



# 2024 Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan

*Input to the 2024 Foster Parent Implementation Plan was provided by foster parents and the entire child welfare team at The Center for Youth and Family Solutions.*

*CYFS Foster parents and staff have reviewed and approved this plan.*



THE CENTER FOR  
YOUTH & FAMILY  
SOLUTIONS  
cyfsolutions.org

Achieving Solutions Together



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
<b>FOSTER PARENT RIGHTS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Dignity and Respect.....	4
Training.....	7
Contact & Agency Support.....	10
Timely Financial Reimbursement.....	11
Placement Plan.....	13
Licensing Investigation.....	15
Additional Information about Children.....	17
Information Given About Children.....	18
Notifications for Advocacy.....	20
Necessary Information on Child.....	22
Notification of Child is Moving.....	23
Notification of Court Hearing.....	24
Children Re-entering Care.....	25
Service Appeal System.....	26
Foster Parent Hotline.....	26
<b>FOSTER PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES.....</b>	<b>28</b>
Open Communication.....	28
Confidentiality.....	28
Advocating for Children.....	29
Treating Children & Families with Dignity & Respect.....	30
Foster Parent Strengths & Weaknesses.....	31
Foster Parent Associations & Networking.....	32
Foster Parent Training.....	33
Preventing Placement Disruption.....	34
Stress Management.....	36
Benefits and Promotion of Foster Parenting.....	37
Roles, Rights & Responsibilities of Fostering on Child Welfare Team.....	38
Mandated Reporter Responsibility.....	41
Administrative Case Reviews and Court Hearings.....	40
Appeals Systems.....	41
Accurate & Complete Records.....	41
Maintaining Connections.....	42
Cultural Sensitivity.....	43



The founders of The Center for Youth and Family Solutions (CYFS) believe in the enduring strength, creativity, and perseverance of the human and community spirit—even when faced with insurmountable problems and crises.

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions uses a family system, inclusive, trauma responsive, strength based or FITS approach to engage and serve children and families in need. This model ensures children and families are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect while building upon individual and community strengths to resolve life challenges together.

In keeping with the vision of The Center for Youth and Family Solutions and the Foster Care Program, The Center for Youth and Family Solutions is invested in upholding the Foster Parent Law (Public Act 89.19). Foster parent recruiters provide prospective foster parents with a copy of the plan to help them understand their rights and responsibilities as they consider becoming foster parents. Licensing staff take a copy of the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan and the CYFS Grievance Policy to each foster home during the first monitoring visit of the calendar year. Both documents are reviewed with the foster parent and any questions or concerns are addressed. The foster parent then signs off that they have received a copy of the plan so the agency can document all foster parents receive a copy with explanation each year.

Copies of the Implementation Plan are available for foster parents at all of The Center for Youth and Family Solutions foster care offices as well as online at [www.cyfsolutions.org](http://www.cyfsolutions.org). The Implementation Plan is also periodically posted on the CYFS Facebook Foster Parent Support Group. Comments or suggestions can be made by contacting the Director of Child and Family Well Being – Adoption, Licensing and Recruitment, Mary Kay Collins at 815-223-4007 or [mkcollins@cyfsolutions.org](mailto:mkcollins@cyfsolutions.org).

*In our delivery of comprehensive family services that promote safety, stability, and permanence for children, we are committed to implementing the Foster Parent Law in the following manner:*

# Foster Parents' Rights

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

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions(CYFS) was established on the premise that all individuals deserve to be treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. In 2022, CYFS formally identified four pillars of its mission and practice objectives areas which includes a Family Systems, Inclusive, Trauma Responsive and Strength Based focus. Utilizing a FITS approach and integrating it into everyday foster care practice ensures everyone in the foster care program is treated with dignity and respect.

Respecting the uniqueness of each foster parent and their family requires a very individualized approach to training and developing of the relationship between the foster parent and the agency. From the first contact inquiring about becoming a foster parent throughout the licensing process and beyond, workers are respectful and responsive to the applicant(s) needs. Recruitment and licensing staff believe it is important to take as much time as needed to help the applicant(s) understand foster parenting. While an information packet can be mailed to the applicant's home as a way to help them learn about the foster parenting experience, an initial face to face meeting with the recruitment worker is suggested. This way staff can personally attend to each applicant's questions and help them gather information important to making a good decision for themselves and their families.

For our traditional foster parents, a recruitment worker provides initial information about foster care as well as acts as a guide to the initial foster care experience. The recruitment staff works hand in hand with the licensing team to provide regular ongoing communication with each family throughout the licensure process.

Our relative or kinship foster parents are introduced to the foster experience by our licensing staff. CYFS understands many relative or fictive kin foster parents come into fostering out of necessity. Our licensing team acts as a support and guide to help them learn about their new role.

Whether a relative, fictive kin or traditional foster parent, the relationship between the foster parent and our CYFS 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. This relationship, grounded in FITS is extremely helpful during the foster parenting experience.

Understanding how valuable it is to learn from others who "walked the walk," applicants are invited to participate in foster parent support groups and other opportunities enabling them to learn and network with seasoned foster parents as well as the CYFS foster care team. Once licensed, foster parents are encouraged to continue to develop these relationships by regularly attending events and activities geared toward the ongoing needs of foster parents.



When licensed the CYFS foster parent receives a password to allow them access to our Foster Parent Resource page on the agency website. Along with our agency Connections newsletter, the resource page keeps foster parents informed of trainings, agency events, tips on parenting and licensing information. In 2023, the CYFS Foster Caregivers Advisory Board (FCAB) created virtual Foster Parent Round Tables to help promote dialog between any CYFS foster parent. Foster Parent Roundtable is a support group designed and led by the CYFS Foster Caregiver Advisory Board. As licensed foster caregivers themselves, the FCAB knows it takes a village to help care for our youth while navigating foster care. The Round Tables allows foster caregivers a chance to come together in a community of support and work together towards strength-based problem solving while sharing tips, tricks and the ups and downs of being a foster caregiver. Round tables are held at two different times during the day and on a monthly basis to increase availability to any foster parent. While the FCAB members do provide topics for discussion, the majority of the discussions are free flowing and open to whatever the foster parents want to discuss.

Annually, CYFS publishes the *Foster Parent Appreciation Month Special Edition* newsletter. This newsletter is dedicated to foster parents. Foster parents who have been fostering for many years, foster parents who have gone above and beyond, and foster parents who participate on our FCAB are all acknowledged. This special edition is a way for CYFS to honor all of the good work our foster parents throughout the year.

Another way foster parents can network with others is the Foster Parent Support Groups on Facebook. These groups are set up by location and provide all CYFS licensed foster parents a chance to touch base with each other, share ideas and learn about upcoming events in their area. There are also opportunities through this to attend mini trainings on issues that are important to fostering.

Staff value the commitment and dedication of our foster parents. Staff use the month of May, Foster Parent Appreciation Month, to focus on celebrating our CYFS foster parents. Using a virtual platform to honor our foster parents has proven very successful. For example, all of our foster parents' names were entered into the *Winning on Wednesday* drawing. Each Wednesday in the month of May, staff dressed up and creatively draw names of foster parents out of a bucket to win prizes. In 2023, more than 130 foster families won family centered prizes.

A very special way we celebrate and honor our foster parents came to us in 2022 when two of our staff used their talents to write and create *WeCare*, a song dedicated to all of our CYFS foster parents and the difference they make to our most vulnerable children. It is something we continue to use to remind foster parents of the impact they have as members of our CYFS community.

In day-to-day practice, there are many ways our staff show their respect for our foster parents. Here are just a few:

- Providing foster parents with information on the child prior to placement. When the foster family is being considered for placement, the family is given as much information as possible about the child, so the foster parent is prepared and has the information to make informed decisions about bringing the child into their home. When a decision is reached

to accept a child, the foster parent receives a placement packet providing them with information on the child including the names of other members of the CYFS foster care team that will be assisting the child.

- Keeping foster parent schedules in mind when planning important meetings such as home visits and Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM). Respecting foster parents time and what it takes to juggle their parenting responsibilities with meetings is important to making sure the foster parent can be present when critical discussions happen.
- Listening to foster parent and giving them a forum to share their concerns, thoughts, and feelings about the children in their home. This can happen at a CFTM, home visit, or any time the staff and the foster parent come together around the needs of the children in their home.
- Staff are trained to be respectful to foster parents when dealing with them on issues that need resolution. Having meaningful discussions and working toward resolution when we disagree, enforces our belief that foster parents are truly part of the team. Even if we “agree to disagree,” the simple fact we come together to consider the best option for the child shows the professional teaming.
- Foster family workers are trained to return phone calls or emails within 24 hours. Foster family workers, family support worker and licensing workers can be reached by phone and/or email. To help eliminate any barriers to communication because staff are not in the office, CYFS provides casework and licensing staff with phones. If a worker does not return a call in 24 hours, the foster parent can call the worker’s supervisor. Again, keeping open communication between the CYFS foster care staff and the foster parents illustrates the importance of this professional partnership.
- Our Continuous Quality Improvement staff ensure foster parents have an opportunity to give feedback on their fostering experience through satisfaction surveys. Written or online surveys are completed after the initial license is in place and annually. Surveys are also provided when the license is closed. Each survey style specifically asks foster parents if they feel they are treated respectfully and with dignity by the agency staff. Each survey allows the foster parent to comment on the quality of the service, their satisfaction with the services and ways to improve the foster care. Results of the most recent foster parent survey indicated that 92% of foster parents agreed or strongly agreed that they had been treated with dignity and respect by the CYFS foster care team. 92% of foster parents either strongly agreed or agreed that they were satisfied with the services they received from CYFS staff. This feedback is valuable and helps us continue the quality of care provided to both the youth in care and the foster parents.

On a broader level, foster parents are encouraged to participate in their Foster Parents Advisory Board (FCAB). Each of the CYFS offices have foster parent representation on the board. The board provide a way for foster parents to work side by side with the agency’s foster care leadership team to impact foster care practice both in their community and in the CYFS catchment area. The board is open to any foster parent and gives the foster parents a chance to “be heard” on issues that are at the heart of their caregiving experience. Using a virtual technology, the FCAB meets monthly. Meetings allow foster parents to address ways to improve foster care services, assist in the development and delivery of the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan and promote foster care awareness in their community.

As an agency, we honor and respect our foster parents by making sure our foster care workers receive ongoing training important to their role in foster care case management. Our foster parents deserve to have well trained and knowledgeable staff assisting them as they provide services for our children. In addition to participating in trainings provided by DCFS, the Foster Care staff participate in ongoing training within CYFS.

All of the agency's employees are trained on the important role our foster parents play in providing for the children we serve. All new employees complete an online learning self- study on the Foster Parent Implementation Plan which includes information on the role of Foster Parents, their rights, and responsibilities and how to work collaboratively with foster parents as part of the child welfare team.

All staff receive training on the importance of confidentiality. The expectation that all information pertaining to foster parents is to be handled in a confidential manner is another way to be respectful of the foster parent.

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

CYFS understands the importance of training for all members of the foster care team. CYFS believes training is not a onetime event, but rather an ongoing process incorporating shared knowledge and hands on experience. Initial and ongoing training for all foster parents strengthens their skills and increases the likelihood of a more positive outcome for foster children placed in their care.

CYFS understands the importance of the foster parent being involved in identifying training needs. Through interaction with the foster parents during home visits, at monitoring visits, in support groups, at Round Tables and at FCAB meetings, staff and foster parents can identify training needs.

