical tools are used to assess the child's functioning. Behavior plans are developed for use in the foster home.

Foster parents are encouraged to avail themselves of support services in order to prevent placement disruption, including the use of respite services.

**9. The responsibility to know the impact foster parenting has on individuals and family relationships; and the responsibility to endeavor to minimize, as much as possible, any stress that results from foster parenting.**

The Baby Fold offers many forums for foster parents to address the stress they experience as foster parents. Training sessions assist foster parents in identifying and minimizing stress. Agency staff are available by phone at all times to assist foster parents in recognizing stress and formulating strategies for preventing, reducing, or eliminating stress. Stress management and self-care training is available and can be accessed.

Foster parents are asked to support recruitment events, through their attendance and by providing testimonials for social media campaigns. This allows them to share their personal experiences with others who are considering becoming foster parents. Retention activities are advertised in The Baby Fold monthly newsletter and The Baby Fold's Foster Care Facebook page and are provided as a means of support and appreciation. These activities provide opportunities for foster parents to socialize and engage with one another.



# The Baby Fold

The monthly newsletter gives tips and suggestions to foster parents for reducing stress related to foster parenting. It also provides information regarding available support groups. At the time of the initial placement of a child, foster parents are given information for Side by Side Ministries, a local organization that offers various types of support to foster parents. Foster parents can consult with The Baby Fold's therapists and/or Clinical Director for support. Family Development Specialists can refer foster parents to the Learning Development Center for training that addresses the impact of foster parenting. Family Development specialists also reinforce the services available to foster parents that address effective stress management.

Family Finding Specialists are assigned to each youth at the time of case opening. They are responsible for developing an initial resource and support list for the child. Throughout the duration of the case, the Family Finding Specialist continues to gather and update information regarding available resources and supports. This process includes making phone calls to foster parents every six months to identify additional members of the child's support network. Resources and supports may be discussed during Child and Family Team Meetings.

Through the Foster Parent Manual and discussions with assigned agency staff, foster parents are made aware of the procedure for utilizing respite care. Foster parents are encouraged to use respite care and approved child care arrangements as preventative measures to avoid placement disruptions.

Respite requests for the purpose of preventing a placement disruption are made to the Child Welfare Specialist. Respite care may also be provided for emergency situations including employment related travel, illness in the immediate family, or a death in the family.

Foster parents may request a "voluntary hold" on placement referrals during times that they are experiencing undue stress. At any time, a foster parent may request having their home removed from The Baby Fold's placement opening list so that they will not be called for placements.

Additionally, Family Development Specialists inform foster parents of the non-active status process at the time of licensure and at each renewal and ensure that foster parents are aware of this option.

Through participation in the implementation plan meetings and responding to program surveys, foster parents have the opportunity to make suggestions regarding ways the program can be improved for their benefit.





**10. The responsibility to know the rewards and benefits to children, parents, families and society that come from foster parenting and promote the foster parenting experience in a positive way.**

Foster parents receive encouragement through their contacts with agency staff and other foster parents, and through the receipt of the foster parent monthly newsletter. Training sessions bring foster parents together to encourage and support one another. Information regarding *BE Strong Families* trainings is provided, which is a combination of trainings that offer various topics, such as protective factors, concrete supports, and resilience.

The Baby Fold's foster parent monthly newsletter features a foster parent spotlight each month. A foster parent is selected from staff nominations to be recognized for their significant accomplishments in foster parenting.

The Baby Fold uses email publications, print, broadcast media, and social media posts to highlight the positive impact of foster parenting. The annual Baby Fold Festival of Trees enhances community awareness of all agency programs including the agency's foster care program. Additionally, representatives from The Baby Fold attend community events throughout the year, such as Juneteenth and PRIDEfest celebrations.

Churches are used as a means of contact in order to promote foster parenting and give recognition to those who are foster parents. Church bulletins, church newsletters, and church programs are used for this purpose.