Prospective traditional and specialized foster parents receive their orientation to fostering from the recruitment specialist. In this way the prospective foster parent truly received an orientation that can address their personal questions and concerns. Our relative foster parents receive their orientation to fostering from their licensing worker. They also must participate in the DCFS VTC online Foster Relative Orientation. Together these two modes of training help the caregiver gain a better understanding of foster care.

Part of any new foster parent's orientation is helping them develop a connection with other foster parents. This can be done through online support groups, Round Tables, Facebook groups and CYFS foster parent trainings.

All new foster families applying for licensure are given the standardized Adult- Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2). This mutual assessment tool provides both the foster care staff and the foster parent with information on parenting strengths and growth areas. The AAPI Parenting Profile tool is beneficial in identifying additional areas for training, which can be useful to the foster parent. The assessment is also a valuable tool to use when considering the foster parent's strengths and specific needs of the child during pre-placement.

DCFS and CYFS requires traditional foster parents who apply for licensure to complete the 39-hour Foster/ Adopt PRIDE curriculum if they wish to care for unrelated children. Foster parents may complete PRIDE through the Department of Children and Family Services or in networks with other agencies. Relative or kinship foster parents are required to complete 6 hours of standardized training through DCFS. CYFS also has a 3-hour Relative Foster Parent Training that is offered as needed to strengthen the relative or kinship foster parenting experience.

The number of ongoing training hours required of Traditional/Relative foster parents is 4 hours per year. Sixteen additional hours are required each year for foster parents in the Specialized/ Medically complex programs. CYFS has certified trainers who provide Parent Skills Training, based on the original ABC (Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence) training, which addresses behavior management. Specialized homes are required to successfully complete this 9-week program and it is suggested for traditional or relative foster parents. These classes are taught by our foster parent trainers as well as CYFS therapists. The classes help foster parents understand how to promote healthy, loving relationships between themselves and the children in their care.

Any foster home willing to provide care for a child under the age of 3 receives training on specific needs of that age group. The Birth to Three training includes such topics as safe sleeping, SIDS, water safety, and general infant and toddler care is presented. CYFS provides the Incredible Years parent training program to help families understand the experience of caring for infants and toddlers.

All CYFS foster parents receive a copy of the DCFS Reasonable and Prudent Normalcy Policy. Licensing staff present the policy and provide education on the policy and specifics of what a foster parent may and may not approve in their role as a foster parent.

Another training all foster parents receive is the Crisis Prevention Behavior Management training. This CYFS policy addresses the expectation that physical restraint with foster children, by a foster parent is NOT allowed. This policy discusses non-violent crisis intervention as well as details the levels of crisis development. At initial licensure foster parents sign documentation acknowledging the agency's expectation that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Behavioral Management Policy. All foster parents are expected to re-sign this document at the time of license renewal. Workers are available to answer any questions regarding this document. Foster parents are encouraged to call their caseworker, licensing worker, or set up a Child and Family Team meeting if they have questions regarding this policy. This CYFS Behavior Management policy follows the Licensing Standards for Foster Family Homes Rule 402.

At least one licensed foster parent from each home must complete the 6-hour Education Advocacy Training within 12 months of a child being placed in their home or prior to renewing their license. Any foster home with an expanded capacity, that is caring for several children at one time, will need to provide 9 additional in-service hours each year after the expanded capacity has been approved.

Beyond the initial trainings, CYFS staff continues to provide additional training and resources for foster families. CYFS assist parents in receiving training specific to the needs of the children placed in their home. For example, if the child placed has medical needs, the CYFS nurse and the family worker will provide one on one training to the foster parent.



Ongoing training opportunities are available throughout the year in classes or workshops facilitated by CYFS, as part of the CYFS support group, in conjunction with other community agencies, and DCFS. Many of these trainings are offered virtually. The CYFS Foster Care Recruiter/Educator is available to provide in home and individual training and coaching to parents. A calendar of upcoming trainings is available to parents via the CYFS website or from the family's licensing worker. The CYFS Connections Newsletters provide foster parents with up-to-date information regarding available training in the community.

CYFS has a partnership with the online Foster Parent College to provide yet another option for training to our CYFS foster parents. FosterParentCollege.com provides evidence-based training for parents, at their convenience, in the comfort of their own home. Courses provide audio, visual and interactive elements to engage foster parents and ensure real learning happens. Instructors for the course are respected professionals in the fields of social work, psychiatry, psychology, pediatrics, and child development. During this last year, CYFS had 247 foster parents and foster care staff enrolled in these courses. 97.9% of those participants found the courses to be helpful, increase knowledge about caring for children and worth the time to take the course. CYFS provides these course free of charge to our foster parents. Our licensing staff can assist all new foster parents with registering on the FPC website.

As a trauma responsive agency, CYFS believes ALL foster parents need to have an understanding of childhood trauma. Gaining insight into the child's trauma experience helps the foster parent better understand the child's view of the world, behavior and promotes healing. Trauma trainings are available to foster parents through DCFS both in person and online, through CYFS workshops and the Foster Parent College.

CYFS solicits input and feedback on training from foster parents in a variety of ways and uses this information to assist with identifying and providing training opportunities. The six-month licensing monitoring visits provide a time for the foster parent and the licensing staff to mutually assess trainings specific to the foster parent's needs. At the monitoring visits, licensing workers review the trainings foster parents have attended and discuss additional trainings that would be helpful to them in caring for the children currently placed in their home. Prior to this visit the licensing worker contacts any family worker connected to the home to gather information on their experience with the foster parents and the children currently placed. A Family Worker Questionnaire is utilized to assist with identifying training areas and strengths of the home. This tool gives the family workers the opportunity to suggest trainings they feel would be appropriate for this foster parent. Through this communication between the foster family worker, the licensing worker and the foster parent, trainings are identified and discussed so the needs of the family and their foster children are met.

Foster parent surveys provide feedback from foster parents on the value and satisfaction with the training offered. In 2023, 95% of foster parents surveyed agreed or strongly agreed the training they received assisted them in caring for the foster children who come into their home. 95% of foster parents surveyed also agreed or strongly agreed specifically that the trauma training they received was also helpful to understanding the experience of children in care.

Utilizing their local FCAB, foster parents in each site have an opportunity to express their needs for

specific trainings. The FCAB shares identified needs with staff and together the local team assists in providing or finding the available trainings. CYFS is accredited through the Council on Accreditation, so trainings provided by the agency are pre-approved for training credit. A record of training credits for each foster parent is kept in each foster parent electronic file as well as in the DCFS Virtual Training Center.

### **3. Foster Parents have 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.**

In pre-service training, foster parents receive training on the importance and appropriate use of the Office of the Inspector General, Advocacy Office, Hotline, Intensive Placement Services (IPS) and Screening, Assessment and Support Services (SASS). Foster parents receive a list of statewide numbers for the Inspector General, Advocacy Office, Hotline, IPS, SASS, and other community resources such as hospitals, schools, counseling agencies and public health providers.

The partnership between the foster parent and the foster care staff becomes even more significant when a child is placed in the foster home. The foster family worker is seen as being the first line of contact in assisting the family as they meet the specific needs of the child brought into their home, but it does not stop there. In addition to the foster family worker, the foster parent has others on the foster care team to help. The foster care supervisor, licensing worker, parent educator, nurse, counselors, family support workers, recruitment and retention specialist, foster parent mentor and the Foster Care Advisory Board members, all can help the foster parent.

When a child moves into a home, the foster parents are provided a placement packet. This packet contains information specific to the child as well as updated information on local community resources that could be helpful. For example, if the child being placed has a history of running away, the foster parent is given very specific instructions about what to do and who to call. Additional information in the placement packet includes but is not limited to:

- Emergency list of agency telephone numbers including information on how to contact the family worker, and/or supervisor in crisis or emergency.
  
- Office phone numbers and information on how to reach staff both during the day and after hours
- Emergency Medical Consent Phone number
- Community emergency phone numbers
  
- Information on the child such as temperament, personality characteristics, behaviors, specific concerns of the child and so on
  
- Information on local community resources that may be helpful

In the CYFS Connection newsletter there is a section entitled ‘Important Numbers to Remember’ which includes the phone numbers for Adoption Preservation, Child Care Connection, Crisis Intervention, DCFS Advocacy Office, DCFS Hotline for Abuse/Neglect, Inspector General’s Office and Missing Kids Unit Hotline. On the Foster Parent Resource Page, located on the CYFS website, Important Numbers to Remember is also available.

The CYFS website also provides valuable information to the foster parent. The Foster Parent Resource page is a password protected page designed to give current foster parents information specific to CYFS foster care as well as information on community and online supportive services, parenting tips and more.

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

It is important to note traditional, relative, and fictive kin foster parents are not paid for their services but rather reimbursed monthly for board (food, shelter, utilities etc.), clothing and allowances. Therefore, reimbursements are not considered income and should not be recorded as such for state or federal income tax purposes.

Regardless of the type of reimbursement, CYFS understands the importance of timely assessment and reimbursement to foster parents. Foster care supervisors work together with family workers , our accounting and business departments to make sure requests are handled quickly. Requests are reviewed at weekly supervision to make sure they are appropriate and reimbursed within the time-frames pertinent to the request.

During the licensing process, foster parents are provided information regarding the financial reimbursement for providing foster care services. When a child moves into their home, foster parent receive monthly reimbursement for care provided the preceding month. Rates are based on the specific level of care needed for the child and according to the child's assigned DCFS program contract. For example, a child with special medical needs could be approved by DCFS for a higher rate of reimbursement than a child with traditional foster care needs. CYFS foster parents can access the current reimbursement rate schedule on the CYFS Foster Parent Resource page that is specifically set up on the CYFS website for foster parents. Foster parents may also ask their licensing worker for a rate schedule. Checks are mailed on the 25th of each month (or earlier if the 25th falls on a weekend or holiday).

The CYFS Placement Agreement (CYFS 310) is signed by the foster parent when a child is placed in the home. Based on the specific needs of the child, this document clearly defines the amount of reimbursement a foster parent will receive. It also specifies the amount designated amount for clothing and allowance for the child each month. The family worker or the foster parent may request additional clothing funds under special circumstances. If this is the child's first experience in foster care, there is an initial clothing voucher which is be used to help the foster parent provide the child with needed clothing. If the child is coming from a previous foster home, the foster parent and family worker will review the child's clothing needs. Any clothes previously purchased for the child should come with the child. There are times when the foster parent can request an additional clothing voucher such as when the child has gained or lost a significant amount of weight, or when previous clothing was destroyed. This type of voucher is handled on a case-by-case basis.

Placement/Payment Authorization forms are completed within 24 hours of the child's placement. When a relative parent becomes licensed, their rate of reimbursement changes from unlicensed to licensed. CFYS receives confirmation from DCFS that the license has changed to an active relative license.

Foster parents may be eligible for paid daycare services if the foster parent is employed, and these services are needed. DCFS has a maximum daycare rate. Many daycare facilities will accept the DCFS rate and foster parents can work with the child's family worker to identify daycare options that meet the needs of the child and the foster parent. If the foster parent chooses a daycare provider with a rate that exceeds the DCFS rate, the foster parent will be responsible to pay the difference.

Specialized and Traditional foster parents are also informed that reimbursement may be provided for the foster parents travel when the foster parent assists with sibling visitation. These visits are very important to a child and foster parents can work with the child's family worker to identify this reimbursement option.

When foster children cause damage to a home or the contents within, licensing workers will assist foster parents in accessing the DCFS reimbursement program. The Foster Child Damage Reimbursement program acts as a secondary coverage (over and above any other valid and collectable insurance held by the foster parent) for damages or bodily injury caused by the child while the child is in the care of the foster parent. DCFS provides this coverage at no cost to the foster parents. As the claim process has specific guidelines and requirements, the foster parent is encouraged to discuss this with the child's family worker or their licensing worker. Either can assist the foster parent with the claim process.

Reimbursements for respite, high school graduation and other onetime agency-approved items may also be available to the foster parent. The licensing worker or, in some offices, the assigned the family worker or respite worker is available to assist the foster parent about reimbursements specific to the child or children in care.

CYFS staff work to provide timely reimbursement for special services. Through communication between the foster parent and the CYFS staff, the potential for reimbursement for special services can be identified and discussed. Each case is very specific to the circumstances, so it is important for the family worker to have all of the information on the service to provide the foster parent with timely reimbursement.

Foster family workers receive training through DCFS and CYFS on how to access special service fees including sibling visitation reimbursement, reimbursement for reunification activities and reimbursement for non-reoccurring events such as graduation supplies for foster parents. If it is a special reimbursement for a service, CYFS reimburses the foster parent when payment is made from DCFS or at the time of the monthly reimbursement check. Generally, if the reimbursement is for something the foster parent has paid for, the reimbursement will be received within 14 days of receiving the receipt.

Licensed foster parents are encouraged to contact their foster family worker or licensing worker if there is a delay, problem, or question regarding their reimbursement. The worker will respond within 24 hours and provide assistance in resolving the matter. The worker will discuss the issue with his/her supervisor and the foster care accountant to determine how best to correct or explain the circumstances. The worker will contact the foster parent within 10 business days of being informed of the matter with an explanation, clarification, or resolution. If the foster parent is not in agreement with the outcome, the worker will inform the foster parent that they may follow the



grievance process as outlined in the Grievance Procedures brochure.

CYFS believes our foster parents come into foster care motivated by their wish to provide a stable home for children who are in need. While we believe it is important for children to feel part of the foster family and to be treated like any other child in the home, we acknowledge circumstances surrounding reimbursements can sometimes get in the way. Our licensing and foster care staff assist foster parents in developing ways to address specific situations so no child will feel any different because their foster parent receives a reimbursement for their care.

CYFS continues to work in conjunction with foster parents and legislators in advocating for fair and timely compensation specific to the type of care provided.

**5. Foster Parents have 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 own family and cultural heritage.**

DCFS often identifies a relative placement for a child when the child is first removed from their home. Sometimes CYFS staff will locate an appropriate relative placement as they gather more information on the family. When a relative home is not available or not appropriate, the foster care staff may consider a fictive kin, a traditional or specialized foster home. CYFS also seeks to place sibling groups together whenever possible. The best interest of the child guides all placement decisions.

CYFS now uses Family Finding Resource Specialists to actively assist the child welfare team with facilitating the expansion of family or kinship resources needed to better serve children and their families involved in foster care. Family Findings is the practice of rigorously searching for extended family members and other supportive adults to establish a wide supportive network for the youth. Family Findings is an intensive search method that uses traditional and non-traditional methods of finding extended family members, fictive kin, and other supportive adults that can step in and provide positive resources, respite care, meaningful connections, and permanency.

CYFS follows the regulations of MEPA/IEPA (Multiethnic Placement Act/Interethnic Placement Act) in making placement decisions. To provide connections to the child’s culture, race, ethnicity and to minimize trauma on the child, careful thought goes into placement. CYFS considers the needs of the child when considering placement. CYFS attempts to:

- keep children in or as near as possible to their community of origin
- place in a home where cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious needs can be met
- educate foster parents about the child’s culture, ethnic, racial, and religious background so the family will be able to accommodate the child’s needs

The Licensing and Foster Care staff informs parents of the above considerations when contemplating the home for a potential placement. Through pre-placement conversations, in person contacts, by phone, in writing and in the placement packet, foster parents are provided as much information as possible regarding the child’s background and permanency goal. Foster parents along with the foster family worker review the CYFS 310 Placement Agreement. This agreement documents the roles of the agency and the role of the foster parent in caring for the child.

Foster parents understand their role as part of a professional child welfare team is to support reunification of the child with their biological families whenever it is appropriate and possible. This starts with the foster parents respecting the biological parents and family members. Foster parents are expected to speak kindly and respectfully about biological parents or family members in the presence of the child. CYFS coaches foster parents to take an active role in such reunification efforts by participating in parent/child visitation, by supervising visits and by mentoring the biological families to model appropriate parenting interactions. When biological and foster parents are able to have open communication about the daily care of the child, everybody benefits – especially the child.

Foster parents are provided opportunities to learn more about the child’s cultural heritage so they can help the child maintain connections to their culture of origin. The CYFS parent educator, foster parent mentors, licensing, recruiting, foster care and adoption staff are available to help parents with one on one or group coaching to support the foster parent in their efforts to incorporate their foster child’s culture into the culture of the foster home. Foster parents are provided information on the visitation plan for the child. CYFS workers provide the foster parent with information to understand and assist in development and implementation of the visit plan. The staff encourages the foster parent’s participation in visits as this can provide stability to the child. The foster parent is engaged in ongoing discussions about how visits should be managed to meet the child’s needs. Coaching the foster parent at this point also helps the foster parent consider how they can participate in or even facilitate the child’s visits.

Foster parents are encouraged to participate in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Service Plan as it relates to placement. Because the foster parent has information on the day-to-day functioning of the child, their input into the service plan is valuable. Information gathered by the workers from the foster parent is incorporated into the service plan. This information includes how the child is adjusting, the child’s needs in the area of education and medical care, insight into the child’s emotional and social development and when appropriate, the child’s needs regarding independent living skills.

Foster parents are notified and invited to participate in appropriate portions of Administrative Case Reviews (ACRs) where Service Plans are reviewed. If unplanned changes are made in the case plan and the foster parents are not present, the family worker will notify the foster parent in person, by phone or in writing of the changes as soon as possible.

CYFS takes moving children very seriously. To reduce trauma and promote healing, any move is carefully and thoroughly assessed.

If a child is going to be moved from a foster home, the foster parent is given a written Notice of Change of Placement (CFS-151 B) 14 days before the move is to take place, except in cases where a child has been determined to be at risk of harm. The foster parents will be informed of their rights to appeal the changed service plan or move of a child and given a copy of the appeal procedures. CYFS staff will assist foster parents in filing an appeal if foster parents need assistance. A Notice of Change of Placement is not to be given until the family worker has staffed the situation with the

supervisor , reviewed the steps in the New Beginning process and a critical decision made that a move is necessary.

**6. Foster Parents have the right to be provided a fair, timely, and impartial investigation of licensing complaint issues and be provided the opportunity to have a person of their choosing present during the investigation and due process; the right to be provided the opportunity to request and receive mediation and/or an administrative review of decisions which affect licensing parameters; and the right to have decisions concerning a licensing corrective action plan specifically explained and tied to the licensing standards violated.**

Licensing staff at CYFS are aware foster parents have the right to be provided a fair, timely and impartial investigation of licensing complaint issues.

Both licensing staff and foster parents are informed through initial and ongoing trainings that licensing investigations are necessary to assess whether there has been a violation of 402 Licensing Standards or the Child Care Act. Through a Licensing Complaint Investigation brochure, given at the initial training and at the onset of an investigation, foster parents are provided written information on the investigation process including the definition of Stand Alone or Concurrent Investigations.

During the initial licensing process, foster parents are provided information on the licensing investigation process. Foster parents are informed complaints may come from a variety of sources. One of which may be the State Central Register, when a Hotline call is made. Others may include a complaint coming as a result of a monitoring or family worker or family support worker visit to the home or a report from the school or counselor to the agency. Policies are reviewed verbally at the biannual monitoring visits. An annual Licensing Investigations training takes place virtually to refresh and educate foster parent's understanding of the licensing complaint process.

Licensing workers also understand their obligation to adhere to the licensing investigation protocol per DCFS policy. Any violations investigated are reported to foster parents in writing, with specific mention of the licensing standard, the section number alleged to have been violated and any evidence supporting the alleged violation. CYFS has developed a brochure, which describes the investigation process and informs foster parents of their rights during the investigation including the right to request a Supervisory Review. Should the Director of Child and Family Well Being – Adoption, Licensing & Recruitment uphold the licensing violations and make the decision that the foster family's license be revoked, the foster parents will be provided a detailed description of reasons as well as all information needed regarding the next layer of appeal, which is the Informal Review with the Regional Administrator of Licensing.

Licensing complaint investigations are assigned to the licensing worker. If a foster parent is being investigated for an abuse/neglect report an investigation is conducted by the both the CYFS licensing worker and the DCFS investigator. DCFS will investigate the allegations of abuse and neglect while the CYFS licensing worker investigates any violation of the 402 Licensing Standards. This is called a concurrent investigation.

Licensing complaint investigations are initiated within 2 business days of receipt of the complaint.

The licensing worker reviews the case, speaks to the foster family worker and supervisor to determine whether the incident is an ongoing or isolated event. The licensing worker, by DCFS protocol will conduct an unannounced visit to the home. The licensing worker informs the foster parents of their right to have an advocate of their choosing present during the interview. The licensing staff understands for many foster parents this process can be very intimidating and frightening. The worker will do as much as possible to support the foster parent through the licensing investigation process.

When the licensing worker interviews the foster parent, a brochure is provided to the foster parent which explains the process including timeframes and expectations. The brochure is reviewed with the foster parent so they can be provided any necessary clarification. The brochure informs the foster parent(s) of their right to request a Supervisory Review if they disagree with the violations and/or the Corrective Plan and informs them of the need to respond within the specified time frame. It also informs the foster parent that if the investigation goes beyond 30 days, the foster parent will be given written notification. When the interview of the foster parents is concluded, the licensing worker determines the need to interview others relevant to the situation. This may include the child, therapist, DCP investigator, or any other person identified as significant to understanding the complaint. When all documentation is gathered, the worker and the licensing supervisor review the information. This review includes assessing what can be done to assist the foster parent to improve or rectify the situation so the expected quality of care can be maintained.



When a Corrective Plan is needed, the licensing worker receives input from the foster parent and the entire team on the development of the plan. The foster parent must sign the plan verifying it has been presented to them and they will work on making the corrections. Foster parents generally have 30 days to make the corrections. The CYFS staff works with the foster parent to assist with meeting the corrections, when appropriate. The foster care staff will make unannounced home visits while the Corrective Plan is pending. CYFS has a foster parent educator and foster parent retention specialists who can assist with the Corrective Plans and provide additional coaching to an individual or family. If additional training is part of the corrective plan, CYFS may help the foster parent connect to the Foster Parent College educational training courses. The specific course will be identified to fit the training need identified in the corrective plan. If the foster parent is not able to make the necessary corrections, the agency may begin to enforce further licensing actions that may include placing the home on hold or revocation of the foster care license.

When the investigation is concluded, a letter is sent to the foster parents. The letter identifies the non-violations and/or violations noted. This letter will also detail how to go about requesting a Supervisory Review if there is disagreement regarding the findings.



**7. Foster Parents have 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.**

Per DCFS policy, Subpart A of Rule 301.120, information is to be provided in a timely manner to the foster parent. CYFS believes this is more than a compliance issue. It is a way to ensure the relationships between the workers and the foster parents is one of mutual trust and respect. CYFS believes foster parents deserve open and regular communication with staff to ensure a quality experience for the children in care. Therefore, every opportunity is made to keep communication open between foster parents and CYFS staff. Foster care leadership including coordinators and supervisors work with staff to ensure intentional conversations are being held and information is being given to the foster parent in a timely manner.