The Baby Fold collaborates with current foster parents to host community events and Q&A sessions that build awareness and support foster parent recruitment in a variety of ways. In addition, Family Development Specialists offer monthly virtual Q&A sessions called "*ABCs of Foster Parenting*." To better accommodate different schedules, these sessions are held twice a day—once in the afternoon and once in the evening. Foster parents are encouraged to participate in these sessions to share their perspectives and experiences with fostering.

Family Development Specialists inform foster parents of additional resources that would broaden their skills, provide support, and promote fellowship with other foster parents. These include support groups hosted by The Baby Fold: Trust Based Relational Intervention and Support Group, Dads Sharpen Dads, and Parent Support Group. Additional support groups offered by community partners include Side By Side Ministries and Grandparent Caregiver Support Group.

Family Development Specialists identify foster parents whose skills and experiences make them strong partners in recruitment efforts. These foster parents are invited to take part in



outreach activities, as The Baby Fold values and recognizes that foster parents are the most effective recruiters and advocates for the role.

The Baby Fold's annual Foster Parent Appreciation Event acknowledges the efforts and accomplishments of The Baby Fold's foster parents. The purpose of this event is to acknowledge foster parents' service, show appreciation, and to build and support connections between staff and families.

## **11. The responsibility to know the roles, rights and responsibilities of foster parents, other professionals in the child welfare system, the child and the child's own family.**

Foster parents learn about the roles, rights and responsibilities of foster parents and others on the child welfare team through PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training, which uses a co-training approach; the DCFS Foster Family Handbook; The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Manual; The Baby Fold's monthly newsletter; and The Baby Fold's Implementation Plan. Foster parents can access training through the Trust Based Relational Interventions (TBRI) Healthy Families DVD series. The Healing Families DVD series includes: TBRI Overview, Attachment: Why It Matters, Children From Hard Places and the Brain, Playful Interaction, Healthy Touch, A Sensory World, and Trust Based Parenting.

Foster parents are encouraged to attend The Baby Fold's quarterly Implementation Plan meetings. Foster parents and staff are both invited to attend in order to foster communication about each another's role and responsibilities. Foster parents are encouraged to ask questions and express concerns in order to clarify the roles of other members of the professional team. The meetings also provide an opportunity for foster parents to express concerns and/or issues that need to be addressed in order to improve service provision and/or communication between agency personnel and foster parents. The Department Director and/or Assistant Director also attend the meetings, providing an opportunity for foster parents to express concerns directly to leadership staff.

When foster parents are given The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Manual and Implementation Plan by a Child Welfare Specialist or Family Development Specialist, they receive an overview of its contents and sign a receipt of acknowledgement, which is placed in the case file and their licensing file. The documents include information regarding foster parents' rights and responsibilities. Information regarding the roles of the various members of the child welfare team is provided. A copy of the Client Rights form is included.

Each month, The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Newsletter will feature one foster parent right and one responsibility. The Foster Parent Newsletter is also utilized to inform foster parents of supportive community services and programs.



The responsibilities of foster parents are listed on the foster home placement agreement. This placement agreement is reviewed with the foster parent by the Child Welfare Specialist and is signed by the foster parent each time a child is placed. The Baby Fold has created a foster parent manual for each foster parent to use as a resource guide. The responsibilities of the foster parent are included in this manual which is given to them and reviewed during orientation for new foster parents. The responsibilities of agency staff members are also described in the agency's foster parent manual. Discussion of the foster parent's responsibilities will be ongoing through the monthly newsletter and meetings with foster parents, and foster care staff. Child Welfare Specialists assist foster parents in understanding roles and responsibilities of different team members through discussions that occur during regular casework contacts in their home. Family Development Specialists offer support and guidance to foster parents during monitoring visits and clarify any questions pertaining to team members' roles and responsibilities.

Foster parents are encouraged to attend and participate in court hearings, Administrative Case Reviews, school staffings, Child and Family Teams, and treatment team staffings. Foster parents are integral participants in Child and Family Teams.

Feedback received from the annual satisfaction survey, quarterly Implementation Plan meeting and Implementation Plan quarterly survey are provided to the Director of Intervention Services, in order to address concerns expressed by foster parents.