At the initial placement, in addition to verbally sharing important information regarding the child, the CYFS Placement Agreement (CYFS 310) provides written information critical to the child being placed. This agreement contains information about the child's medical needs, educational needs, as well as mental health issues of the child.

At the time of an initial placement, some information may be unavailable. Foster family workers are responsible for informing foster parents of new information, as it becomes known. This information may include updates on health or safety issues, school issues or issues surrounding visitation. Supervisors follow up with family workers to make sure the foster parent has the necessary information. This follow-up is documented in a supervisory note.

Additionally, because the licensing worker and the foster family worker work in tandem to assist with the placement, the licensing worker contacts the foster parent within 24 hours of the placement to make sure they have everything they need and to address any additional needs or questions.

This information is then shared with the foster care team and any unmet needs are identified and resolved as quickly as possible. Supervisors or lead workers also review case notes to ensure documentation that the foster parent has received what was needed. It is also not uncommon for a lead worker or supervisor to randomly contact a foster parent to inquire about how their experience is going. This would include making sure the foster parent is getting adequate and timely information.

Through on-going training and direct supervision, supervisors are responsible for family workers having the knowledge of what information should be shared with foster parents. Supervisors educate family workers to understand, not only what can and cannot be disclosed, but how to disclose the information. The CYFS staff understands foster parents may desire some information that, because of confidentiality, cannot be shared with the parent. The staff works with the foster parent to help them understand and respect the importance of confidentiality in these situations. Supervisors and lead workers have an open-door policy so staff can receive guidance, instruction, and support whenever it is necessary. Structured supervision is done weekly for the first 45 days of a case and at least monthly after the first 45 days or as often as necessary. If it is found communication has not been as it should be, supervisors work with staff and parents to address barriers, provide one on one training on how develop and maintain open communication and assist

with building or strengthening the relationship between the parent and the staff.

There are many other avenues open to provide ongoing information to the parents. Family workers and/or supervisors encourage parents to attend court at the beginning of a case, as well as throughout the life of the case, as much information about the case is shared during this process. Child and Family Team meetings take place throughout the life of the case. One purpose of the meeting is to allow an exchange of information about the child with the parents and others relevant to the child's case. This is done so everyone has information necessary to assist the child while in care and as they work toward permanency.

Per Procedures 315, a "ice breaker" meeting with the biological parents, foster parents and staff takes place within 48 hours of the initial placement. Ideally, a Child and Family Team meeting will take place within 5 business days after initial placement. When a child moves from one foster home to another, the Child and Family Team meeting will take place within 10 days. Also, at any point during the case, foster parents are able to request information from the family worker or the supervisor and request a Child and Family Team meeting if they believe they need to have additional information that is relevant to the care of the child.

**8. Foster Parents have the right to be given information concerning a child (I) from the Department as required under subsection (u) of Section 5 of the Children and Family Services Act and (ii) from the child welfare agency as required under subsection (c-5) of section 7.4 of the Child Care Act of 1969.**



The agency has clear rules and procedures for ensuring foster parents receive necessary information regarding a child. It also has confidentiality policies to ensure proper disclosure of information. CYFS foster care staff are responsible for ensuring all information important to the care and needs of the child is shared with the parent. Effort goes into protecting the rights of the child's family and information will not be shared with the foster family if it not essential in providing care to the child. That being said, the foster parent is given as much information concerning the child as is known and able to be shared. Prior to the parent accepting the placement, the worker will share information with the foster parent to assess the appropriateness of the placement and determine if the parent's home is a viable resource for the child.

Family workers and family support workers understand the importance of sharing information with the foster parent so they can best meet the needs of the child. This occurs prior to placement, at the time of placement or whenever there is updated information to be shared. Foster family workers and supervisors make certain foster parents receive information in writing regarding:

- the child's medical history
- the child's educational history

- the child’s portion of the service plan
- the plan for visitations
- any other relevant background information about any behavioral problems including cursing, yelling or more serious behaviors like perpetration of sexual abuse, destructive behavior and/or substance abuse habits.

Per DCFS policy, within 10 days of placement, foster parents will have signed a Sharing Information with the Parent (CFS 600-4) verifying that the foster parent has received the above information in writing and this document will be forwarded to the child’s guardian ad litem.

Child Family Team Meetings (CFTM) are another way parents can receive information on the child. These meetings provide an opportunity for parents to learn more about the child from the child’s worker as well as from the biological parents and any other person significant to the child’s care. Being part of the professional team, the foster parent does not need to wait to be invited to a CFTM but rather, when they feel they have the need to bring people together to discuss the child’s needs, can request a CFTM be held.

Staff are held accountable for sharing pertinent information with the foster parents. This begins with staff training from the DCFS Foundations for Child Welfare Specialists, regarding policies and procedures. Staff also attend CYFS New Employee Orientation where they are schooled in the expectations and requirements of a CYFS Child Welfare Specialist. This includes education on the importance of confidentiality as well as full disclosure of information.

Supervisors train on and review pertinent policies and procedures with the foster care staff during regular supervision to ensure the policies and procedures are correctly implemented. Feedback from foster parents is solicited at various stages of the case to ensure policy and procedures are being followed and that the parents are receiving information and support that they need. This is also a way to hold staff accountable for disseminating pertinent information and supporting the foster parent as they provide care to the foster child.

Regularly, foster care supervisory staff review relevant policies and procedures for assisting foster parents including the importance of ensuring foster parents have access to pertinent information such as:

- the child’s medical history including any known medical problems, communicable diseases, immunizations, insurance and/or medical card information;
- a copy of the child’s portion of the client service plan including visitation arrangements, case history of the child, how the child came into care, permanency goal, history of the child’s previous placements and reasons for any placement changes (identifying information or location of any previous parent will be redacted);
- the child’s educational history including individual educational plan (IEP), Individual Family Service Plan, and the 504 Educational Special Needs Plan (when appropriate);
- relevant background information on the child including, but not limited to, any prior criminal or behavior problems, substance abuse or habits, sexualized behavior or perpetration of sexual abuse and/or destructive behaviors; and
- the child’s cultural and ethnic background.

In most offices, there are 1-2 lead case workers who function in a quasi-supervisor role. These workers provide an additional layer of supervision, training and mentoring to assist newer workers in learning and fulfilling their job duties.

In 2023, 84% of foster parents who completed the annual survey agreed or strongly agreed they received timely updated information from their worker.

- 9. Foster parents have the right to be notified of scheduled meetings and staffing's 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 meeting, administrative reviews, interdisciplinary staffing's, and individual educational planning meetings; the right to be informed of decisions made by the courts or the agency concerning the child; the right to have their input on the plan of services for a child 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.**

It is the responsibility of all agency staff family workers, family support workers, therapists, licensing workers, and the leadership team to assist foster families in caring for our children. It is particularly critical, before any decisions or recommendations regarding continuity or permanency are made, every team member, including the foster parent, has an opportunity to provide input and be given full consideration. Foster parents are informed of scheduled meetings and/or staffing's concerning the foster child. This is done during home visits, monitoring visits, by phone, at Child Family Team Meetings or by a letter. Foster parents are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process regarding case planning and services needed. Because foster parents are viewed as integral team members who are responsible for the child 24/7, their input in case planning is vital and appreciated.

Foster parents have access to their licensing worker, the child's family worker, supervisors, and other members of the professional team to ensure the parent has necessary information as well as an opportunity to share their perspective on the care of the child. Foster parent's schedules are considered when arranging these meetings and when foster parents are unable to attend every effort is made to gather information from the foster parent before the meeting, so their input is available as decisions are made. The staff also follow up with the foster parent on the results of the meeting, so the foster parent is kept current on the results of the meeting.

The family worker is responsible for notifying the foster parent of all court appearances, Administrative Case Reviews (ACR) and visits. Foster parents are informed of their right to attend court and ACRs during pre-service training and through communication with their family worker. This communication is done by phone or in person at home visits or Child Family Team Meetings. Additionally, in most offices, the foster care secretary is given a schedule of court dates so a formal letter can be mailed to the foster parent. The foster care secretary sends out a letter informing the foster parent of the date and time of any court hearings. This is just another way to ensure foster parents have information regarding court hearings. If the foster parent cannot attend a court hearing, the family worker will keep the foster parent informed regarding the outcomes of the hearing through either a phone call or an in-person contact.



Periodically trainings are offered to parents regarding court, the Administrative Case Review process, and educational issues. Educational advocacy is offered by the Department from time to time and foster parents are encouraged to attend this training as often as needed. Parents must attend the Educational Advocacy training prior to renewing their foster care license, however, it is strongly suggested that it be completed by the end of the first year of licensure.

Foster parents are very instrumental in requesting an IEP be held and have the right to ask their child’s school in writing for an IEP to be held when they feel it is necessary. The supervisor and caseworker assist the parent in this process, and they may consult with the DCFS Educational Liaison when necessary.



Supervisors meet with their casework staff on a regular basis to ensure all of the required duties of the family workers are being fulfilled. Supervisors will also inquire as to how the foster parent is being involved in the case. Peer and supervisor reviews of client files are also completed on a regular basis, going above and beyond DCFS policy.

**10. Foster parents have the right to be provided, in a timely and consistent manner, with any information a caseworker 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 right 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.**

At the time of placement, the licensed foster parent receives a placement packet which includes important information on the child’s behaviors, emotional status, social, medical, and educational situation as well as community resources or information that is specific to the age and needs of the child. For example, information about local community resources to support a LGBT youth may be part of a packet given to a parent who accepts placement of a youth who identifies as LGBT. At the time of placement or no later than 10 days of placement, a Placement Agreement (CYFS 310) is signed by the foster parent, which includes relevant information to the child being placed including the permanency goal.

The values, on which the CYFS foster care mission is based, strongly support promoting positive relationships between the foster family and the child’s family in order to facilitate an open exchange of information, which promotes relationship continuity, placement stabilization, and minimizes the trauma of separation. Following DCFS procedures 315 an introductory meeting, sometimes, called the icebreaker meeting, brings together the child’s biological parents, parents/

relative parents and caseworkers within in the first 48 hours of a new placement. The goal is to reduce trauma on the child by building a healthy relationship between all the adults responsible for providing for the child. It also promotes positive supports to the biological parents as they work toward reunification. Establishing this relationship encourages parents to take an active role in helping the child's family regroup. Staff and foster parents receive training and supervision to guide them in determining appropriate information that is to be released and with whom information can be shared based on Licensing Standards for Foster Family Homes, Section 402.24.

Child and Family Team meetings are a great venue for foster parents to learn and share information regarding the child. For that reason, foster parents are encouraged to attend these meetings. To support foster parents during these meetings, licensing workers can attend with the foster parent. It is important to note foster parents will NOT be invited to attend the portion of the Child and Family Team meeting that pertains to the biological parent's situation or progress unless there is a positive biological parent/foster parent relationship, and the biological parents sign a consent to allow the foster parents to attend and receive this additional information.

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions encourages all foster families to attend court hearings whenever possible. Semi-annual ACRs are another opportunity for foster parents to meet biological parents and discuss the child's progress. Foster parents are able to stay throughout the child's portion of the review but may only stay throughout the rest of the ACR when biological parents grant permission. Information learned within the court proceeding and ACRs must also be treated as confidential.

Finally, family workers along with the supervisor consider the foster parent's thoughts, beliefs and input when making a permanency plan for the child. The foster parents provide feedback into how best to meet the child's needs in the future.

When the plan includes reunification with the biological family, the foster parents work with the family worker and when possible, the biological family, to make a thoughtful transition plan for everyone involved, but especially the child. Foster parents are given assistance on how to help the child prepare for returning home as well as how to manage their own feelings regarding reunification.

- 11. When the permanency plan is guardianship or adoption, the foster family is introduced to the adoption conversion worker, who will help them understand either the adoption or guardianship option. When the foster parent does not wish to be considered as a permanent placement for the child, the family worker, licensing worker and adoption worker will consider information from the parent as to their perspective for the best possible home for the child in question. When the foster parent is not providing this resource for the child, the foster parent is encouraged to meet and share information with the prospective adoptive or guardianship family and when possible, begin to develop a positive open relationship with them. This is done to minimize trauma to the child as this transition unfolds. Foster parents have the right to be given reasonable written notice of any change in a child's case plan or of plans to terminate the placement of the child with the foster care giver and of the reasons for the change or termination in placement. Such notice should only be waived in cases of a court order or when the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm.**

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions believes it is in the best interest of any child in care to carefully consider decisions around placement disruption. The foster care team, including the foster parent must ask themselves, “*Have we done everything we can to stabilize this placement?*” In 2022, CYFS updated the replacement process to ensure it is family centered, trauma, inclusive and strength based (FITS). The process is called New Beginnings and everyone including the youth when appropriate works together to either stabilize the current placement or find a new beginning. It is only through open and honest dialoging between the foster parent and the case management staff that decisions regarding a disruption should be made. Through worker’s home visits, coaching from the parent educator and foster parent mentor support from other foster care providers, therapists and other professionals on the team as well as utilizing the IPS and Clinical Intervention to Placement Preservation (CIPP) interventions, everything is done to stabilize the child’s foster care placement. A plan to move a child becomes necessary only when:

- a) All attempts to stabilize the placement have been unsuccessfully;
- b) The child or others in the home are unsafe if the placement continues;
- c) The placement cannot meet the needs of the child even with additional available resources;
- d) Continuity or permanency for the child is facilitated by such a move;
- e) The child is being placed with siblings. In the situations where placement changes are necessary, foster parents are to be included in the planning process.



In 2023, CYFS implemented the Foster Parent Mentor Program. Through this program, families who care for our children and youth receive support and resources from other trained CYFS foster parents to better meet the needs of the child in their home. Among its primary objectives, the program seeks to assist with placement stabilization, promote permanency when reunification is not an option.

If all efforts to stabilize the placement fail, the foster caregiver is given a written Notice of Change of Placement (CFS151B) which provides the reason for terminating the placement as well as the process for the foster parent to appeal the decision. The Notice of Change of Placement (CFS 151B) is given 14 days before moving a child. This notice shall be given but the 14 days shall be waived in cases of a court order, at the foster parents’ request or when the child is determined to be at risk of harm. If the child is determined to be at risk of harm, an Unsafe Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol will be completed and placed in the child’s file by the foster family worker.

Should a critical decision be made, and a situation warrants removal of a child either immediately or by the issuance of a 14-day notice, licensing workers provide the parents with information regarding the parents’ right to appeal as well as assist the foster parent in the appeal process.

Instructions regarding requesting a Clinical Placement Review (appeal) are detailed on the Notice of Change of Placement which includes faxing the request into the Clinical Review Team at 1-800- 733-3308 or by calling 1-866-225-1431. A licensing worker and/or family worker will provide assistance in this process by faxing the form in for the foster family if that is what they wish. The licensing worker and/or family worker will then prompt the foster family to call the number to ensure their intentions to appeal are clearly expressed.

Foster families will be kept informed on the status of the situation and in some cases, through the appeal system, foster children may be returned to the foster home. While a foster home is appealing the decision, supervised visitation with the child may be granted depending on the situation. Typically, in those situations where children are removed from a foster home in order to be reunited with a sibling or siblings, foster parents are not granted an appeal through the Department. According to DCFS policy, placement with siblings is not appealable.

If the family has requested a Clinical Placement Review and the Reviewer does not believe the child should be returned to the home, the foster parent can request an appeal through an Administrative Law Judge. The paperwork for this process is given directly to the foster family from the Clinical Placement Review when she/he renders a decision.

Workers will support foster families throughout the investigative and/or appeal process and share information within Department rules and procedures. Workers understand going through an investigation or appeal can be a difficult process so they will assist families and provide support during this time.

**12. Foster parents have the right to be notified in a timely and complete manner of all court hearings including the date and time of the court hearing, the name of the judge, or the hearing officer hearing the case, the location of the 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.**

CYFS family workers are responsible for notifying foster parents of upcoming court hearings and providing the available information regarding the date, time, and location of the court hearing. Notification is given to the foster parents at home visits, by phone, in person or in Child Family Team Meeting. Additionally, in some offices, the foster care secretary may send a letter to the foster parent with all of the court information. In this way the foster parent has multiple ways to be notified about the court hearings.

Because CYFS deals with many different court systems, the foster care family workers will also help the parent understand their role and responsibilities when in court. Foster families are given the name of the judge and/or hearing officer associated with the case. Family workers are responsible for sharing recommendations or court orders that involve the foster family. Upon licensure, foster parents are given information regarding the court process. Foster parents are also encouraged to review their DCFS Foster Family Handbook which has an entire section dedicated to the Juvenile Court process. This also includes the rights and responsibilities of the foster parent while in court. This handbook can be found on the DCFS website. Periodically CYFS will provide training regarding the court process. Foster parents have the right to be heard in court proceedings; however, any time a judge wishes to clear the courtroom, it is within his/her right to

do so.

Through discussion, case note reviews and regular supervision, the foster care supervisor ensures the family worker is notifying the foster parents of court hearings and encouraging them to attend.

**13. Foster parents have the right to be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parents is to be reentered into foster care when such placement would be consistent with the best interest of the child and other children in the home.**

In an effort to minimize stress and trauma to the child, and to ensure as much continuity in the child's life as possible, if re-entry into placement occurs, it is expected DCFS along with the CYFS staff and any other members of the multidisciplinary team first explore the available case history to identify the appropriateness of any previous placement that may serve the child's best interests.

Family Finding Resource Specialist may already have a list of potential resources from previous foster care experiences to explore and are brought in to update that list with viable relative or fictive kin options. Previous foster care homes can be considered a fictive kin to the child. The definition of fictive kin is any individual, unrelated by birth or marriage who is shown to have a close personal or emotional ties with the child or the child's family prior to the child's placement with individual. [20ILCS 505.7 (b)].

Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System assists in obtaining information about a child's prior placements. If the child was a youth in care, CYFS licensing workers will access the CYFS data system for records management and find the name of the foster parent where the child was last placed. A review of the child's current needs as well as a review of the foster parent's current skill set will assist with this assessment. If the child is old enough to be verbal, agency staff are expected to obtain some assessment of the child's attachment or feeling about the prior placements. When appropriate, the child's foster parents may also be asked their feelings about the prior placement. Completion of the Matching Tool (CFS 2017) also helps support whether the placement is consistent with the best interest of the child.

**14. Foster parents have the right to have timely access to the existing appeals process with the child placement agency. The assertion of the right to appeal will be free from acts of harassment and retaliation.**

In order to support positive relationships between staff and foster parents, both are trained in the importance of mutual respect for all members of the team, roles are defined and the goals of continuity and permanence in the best interest of the child are stressed. CYFS has formalized an internal appeal process. At no time and under no circumstance will CYFS tolerate harassment or retaliation directed towards foster parents who have requested to appeal a service decision. If a foster parent feels he/she has been a victim of harassment or retaliation he/she may use the agency's grievance process going directly to step two.

When conflict or disagreement occurs, foster parents are asked to immediately discuss and attempt to resolve the issue with the staff involved. If a resolution cannot be reached, the foster parent should contact the worker's supervisor. If resolution still cannot be reached, the foster parent should



contact the foster care site supervisor. If a resolution is still unable to be reached, the foster parent should contact the Regional Coordinator. If a resolution is still unable to be reached, Director of Child Welfare services should be the next step. If attempts at resolution have been unsuccessful, the foster parent will be given the opportunity for mediation through the agency's Quality Assurance Unit. All foster parents are given a copy of the grievance procedures along with the Implementation Plan each year. This process does not waive the foster parent's right to access the DCFS Service Appeal Process or other community-based mediation processes.

Foster parents are informed of the DCFS appeal process during PRIDE training. They are also informed of their rights through CYFS and DCFS newsletters. Licensing workers and/or family workers assist foster parents in exercising their appeal rights. Workers explain to the foster parents what they need to do including the need for the appeal to be submitted within 3 days. Workers assist in the submission of the appeal when requested. Instructions regarding requesting a Clinical Placement Review (appeal) are detailed on the Notice of Decision (CFS 151) which includes faxing the request into the Clinical Review Team at 1-800-733-3308 or by calling 1-866-225-1431. Foster parents may also call the Department of Children and Family Services Advocacy Office at 800-232-3798 if there is still no resolution to the concern.

In 2023, 84% of foster parents completing the annual foster parent survey noted they agreed or strongly agreed that if there was an issue that needed resolution the resolution was done in a timely and fair manner, and they were satisfied with the resolution.



**15. Foster parents have the right to be informed of the Foster Parent Hotline established under this 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.**

Foster parents are provided education during the initial licensure, as well as through ongoing trainings, on the DCFS Foster Parent Hotline and the role of the Office of the Inspector General. Foster parents are given the number to the Foster Parent Hotline in the CYFS newsletter and it is on our Foster Parent Resource page on the CYFS website.

The Foster Parent Hotline is a referral service where foster families can get information not only on where to go to get licensed, but on matters involving the adoption of children. This Hotline will refer complaints of a more serious nature to the Advocacy office. The Advocacy office will review such things as a foster family having an issue with a caseworker or frustrations involving casework decisions. They will contact the agency staff and assist with a resolution.

The number for the Foster Parent Hotline is 1 (800) 624-5437, the number for the Advocacy Office is 1 (800) 232-3798, and the Inspector General's phone number is (800) 722-9124, 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Monday through Friday.

## **Foster Parent Responsibilities**

### **16. (1) Foster Parents have the responsibility to openly communicate and share information about the child with other members of the child welfare team.**

From the first inquiry through each foster child placed in their care, foster parents learn they are an important part of the child welfare team and as such not only have the right to open communication but also the responsibility to participate in open communication with others significant to the care of the child. This includes but is not limited to foster family workers, family support workers, supervisors, licensing workers, and therapists.

Through PRIDE and ongoing training from The Center for Youth and Family Solutions, foster parents learn about different styles of communication and how to build a relationship that fosters honest communication between the parents and the child's workers. Ongoing training from the retention specialist and licensing workers help parents understand the expectations to:

- share openly and honestly with the worker about the child's experience while in care. This includes information about progress with school, therapy, as well as adjustment in their foster home;
- inform the child's family worker of any unusual incidents or emergencies that come about while the child is in care;
- provide the family workers and others of ongoing or newly discovered needs of the child including updates on physician's recommendations for medical treatment and any recommendations that would enhance the child's well-being both while in care and in the future;
- maintain records on each child's care including documenting the child's medication and any unusual or extreme behavior so that others may follow up and/or provide continuity of care for the child.

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions provides parents with tracking forms to record the child's needs while in the home. To assist the foster parent, many of these forms can be found on the CYFS website.

To assist with keeping the lines of communication open, foster parents are provided the contact information for their licensing worker, the child's caseworker, after hours and supervisors. Foster Parent Mentors also coach and model open communication between foster parents and staff. Foster parents are encouraged to reach out whenever they feel they need input or assistance from the staff.