**12. The responsibility to know and, as necessary, fulfill the foster parent's responsibility to serve as a mandated reporter of suspected child abuse or neglect under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act; and the responsibility to know the child welfare agency's policy regarding allegations that foster parents have committed child abuse or neglect and applicable administrative rules and procedures governing investigations of such allegations.**

Foster parents receive training on their responsibilities as mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect through PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training, the DCFS Foster Family Handbook and The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Manual. Information provided through The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Manual informs foster parents that licensed and unlicensed foster parents are legally mandated reporters for only those foster children placed in their care. If a foster child reveals incidents of abuse or neglect to the foster parent, the foster parent is required to report the abuse or neglect.

Foster parents are also provided with the DCFS Child Abuse Hotline number (1-800-252-2873) to report suspected abuse. Foster parents are also informed that non-life threatening



and non-emergency reports of abuse or neglect can be reported online at <https://childabuse.illinois.gov/>. This information is included in The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Manual, training materials, and the Foster Family Handbook, both of which are distributed during PRIDE training.

Before becoming licensed, foster parents are required to read and sign the CFS CANTS 22B Acknowledgement of Mandated Reporter Status, confirming their understanding of the responsibilities associated with being a mandated reporter. The Family Development Specialist reviews this form thoroughly with foster parents during the licensing process.

Foster parents receive periodic reminders of their mandated reporter responsibilities through DCFS and The Baby Fold's monthly newsletters. In addition, they are informed that their Family Development Specialist is available to support them if and when they need to make a report.

As the reporter, the foster parent may be contacted by the DCFS Child Protection Investigator to discuss the allegations made by the child, obtain information regarding the child, or to arrange the interview with the child.

Alleged child victims of abuse and/or neglect will be interviewed in person by the DCFS Child Protection Investigator. The interview may take place at school, in the foster home, or at the agency office.

The Baby Fold's monthly Foster Parent Newsletter alerts foster parents regarding their responsibility for reporting unusual incidents, including suspected incidents of abuse or neglect.

The DCFS Foster Family Handbook provides information about the process related to a child abuse or neglect investigation. Family Development Specialists also provide foster parents with a copy of the *What You Need to Know about a Child Abuse or Neglect Investigation* (CFS 1050-54) and the *Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations in Licensed Facilities* (CFS 1050-55). Information in the latter brochure includes the fact that foster parents have the right to have someone of their choosing present during the investigation interview.

Foster homes can be involved in different types of investigations. Licensed foster homes can be involved in a stand-alone licensing investigation initiated by the Family Development Specialist in relation to an allegation of a violation to 402 licensing standards. Any foster home may be involved in a DCFS investigation as a result of a report of abuse or neglect made to the DCFS hotline. For licensed foster homes, this will result in an automatic concurrent licensing investigation by the Family Development Specialist.



If a foster parent faces an allegation of abuse or neglect, details of the investigation may be withheld until the Department's Child Protection worker has reviewed the case. Family Development Specialists and/or Child Welfare Specialists provide support through phone calls and home visits. Alleged violations of licensing standards are investigated by the Family Development Specialist. Family Development Specialists educate foster parents regarding the agency's investigation procedure during licensure.

DCFS and agency staff also provide information about the administrative rules and procedures that apply to such investigations in licensed and unlicensed foster homes, including Rule 300. DCFS administrative rules and procedures are available on the DCFS website at [www.dcf.illinois.gov](http://www.dcf.illinois.gov). The DCFS website is posted in The Baby Fold's foster parent newsletter. A copy of applicable DCFS administrative rules and procedures are also provided to foster parents upon request.

Foster parents can also access free online training on the responsibilities of mandated reporters on the DCFS Learning Development Center. They also receive a copy of the Mandated Reporter Handbook. Foster parents are part of the professional team and are responsible for assuring children are safe and free from abuse and neglect.