### **17. (2) Foster Parents have the responsibility to respect the confidentiality of information concerning foster children and their families and act appropriately within applicable confidentiality laws and regulations.**

In addition to the training provided through PRIDE, the CYFS foster parent trainings stress the importance of honoring the confidentiality of the children and families in foster care. Through discussions, family workers, family support workers, and licensing staff assist the parent in understanding the laws and regulations surrounding confidentiality, including those described in the Child Care Act as well as those protected in accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. Licensing workers review and discuss issues surrounding confidentiality as it is presented in the Foster Home Licensing Standards (402.24) at each monitoring visit. This includes conversations regarding how to safeguard confidential information from court, school, medical or behavioral therapies.

Foster parents are encouraged to contact their family worker if they are uncertain as to the appropriateness of releasing specific information. Foster parents are given a folder at the time of placement for which all written documentation regarding the child is to be placed. Foster parents are to keep this folder in a confidential place in the home.

### **18. (3) Foster parents have the responsibility to advocate for children in their care.**

Foster parents are taught the importance of strong advocacy skills from the very beginning of their training in the DCFS PRIDE classes. By keeping foster parents aware of the various proceedings important to the child's case, such as ACR, Integrated Assessments, Child and Family Team Meetings, Individualized Education Planning, therapeutic meetings including the writing of Behavior Management Plans, Clinical Intervention to Placement Preservation, and court hearings, the CYFS foster staff helps parents participate and advocate for the children in their care.

Educational Advocacy training is offered to all foster parents with at least one licensed foster parent required to attend during the first four years of licensure. Foster parents are informed of the requirement to complete Educational Advocacy training. CYFS staff assist foster parents in identifying Educational Advocacy trainings available to them and by helping them register for the training.

Foster parents are important advocates for children in the schools. CYFS has a specific Educational and Life Skills Service Coordinator who can assist foster parents with navigating the school system and providing advocacy for the youth in their home. This includes IEP and parent/teacher conferences, so the children have the most optimal experience. Staff may go with the parent on the first few visits or on critical meetings to provide information and support to the foster parent. This is also true of the medical system. It is the foster parent who knows best how the child is managing on a day-to-day basis and can convey that to the physician so the best medical plan can be implemented. If the foster parent needs assistance with the medical systems, CYFS has nurses available to help them understand and navigate the medical systems.

Staff also provide foster parents with information on DCFS and other trainings in the community that help them more fully understand the legal and educational systems and how to advocate for the children in their care. Foster parents can access other persons who are also

responsible for advocating for the children, such as the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), Guardian Ad Litem, and agency staff. Throughout the region, CYFS offers training on CASA and the court experiences so foster parents have a clear understanding of how these function to assist the child in care.

Foster parents receive service appeal brochures and training on how to access the appeal process to secure needed services for children in their care, from the licensing and foster family worker. Periodically, the licensing staff and the parent educators provide one on one or group training on these processes as well.

Foster parents are encouraged to attend Foster Care Advisory Board meetings where they can work with other foster parents and staff to advocate for all foster children. It is not uncommon for foster parents to brainstorm on how to get a specific service or to identify community resources to assist with a particular foster family need. CYFS keeps foster parents informed of any trainings within the community that would assist them in advocating for children in their care.

**19. (4) Foster parents have the responsibility to treat children in their care and their families with dignity, respect, and consideration.**

All foster parents at CYFS are expected to embrace the agency’s mission statement, and FITS approach which ensures each person is treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. This goes beyond the compliance of the Foster Home Licensing Standards (CFS 402), which state children in the foster homes need to be treated equitably. It encompasses how foster parents conduct themselves when working with the children and how their demeanor must be supporting and accepting when addressing the child’s culture, ethnicity, religion, and connectedness with the child’s family.

Through initial and ongoing training at CYFS, parents gain an understanding of how this expectation plays out in everyday situations. For example, children shall not be deprived of family or sibling visitations or other family contact as a punishment for misbehavior. Foster parents are encouraged to facilitate visitation and positive bonding between the child and their biological families. Additionally, foster parent support groups, round tables and FCAB’s provide an opportunity for ongoing training and discussion about how to ensure the children that come into care are being treated respectfully in every consideration.

CYFS monitors this responsibility in a variety of ways. First, by providing parents with additional training, beyond the initial PRIDE training, foster parents receive more face-to-face time with our caregiving team. This reinforces the CYFS philosophy and vision surrounding the caregiving experience while strengthening the working relationship between the foster parent and the rest of the child welfare team.

Licensing workers, family workers, and family support workers visit the foster home when a child is placed to make sure things are going as expected. If there are concerns or unmet needs, these are addressed. The foster family worker will continue to monitor and support

the foster parents at least monthly throughout the life of the case. While the licensing worker is required to be in the home every six months, they are available to assist the foster family whenever needed.

Child and Family Team Meetings are held quarterly by CYFS. Foster parents are asked to attend these meeting so they will have a better understanding of how to meet the child's needs. This also may provide the foster parent an opportunity to meet the child's parents and learn about family customs and traditions. Foster parents may have the opportunity to ask the child's parents questions in order to assist the child in making the transition into foster care. These meetings also give the foster parent more information from others on the team about how to successfully parent the child in their home. This dialog can give testimony to the foster parent's commitment to treating the child and the child's biological family with respect and dignity.

Another way to monitor the treatment of children in the foster home is to simply talk to and observe the children in the home. Family workers and licensing staff are trained in how to assess the child's behavior when considering safety and well-being in the foster home. Talking to the children about their experience can provide information to both the staff and the foster parent about how the child feels in the foster home. If there are any concerns, the family worker will address these with the foster parent and the licensing worker so these can be clarified or corrected. If the concern continues, it may result in a licensing complaint investigation through the licensing department. Additionally, satisfaction surveys given to foster children over the age of 12 monitor this expectation and provide good feedback from the child's point of view.

**20.(5) Foster parents have the responsibility to recognize their own individual and familial strengths and limitations when deciding whether to accept a child into care, recognize your own support needs, and utilize appropriate supports in providing care for foster children.**

Foster parents are encouraged during PRIDE, the licensing assessment process, and on an on-going basis, to continually develop their self-awareness. Knowing their strengths and limitations is essential when deciding whether to accept a child into their care. Foster parents also have the responsibility to understand their own experience with trauma so they will be able to use this understanding to help them understand how best to help the children they will accept.

In order to prevent subsequent placement changes for children and provide the best placement possible, foster parents are expected to work with the family worker, family support worker, licensing worker, supervisors, and any other member of the child welfare team in assessing the potential placement. This strength-based approach includes candid discussions about the foster parent's strengths and limitations with regards to the specific child. It also includes an assessment by the foster care and licensing and retention staff of support and resources the foster parent may need to best meet the needs of the child in question. The Child Caregiver Matching Tool (CFS 2017) is a helpful tool used to assist staff and foster parents in mutually assessing the foster parents' capability to care for a particular child.

Information gathered from the AAPI-2, which all parents take, is another way to assess the



parenting strengths and weaknesses of the foster parent. The AAPI-2 Parenting Profile is beneficial in assessing the need for additional training which may be helpful for the foster parent. When the tool identified specific areas for additional training, the CYFS parent trainer can utilize the home visit coaching model to meet the need and prepare the parent for a specific placement.

When a foster parent is approached to care for a child with more intense needs (such as sexual behavior problems or extreme behaviors); CYFS provides additional training to them to assist in caring for the child. Parent Skills Training is a 9-week program, 27 hours in length that directly assists parents in behavior management techniques. This training helps foster families understand trauma and the importance of the foster parent/ child relationship.

The Family Worker Questionnaire and the semi-annual monitoring visits are all tools that assist in evaluating strengths and limitations for the foster home. The Family Worker Questionnaire is a questionnaire each family worker working in the home completes before the licensing worker visits the home for the semi-annual monitoring visit. One of the questions ask whether the family worker believes additional training may be warranted. The licensing worker will discuss the questionnaire with the foster family. Feedback gathered from the family worker and foster parent will then assist in finding trainings identified as beneficial.

When a child is placed with a relative, the CYFS staff makes a special effort to assist relative parents with realities of relative foster care. Foster Parent Mentors may be assigned to relative care givers to support them while they learn how to be a foster caregiver. This also provides a good opportunity to coach relative caregivers on updated child development and strength-based parenting. Relative foster parents are provided the opportunity to attend support groups and participate in the Foster Parent Advisory Boards, which will help them develop a better understanding of the foster care process and how to access resources and supports when needed while helping them network with other parents.

CYFS has implemented the Parent Self-Assessment for Reunification Prepared (CFS 250A) and foster families can earn additional reimbursement for their participation in reunification activities by completing the Family Reunification Support Special Service Fee Log (CFS1042L). DCFS must approve this process.

**21.(6) Fosterparents have the responsibility to be aware of the benefits of relying on or affiliating with other caregivers and foster parent associations in improving the quality of care and service to children and families.**

During training, and semi-annual license monitoring visits, agency staff informs and encourages foster parents of various types of support groups, Round Tables, Foster Parent Associations, the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council, and special events that will promote their affiliation with other foster parents. Foster parents are encouraged to take advantage of opportunities within CYFS as well as local opportunities to develop networking opportunities, establish “mentor” relationships with experienced foster parents, and learn of local resources. Foster parents are made aware of these internal and external opportunities in

the foster parent newsletter, through mailings and through the use of social media such as Facebook and our agency website. Additionally, licensing, foster family workers and foster parent mentors make phone calls or mention the upcoming events, at home visits.

The CYFS Foster Caregiver Advisory Board (FCAB) is another way for foster parents to connect with other foster parents and work to improve foster care services. The mission of the CYFS FCAB is to

*“...provides foster parents the opportunity to support each other and work side by side with the CYFS staff to build and strengthen the foster parent community and improve the foster care experience. The FCAB members strives to create a positive sense of foster parenting within their local communities.”*

During the pandemic, CYFS learned the FCAB meetings could successfully be held virtually. This allowed for more foster parent involvement as it eliminated childcare and transportation barriers for many foster parents. The virtual platform eliminated the need for local boards as now all of the CYFS office locations could participate together. FCAB meetings are now held virtually on a monthly basis.

Foster care family workers, supervisors, licensing staff as well as any of the agency’s leadership team are invited to attend the boards. In this way, foster parents’ “voices” can be heard by all staff. This is also a positive way for parents and CYFS staff to strengthen their working relationship and build a stronger foster care experience for everyone.

The CYFS Foster Caregivers Advisory Board is responsible for:

- spearheading special events for foster families such as picnics, back to school events and holiday gatherings;
- identifying additional training needs;
- organizing mentoring programs for newly licensed foster parents;
- creating community awareness of the need for more foster parents
- reviewing and participating in the development of the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan as a viable working document reflective of the services to and for foster parents and the children they serve;
- encouraging foster parents to utilize the CYFS Facebook and website to stay in touch with available resources;
- reaching out to other foster parent groups and associations in the community to encourage collaboration.

In 2022, the FCAB created a welcome letter for all new foster parents, and they are currently working on a Meet the Board flyer to help new foster parents get to know the mission of the FCAB and the members in their local communities.

**22. (7) Foster Parents have the responsibility to assess their ongoing individual training needs and take action to meet those needs.**

Foster family workers, licensing workers, retention specialists, foster parent mentors and the foster parents assess the needs of the foster care home on an ongoing basis. During the initial licensing process the licensing workers use the Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI) as a tool to identify parenting skills that may need to be reinforced to assist the foster parent in parenting foster children. Using this knowledge and a strength-based approach, staff helps the foster parent identify areas that may need additional attention. The staff provides foster parents with the opportunity to receive such training. This may be in conjunction with a group training or may require contact with the agency's parent trainers or retention specialists to provide individual training in the home.

Regularly at foster care staff meetings or when the need arises, licensing workers and foster care workers along with supervisors consider the strengths and the needs of the foster parent in providing services to a child in need of a placement. Prior to a child entering foster care, there are several tools (Integrated Assessment, Child/Caregiver Matching Tool, CYFS New Beginnings packet) to assist in identifying the child's needs so the agency will know how to assist the foster parent in helping the child. In this way the agency and the foster parent can assess if additional training is needed prior to or shortly after the child is placed.

At six-month monitoring visits (402.12) with foster parents, licensing workers review the trainings they have attended and what additional training would assist them in caring for their foster children. The Foster Home Utilization Assessment, completed by licensing workers annually (at minimum) can offer insight into relevant training needs of the foster parent. Specific training may be requested by the foster parent or recommended by the worker based on the children who are placed or being considered for placement in the home. The DCFS Virtual Training Center can be utilized to assist the foster parent in training needs as well as tracking training hours. There are times with a foster home may have a licensing violation which is substantiated. As part of the corrective plan, CYFS may identify specific trainings to help the foster parent not only correct the violation but also gain knowledge into how to manage fostering with a better outcome. For example, if the foster home has a licensing violation surrounding corporal punishment, the corrective plan may require the foster parent to redo the DCFS PRIDE module on discipline. CYFS may also provide a parent trainer to go into the home and help coach the foster parent on how to improve their parenting of the child currently in their home.

CYFS collaborates with other child welfare agencies to increase the number of trainings offered to foster parents. CYFS has provides support groups/training opportunities on a regular basis to assist parents with their training needs. Many of the identified topics for these trainings come directly from the foster parent input at the Foster Caregiver Advisory Boards, from the Foster Parent Surveys or at Round Tables.

Foster parents are informed of training modules and other relevant trainings through CYFS newsletters, through the CYFS Facebook, the CYFS website and through their foster family worker and licensing worker. Online trainings have been developed and are available to foster parents as well as trainings that can be accessed through the DCFS Training Department.

**23. (8) Foster Parents have the responsibility to develop and assist in the implementation of strategies to prevent placement disruptions recognizing the traumatic impact of placement disruptions on a foster child and all members of the foster family and to provide emotional support for the foster children and members of the foster family should preventative strategies fail and placement disruption occur.**

The very first step in preventing placement disruption begins before the child is ever placed in the foster parent's home. During PRIDE and the initial CYFS foster parent training, the foster parent is educated on the importance of self-awareness, open and honest communication with the foster care staff, realistic expectations of the behaviors and situations foster parents face when dealing with children who have experienced trauma. They are also made aware of services available if situations escalate such as counseling or Intensive Placement Services (IPS).

All foster parents are provided training on the CYFS Foster Care Program Crisis Prevention Behavior Management Policy. Foster parents are responsible for following the CYFS Foster Care Program Crisis Prevention Behavior Management Policy. This document elaborates on our general policy regarding physical restraint as well as provides information on non-violent crisis intervention. The policy explains the levels of crisis development as well as gives some guidelines to foster parents. Foster parents who provide a home to specialized children may receive Parent Skills Training (PST) which specifically prepares them with parenting strategies when dealing with children who display more complicated behavioral needs.

Prior to placement, communication between the foster parent and the staff includes considering what support will be needed for the home and with the child to ensure a stable placement. This discussion includes:

- considering what was successful with previous placements in the home;
- the impact this placement will have on all current foster family members;
- specific needs of the child being considered for placement;
- training and strengths of the foster parents in dealing with specific issues;
- review of the parents understanding of the impact of trauma on children who come into care; and
- availability of resources to assist the foster home if challenges arise.

Once a placement is made, it is the foster parent's responsibility to be proactive in informing the CYFS staff of any emergencies, changes in behavior or mood, or anything unusual occurring regarding the child. In this way CYFS staff can assist the foster parents in seeking out support to help the child and maintain the placement.

CYFS supports the foster parent in this responsibility by responding to their requests in a timely manner and advocating for particular services. Foster care and licensing staff are trained to recognize signs and symptoms of extreme stress within the foster family. CYFS family workers provide foster parents with appropriate contact information so they will have access to a worker or supervisor. CYFS staff monitors the home and staff are trained to recognize when foster parents may benefit from respite to help stabilize a placement. Foster Parent Mentors may be assigned to a home that might need extra support and coaching. A focus of the CYFS

Foster Care Program is to improve stability by providing responsive services to meet the particular needs of a child or family. These services are implemented to prevent disruption and include casework services, Child and Family Team meetings, counseling, engaging school social workers or medical or psychological assessments to name a few.

When challenges to the placement become known, CYFS has its own resources, such as counseling, in-home parent training and mentoring to assist the family and stabilize the placement. CYFS may also seek services from the community such as SASS, IPS, CIPP and/or counseling to ensure the best possible outcome for the child. Respite services may be used to help the family regain their sense of balance and be planful in continuing to provide care to the child.

If a child's behavioral or emotional needs become difficult to manage and the safety of the child or others becomes a concern, the foster family should call the CARES line as well as the agency worker's on-call after-hours number. Once the CARES lines have been contacted and when they determine a SASS screening is warranted, a worker from SASS, as well as the agency will be sent out to screen the child and decide if a hospitalization is necessary. SASS may make a referral to IPS. In this case, a CFTM should be done to ensure all necessary services are in place. IPS should be accessed when the stability of a child's placement is at risk or when a child's needs cannot be met through traditional foster care.

When a placement cannot be stabilized, the entire child welfare team works together to plan the transition process. In 2023, CYFS implemented a Transitional Foster Home Program (TFH). This program improves the agency's ability to meet a youth's need for stability while they transition from one setting to another. The program uses structured foster homes in a community-based setting augmented by intensive support from our CYFS team of professionals. The CYFS child welfare team uses the term "transitional" as it implies a strength based and positive connotation when assisting our youth. The model used for the TFH program provides support for the youth and the foster family as they work together to resolve life's current challenges.

As a member of the team, the foster parents are encouraged to recognize the effect of the disruption and assist the team in decisions regarding the most planful way to move the child. If the TFH program is being utilized for placement, the previous foster parent is encouraged to share information with the TFH foster parent to ensure the most positive outcome during the transition for the youth.

Foster parents are expected to follow the 14-day notice of decision when expecting a child to move at their request. This notice allows the entire foster care team to review the current placement and assess any ways to stabilize the placement but if that is not possible, allows time to put a thoughtful transition plan in place.

Family workers, family support workers, foster parent mentors, retention specialists, therapists, and licensing workers provide emotional support to foster families and foster children when a placement disruption cannot be prevented. Once the transition occurs and the child is in a



stable placement, the entire child welfare team, including the foster parents will assess the situation to determine what might be done differently in the future to avoid replacement. Both the foster parents and the child may be referred to a counselor if needed.

**24.(9) Foster parents have the responsibility to know the impact foster parenting has on individual and family relationships, and endeavor to minimize, as much as possible, any stress that results from foster parenting.**

PRIDE pre-service training as well as the CYFS foster parent trainings address the impact foster parenting may have on individuals and families. CYFS staff teams with foster parents to continually assess how they are coping with stress and to help them recognize the needs for extra support. CYFS retention specialist, foster parent mentors, licensing staff and parent trainers provide support groups and trainings on how to manage stress.

Foster parents receive training to recognize signs of stress and other related signals that suggest a placement has or is about to negatively impact the foster family. Knowing how tough this work can be on staff and foster parents, CYFS reached out to Dr. Christy Schmidt of H3Wellness. Dr. Schmidt's workshop on the Cost of Caring provides an opportunity to learn more about what happens to workers and foster parents as we provide care and ways, we can strengthen our abilities to care for ourselves and our teams. This workshop was held in 2023 and will be held annually to foster parents in hopes of strengthening their resilience when facing the day-to-day challenges of working in foster care.

During in-home visitation with the child and their foster parent, workers assess the impact foster children have on the foster family. When necessary, conversations regarding interventions to reduce stress may be necessary. The foster family may be referred for additional services to help. When warranted licensing workers may enlist the help of a mentor foster family or a more experienced veteran foster parent to provide support and encouragement. Counseling services may be available to assist the foster family in coping with specific concerns

Foster parents are encouraged to attend regular support groups or trainings which help them network with other foster parents. This networking can help foster parents find support and empathy from others who understand the challenges of foster parenting. The importance of attending special events such as back to school gatherings, appreciation picnics or holiday events is also discussed with foster parents as this is a way to connect the entire family with other families who provide foster care. Getting out as a family, enjoying each other with families who understand the fostering experience can be a strong, proactive way to minimize the stressors of foster parenting. Foster parents are encouraged to consider self-care, including marital or family counseling, as needed, during periods of high stress, separation, or family conflict. CYFS has counseling services available that foster parents can access. Foster parents are encouraged to request intervention strategies such as respite before a crisis occurs.

Respite care is available and can be utilized when a family feels they need a break or when an unexpected event or emergency occurs putting additional stress on the family. Respite care is designed to help the foster parent regain a sense of balance, stability, and resilience. CYFS

follows DCFS policy and procedures for respite service. Respite care can be requested by contacting the licensing worker or foster family worker.

When considering respite placements the licensing worker coordinating the respite, interviews the current parent to assess any of the child's special needs and to discuss the child's current situation. The foster parent will be asked to identify any potential respite provider they have used in the past or that has a pre-existing relationship with the child as to minimize stress on the child. In many cases, when foster parents attend support groups or events and meet others who are providing foster care services, these relationships lend themselves to identifying foster parents who may be a respite resource. If the parent does not identify a viable respite parent, the licensing worker will seek out potential respite providers. The licensing worker also contacts the child's family worker to discuss the needs of the child in consideration of the best options for the youth.

Respite care is provided to all specialized children at a minimum rate of 15 hours per month and these respite hours are paid directly from the agency to the respite provider. Respite care can also be utilized by foster homes who are providing care to relative, traditional, and medical specialized children but this reimbursement is not covered by the DCFS. Reimbursements for these types of respite care are paid by deducting the amount of the respite from the current foster parent and paying that amount to the respite provider.

Ideally and to be proactive, the family worker and the parent develop a respite plan within 30 days of the child's placement and review the plan at least every six months. The identified respite parent will be familiar with the children and willing to provide for the child's care as well as any of the child's special needs. If the child has a supervision plan, a copy will be provided to the respite parent.

When foster parents believe they need a break from caregiving but do not wish to close their license, they have the option of requesting a Voluntary Hold. The foster parent must complete and sign a DCFS form stating they are requesting to be placed on "Non-active Status". The licensing worker will ensure through discussion that the family has no immediate intentions of fostering. The foster parent must also be willing to remain in compliance with Licensing Standards but will not be called upon on for placements during this period. The benefit of this for the foster parent is that monitoring visits to the home need not be completed during this time period. At any point the foster parent wishes to return to "Active Status", the licensing worker will complete a monitoring visit to assess compliance with the Licensing Standards and the hold through Placement Clearance Desk will be lifted. Once the Placement Clearance Desk has lifted the hold the home may be again utilized. Licensing workers will discuss this topic with foster parents at monitoring visits.

**25 (10.) Foster parents have the responsibility to know the rewards and benefits to children, parents, and society that come from foster parenting and promote the foster parenting experience in a positive way.**

Research, agency staff and foster parents identified the most effective foster parent recruitment tool is the foster parents themselves. In efforts to improve the public image of foster parents, as well as to carry out the mission of The Center for Youth and Family Solutions, foster parents promote the foster experience in a positive way at every opportunity, and are asked to actively participate in our recruitment efforts.