**13. The responsibility to know and receive training regarding the purpose of administrative case reviews, client service plans and court processes, as well as any filing or time requirements associated with these proceedings; and the responsibility to actively participate in the foster parent's designated role in these proceedings.**

Foster parents learn about administrative case reviews, client service plans, and court processes through PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training, the DCFS Foster Family Handbook, and The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Manual. Foster parents are encouraged to attend all agency training regarding these topics when offered. As stated in the foster home placement agreement, the child's current foster parents are encouraged to attend and participate in applicable case processes.

Child Welfare Specialists and Family Development Specialists encourage foster parents to participate in administrative case reviews, child and family team meetings, and court hearings to be fully informed of the permanency goal for the child and to be involved in permanency planning for the child.



## **14. The responsibility to know the child welfare agency's appeal procedure for foster parents and the rights of foster parents under the procedure.**

The PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training and the DCFS Foster Family Handbook provide information on the DCFS service appeal process. At the time that Child Welfare Specialists review the child's portion of the service plan with foster parents, they will provide a DCFS Service Appeal brochure. This brochure outlines what appeals can be filed. When appropriate, agency staff will assist the foster parent with writing and submitting the appeal if technical assistance is needed.

The DCFS Advocacy Office is also available to assist foster parents with the appeal process. Information regarding the DCFS Advocacy Office is located in the DCFS Foster Family Handbook and The Baby Fold Foster Parent Manual.

Foster parents receive information on The Baby Fold's grievance procedure in The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Manual at the time of licensure and when complaints arise. Information on The Baby Fold's foster parent grievance process is included in The Baby Fold's foster parent manual. A copy of the agency policy and procedure for foster parent grievances is provided to the foster parent at the time of placement of a child in the foster home. A copy of the grievance process is also provided to foster parents on an annual basis when they receive a copy of the updated implementation plan. The process is also reviewed annually by the foster parents and staff who provide feedback on the implementation plan. Foster parents are informed that this grievance process may be used to address alleged violations of the Foster Parent Law. Inclusion of the Department Director, Chief of Operations, and the Chief Executive Officer in the grievance process ensures that acts of harassment or retaliation are prevented.

The Baby Fold's Vice President of Quality and Information Systems reports the grievances on a quarterly basis to the Leadership Team for risk management analysis, and to the specific program in which the grievance was filed. The Chief Executive Officer ensures that patterns of grievances and/or specific problematic or unresolved issues for which liability may be incurred will be reviewed by the board or appropriate board committee on a quarterly or as needed basis. The review will be conducted in such a way that the confidentiality of the person(s) served will be protected.

## **15. The responsibility to know and understand the importance of maintaining accurate and relevant records regarding the child's history and progress; and the responsibility to be aware of and follow the procedures and regulations of the child welfare agency with which the foster parent is licensed or affiliated.**





Foster parents learn the importance of record keeping through PRIDE and through reviewing the licensing standards with the Family Development Specialist. During the licensing process and through continued monitoring visits, The Baby Fold's Family Development Specialist instructs the foster parents on the records that are required. For unlicensed relatives, the Child Welfare Specialist provides information to the foster parents about the need to keep records pertaining to a child's progress.

The agency provides the foster parent with an expandable, divided folder for each foster child. The folder sections are labeled and contain copies of the required forms for record keeping. Instructions are included in each child's record folder. Agency staff review these records when they are in the foster home to ensure that all necessary records are being kept. The Child Welfare Specialist ensures that the child's folder is transferred when placement changes occur.

**16. The responsibility to share information, through the child welfare team, with the subsequent caregiver (whether the child's parent or another substitute caregiver), regarding the child's adjustment in the foster parent's home.**

Through PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training, foster parents are informed of the importance of working as a member of the team and sharing pertinent information regarding the children in their care.

Agency staff instruct foster parents to keep each child's record folder current. Child Welfare Specialists review the record folder during home visits. Family Development Specialists review licensing standards pertaining to record keeping during biannual, in-home monitoring visits.

Foster parents work with the Child Welfare Specialist to develop a plan for sharing information with the subsequent caregiver. Unless there is a reason it is not in the child's best interest, foster parents may meet with future caregivers to present information and answer questions. Foster parents work with the Child Welfare Specialist to determine the appropriateness of developing a plan for any on-going contact with the subsequent caregiver and the child. Foster parents are encouraged to participate in transitional planning for change of placement.

Foster parents are encouraged to develop life books that the children will take with them. Foster parents, staff, and children collaborate on the development of pages for life books. The Baby Fold's therapist hosts events to help youth in care develop their life books.



The Baby Fold's Foster Parent Manual includes information on the necessity for foster parents to report unusual incidents and high-risk indicators to the child's case worker.

**17. The responsibility to provide care and services that are respective of and responsive to the child's cultural needs and are supportive of the relationship between the child and his or her own family; the responsibility to recognize the increased importance of maintaining a child's cultural identity when the race or culture of the foster family differs from that of the foster child; and the responsibility to take action to address these issues.**

PRIDE Pre-licensure/Pre-placement training addresses the need for children to remain connected with their biological families, their culture, and their cultural identity. Agency staff encourage foster parents to participate in activities and training that will enhance their ability to meet the cultural needs of the foster children in their home. Foster parents are encouraged to use Child and Family Team meetings to engage in conversation with the biological family about their culture and how it can be imparted to their child while in foster care.

Staff help foster parents identify areas of need regarding the children in their care. Appropriate referrals for services or training are made to assist foster parents with specific areas of need. Examples include the availability of staff and other foster parents to assist with the hair care and skin care needs of children whose hair and skin require special care. In addition, utilizing a co-training model, when available, a current foster parent is invited to co-facilitate trainings on various topics, including ethnic hair and skin care, in a group setting to current traditional and relative foster parents.

Foster parents are expected to understand, respect, and respond effectively to the cultural and linguistic needs of children and families from diverse backgrounds. For foster parents, this means creating a home environment that affirms a child's identity, traditions, and sense of belonging.

Foster parents are encouraged to engage in self-reflection, explore potential biases, and recognize how their own culture influences their parenting style. Foster parents are expected to respect the child's culture by learning about the child's cultural, racial, and religious background and supporting the child in maintaining connections to traditions, language, and community. Foster parents can engage in inclusive practices, such as incorporating foods, books, music, and holidays that reflect the child's culture and encouraging the child to share their traditions with the foster family.

Foster parents are asked to maintain open communication with birth parents and children by asking respectful questions, listening to their experiences and engage in conversations



# The Baby Fold

to understand cultural practices. The Baby Fold encourages foster parents to develop community connection for children by building relationships with community organizations, mentors, or faith leaders that reflect the child's background. The participation in cultural events and activities is also encouraged and supported. The Baby Fold provides information in the foster parent newsletter and Facebook page regarding cultural events and festivals that are occurring in the community.

Foster parents are provided with training opportunities focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. They are encouraged to seek feedback from the child, the child's birth family, and involved professionals regarding cultural support. Foster parents are also expected to remain open and flexible in adjusting their parenting approach as they continue to learn and grow in this area. Foster parents are expected to use inclusive, affirming, and respectful language when speaking with and about children, birth families, and others involved in the child's life.



## Appendix

### Frequently Used Acronyms

ACR	<b>Administrative Case Review:</b> An independent review process of the child's case plan and progress towards permanency required by federal and state law.
ASA	<b>Assistant State's Attorney:</b> Attorney and representative of the People of the State of Illinois whose role, in child welfare cases, is to make sure children are safe and that the court process follows the law.
CANS	<b>Child Abuse and Neglect:</b> Reports or cases involving child maltreatment.
CANTS	<b>Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking System:</b> DCFS's database for tracking abuse/neglect cases.
CAPU	<b>Case Assignment Placement Unit:</b> The unit responsible for matching children with appropriate placements.
CARES	<b>Community Access Referral Evaluation Support Line:</b> A crisis hotline providing support and referral services for children and families.
CASA	<b>Court Appointed Special Advocate:</b> A volunteer assigned by the court to represent the best interests of the child in court proceedings.
CERAP	<b>Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol:</b> A standardized child safety assessment tool used by the DCFS to evaluate the immediate risk of moderate to severe harm to a child.
CFS	<b>Children and Family Services:</b> Often used on DCFS official forms.
CFTM	<b>Child and Family Team Meeting:</b> A collaborative meeting designed to build a support system for families involved with the child welfare system, focusing on the child's needs and the family's strengths
CIPP	<b>Clinical Intervention Placement Preservation:</b> Meetings to support placement stability when a child's placement is at risk of disruption.
COA	<b>Council on Accreditation:</b> An accrediting body that ensures agencies meet standards for quality and accountability.
CWS	<b>Child Welfare Specialist:</b> The caseworker responsible for managing a child's case in the foster care system.
DCFS	<b>Department of Child and Family Services:</b> The state agency overseeing child welfare services.
DNet	<b>Data Network:</b> A password-protected DCFS computer system for employees and affiliated professionals.



GAL	<b>Guardian Ad Litem:</b> An attorney appointed by the court to advocate for a child's best interest.
HFK	<b>Home of Fictive Kin:</b> Foster care placement with a person who is unrelated to a child by birth, marriage, tribal custom, or adoption and is shown to have significant and close personal or emotional ties with the child or the child's family.
HMR	<b>Home of Relative (Foster Care):</b> Placement with a relative to maintain family connections.
IA	<b>Integrated Assessment:</b> A comprehensive evaluation of the child's needs and strengths upon entering foster care.
ICPC	<b>Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children:</b> An agreement between U.S. states to ensure that when a child is placed in foster care or for adoption in another state, the placement is safe and suitable, and the receiving state provides a home study and ongoing support.
ICWA	<b>Indian Child Welfare Act:</b> Federal law that protects the best interests of American Indian children by establishing minimum federal standards for state child custody proceedings involving tribal children, aiming to keep children connected to their families, communities, and cultures.
IEP	<b>Individualized Education Plan:</b> A written, legal document that outlines the specialized instruction, related services, supports, and goals for a student with a disability to help them succeed in public school.
IPS	<b>Intensive Placement Stabilization:</b> A short-term, in-home DCFS program that provides services and support to high-risk foster youth and their families to prevent disruptions in their living situations and deter entry into higher levels of care.
ISP	<b>Individualized Service Plan:</b> Written plan outlining the supports, activities, and resources needed for a child in foster care to achieve stability and goals.
LDC	<b>Learning Development Center:</b> Primary online portal for training-related resources and information for foster and adoptive caregivers, child welfare professionals, and the public in Illinois.
OIG	<b>Office of the Inspector General:</b> An independent body created to investigate misconduct and violations of rules and procedures by DCFS employees, foster parents, and service providers.
POS	<b>Purchase of Service:</b> Private agencies contracted by DCFS to provide child welfare services.
PRIDE	<b>Parent's Resource of Information Development and Education:</b> Pre-service training program for prospective foster and adoptive parents, focusing on trauma-informed care, understanding children's needs,



SACWIS	supporting family connections, and the five core competencies of child welfare. <b>Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System:</b> A system used to track case management information for children in foster care.
SASS	<b>Screening, Assessment, and Support Systems:</b> A program providing crisis mental health services for children.
SOC	<b>Systems of Care:</b> A coordinated network of community-based services and supports for children and families with behavioral health needs
SSF	<b>Special Service Fee:</b> Payments provided for services that meet special needs of children in foster care.
TPR	<b>Termination of Parental Rights:</b> A legal process by which a parent's rights to their child are permanently terminated.
<b>Glossary of Terms</b>	
Child Welfare Specialist	Caseworker
Family Development Specialist	Licensing Worker
Permanency Achievement Specialist	Adoption/Guardianship Worker
<b>Permanency Goals</b>	
21	Return Home Within 5 Months
22	Return Home Within 12 Months
23	Return Home Pending Status Hearing
24	Substitute Care Pending Court Decision on Termination
25	Adoption
26	Guardianship
27	Independence (minor over age of 12)
28	Cannot be Provided for in the Home Environment
29	Long Term Foster Care