The Foster Caregivers Advisory Board has identified assisting with recruitment and retention of foster parents as one of their main objectives. The board believe foster parents are the most appropriate people to speak on the foster care experience, so many of them have made themselves available to speak at public forums on the need and experience of foster parenting.

During the past year, our foster parents have worked with our recruitment and retention specialists to support our current foster parents and to reach out into the community to create an awareness of the need for foster parents and for support for foster parents.

Foster parents can work with businesses and the community for greater public support and recognition. Foster parents are encouraged to participate in activities that support and recognize the importance of foster parents as members of the child welfare team. CYFS staff partner with foster parents to create community awareness and recruit foster parents in a wide variety of ways. In 2023, our FCAB members received business cards that identify them as a CYFS Foster Caregiver Advisory Board Member. Their hope was as they participate in the community, they will be able to increase a positive community sense of foster parenting. This may also help our recruitment staff identify potential new foster homes.

CYFS staff and foster parents have participated in such family and community centered events such as but not limited to Juneteenth Emancipation Day Celebration, Pride Fest and Parade, Strawberry Festival, Sweet Corn Circus, Back to School Bash, and the Illinois State Fair. and have presented community presentations for local libraries, churches, and civic groups. Recruitment staff hold virtual quarterly Q & A events to provide an opportunity for individuals to get together and learn more about foster care. Current foster parents are invited to attend these to lend a voice on the experience of fostering

**26. (11) Foster parents have the responsibility to know the role, rights, and responsibilities of foster parents, other professionals in the child welfare system, the child and the child’s own family.**

Foster parents are first introduced to the roles, rights, and responsibilities during PRIDE training and the CYFS foster parent home study process. During these pre-service trainings foster parents are informed they have the right to receive training pertinent to their role and the responsibility to not only attend but to participate in training provided to them. Foster parents are encouraged to attend trainings specific to understanding how the child welfare system works and what role they have in being a valued member of the child welfare team. Like any new role, foster parents need training and experience to become skilled foster parents. CYFS staff supports foster parents in this effort by informing them in advance of any community or in

house trainings useful to developing their understanding and skill surrounding their rights and responsibilities as a foster parent. By discussing specific needs of the foster parent at monitoring and home visits or whenever necessary and then supplying parents with resources to meet these training needs, CYFS hopes to support the parent as they fine tune their fostering abilities.

During the licensure process, foster parents have the opportunity to hear about their roles, rights, and responsibilities. At initial and ongoing foster parent trainings and incorporated into our support group model, foster parents are given the opportunity to learn more about their role from current foster parents. They also have an opportunity to learn about the roles of other team members. Using this co-training model, various team members and seasoned foster parents help introduce their duties and demonstrate how the teaming works in caring for the children. It should also be noted that when a specific need is identified, the staff and the foster parent may receive training together. In those cases where it is appropriate, the biological parent or family member may also participate in these trainings. This is done to ensure the child's needs are being met in a consistent fashion. A bonus to this co-training effort is the adults in the case have an opportunity to get to know each other and utilize each other as they all care for the child.

Foster parents are a part of the professional team serving the child and are included in Child and Family Team meetings, ACRs, Court, and any other meetings that address case planning and decision-making regarding children in their care. CYFS supports the foster parent's involvement in these meetings by making sure the foster parents are informed of the meetings and have ample time to prepare for the meeting. In some cases, foster parents may need support from the CYFS team to participate in the meetings. When a foster parent feels they need additional support from the foster care staff, the staff is there to help. This may mean going with the foster parent to the child's school, meeting them at the courthouse to help them find their way or listening to them as they "practice" what they want to say at an ACR. Helping the foster parent feel confident in their role as a foster parent and advocate is an important role of the CYFS staff.

Foster parents are given a copy of the CYFS Implementation Plan before they are licensed, and the foster parent is asked to sign that they have received a copy and understand its contents. Foster parents are also given a new copy at the first monitoring visit of each calendar year; however, the foster parent's responsibility goes far beyond just reading and documenting they have received the Implementation Plan. CYFS take this plan very seriously as it is a tool used to build and guide the partnership between the foster parents and the agency. This belief is shared with the foster parent in hopes to inspire their active involvement ensuring the plan is reflective of the work of the entire child welfare team. Each time the foster parent receives the plan; it is explained both the agency staff and the foster parent have the responsibility to ensure it reflects their actual work as part of a professional child welfare team.

On-demand training from DCFS on the Foster Parent Law is also available to all foster parents through DCFS training.

**27.(12) Foster parents have the responsibility to know, and as necessary, to fulfill the foster parent’s responsibility to serve as mandated reporters of suspected child abuse/ neglect under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act, and 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 and foster care staff understand the ultimate goal for any child in foster care is of course permanency. However, even more basic is the reality that our purpose as a child welfare team, including foster parents, is to make sure any child in care feels safe does not experience any further abuse or neglect while in care. To that end, foster parents receive training and support to help them as they provide for the children. Foster parents learn through their training they are mandated reporters. Their responsibilities regarding this are spelled out in PRIDE as well as in the CYFS initial and ongoing trainings.

Foster parents are also required to read and sign a statement (CFS CANTS 22B Acknowledgement of Mandated Reporter Status) acknowledging their understanding of requirements associated with being a mandated reporter prior to being licensed. The foster parent licensing workers reviews this form in detail with the foster parent at the time of licensure. Foster parents are given the DCFS hotline number to report any abuse. This number is in training materials and in the Foster Family Handbook, which they receive during their PRIDE training. Periodically, foster parents are reminded of their mandated reporter status in DCFS and CYFS newsletters. Foster parents are also informed their licensing worker can support them if and when they need to make a call.

In addition to attending pre-service training, foster parents are responsible for attending training regarding the behavioral issues of their foster child. The materials presented at these trainings can help the foster parent to understand the reasons behind the child’s unique behaviors. With this understanding, foster parents may be able to alter their responses to the behaviors thereby reducing the likelihood of an investigation.

To increase foster parents understanding of the investigation process both through DCFS and CYFS, foster parents are encouraged to attend additional trainings prepared by the CYFS licensing staff on licensing investigations and allegations against foster parents. This training educates the foster parent on their responsibilities and rights when facing any type of investigation including a licensing referral.

Should a foster parent be facing an allegation of mistreatment of a foster child, the licensing and/or family worker may be unable to share with the foster family information regarding a pending investigation until the Department’s Child Protection worker has either interviewed all parties and/or has given the agency permission. Licensing workers and/or family workers will support foster parents when going through an investigation.

Foster parents who are alleged to have violated a licensing standard will be investigated by



their licensing worker. This process is detailed in the Licensing Investigation brochure and will be offered to the family if investigated. This brochure is available to all foster families at initial licensing and upon request.

**28.(13) Foster parents have the responsibility to know and receive training regarding the purpose of administrative case reviews, client services plans, and courts processes, as well as any filing or time requirements associated with these proceedings, and actively participate in the foster parent’s designated role in these proceedings.**

PRIDE and CYFS training stresses the importance of foster parents being active participants in planning for the child. This begins when the home is being considered for placement. By engaging foster parents as equal partners in services provided to the child, the entire child welfare teams, including foster parents, assess how best to meet the child’s needs and plan for the future. Through initial training provided by CYFS and the PRIDE training, foster parents can develop their understanding of how they are responsible for taking an active role in planning for the permanency goal through the Integrated Assessment which is completed when a child is brought into foster care

**29. (14) Foster parents have the responsibility to know the child welfare agency’s appeal procedure for foster parents and the rights of foster parents under the procedure.**

Foster parents receive a copy of the CYFS appeal process along with the Implementation Plan at the time of licensure or at any time it is requested. A brochure has been developed to assist foster parents in their understanding of the agency’s appeal procedures.

**30.(15) Foster parents have the responsibility to know and understand the importance of maintaining accurate and relevant records regarding the child’s history and progress and be aware of and follow the procedures and regulations of the child welfare agency with which you are licensed or affiliated.**

PRIDE and ongoing training in “Records to be Maintained,” (Rule 402.26) stress the importance of accurate documentation. In addition, the worker’s expectations for upkeep of specific records are explained at the onset of placement, semi-annually at each monitoring visit and periodically in the agency newsletter.

When a child is initially placed in a CYFS foster home, the foster parents are given a folder to keep all of the child’s records.

At monitoring visits or whenever necessary, licensing workers will review this folder to ensure records are being maintained. Family workers and their supervisors are responsible for ensuring foster parents have all required information such as medical and educational information. If the foster parent feels they need more information, they need to talk with staff to determine what information would be helpful to assist the child in their care.

Foster parents need to ensure all paperwork is kept in a confidential place in the home. Some children will require medication logs, behavioral logs, and/or supervision plans in addition to the

other required documents.

Every child coming into CYFS foster care receives a life book. Life books are a way to help the child keep information about their childhood. They capture special moments or experiences for a foster child that may otherwise be lost. Counselors or casework staff may use life books to help the child make sense of their childhood experiences. CYFS foster parents are provided information on the importance of developing and maintaining life books for each child in their care. It is an expectation of foster parents to maintain and use the life books to track the child's time while in their home. Case work staff assist the foster parent in this responsibility by providing photos or other pieces of information for the child. CYFS staff also provide annual life book trainings to help the foster parent be creative and make the life book experience one that is not only useful but enjoyable to the child.

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

The foster parent receives training both at the PRIDE and CYFS licensure trainings on the importance of open communication about the child's progress or adjustment in the home. Additionally support group trainings and discussions with foster parent mentors, family support worker, and FCAB members reinforce the importance of the foster parent being open and honest about the child's experience, especially if it becomes necessary for the child to move from one home to another. Foster parents and staff learn from each other. This not only happens when they attend trainings or meeting together, it also happens when they work with each other to make sure the child is getting what is needed from the foster care experience.

Whenever children need to be moved from one home to another, information regarding the child will be shared with the new provider. When appropriate a Child Family Team Meeting between both families may be held in order to share pertinent information and plan how best to assist the child during the transition. When appropriate, the previous foster parents may assist in the move of the child to the new family. When appropriate, contact and/or visits may continue with the previous foster family.

Foster parents provide valuable information that is incorporated into the Matching Tool which is shared with the new foster parent. Foster parents also assist subsequent foster parents by maintaining good records and documentation in each child's folder that gets passed on.

**32. (17) Foster parents have the responsibility to provide care and services which are respectful of and responsive to the child's cultural needs and are supportive of the relationship between the child and his/her own family; 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 take action to address these issues.**

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions uses a family system, inclusive, trauma responsive, strength based or FITS approach to ensure the child's needs are met. This model ensures children and families are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. Using the FITS approach, helps the foster parents remember the importance of recognizing and supporting the child's cultural identity and biological family connections.

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions works extremely hard to keep foster parents informed of resources regarding multicultural issues. The PRIDE Module #7 Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity provides foster parents with training in this area. CYFS provides ongoing individual or group trainings to foster parents on these topics as well. When possible, foster parents and biological family members can work together to help sustain important cultural connections as well.

The CYFS Foster Parent Resource page on the web has several articles and links to assist caregivers with strengthening their understanding of diversity as it relates to the children they serve. If foster parents cannot participate in face-to-face trainings, CYFS also has several DVD and CD presentations available as well as training opportunities through the Foster Parent College.

Because each of our CYFS offices reside in different communities, our staff uses a local approach to collaborating with resources to assist both youth in care and the foster families who serve them. This includes seeking out resources which may help the foster parent support the child's cultural heritage. Foster parents are made aware of community resources and trainings addressing these issues through agency newsletters, our Facebook page and website. The list of available training materials is also on the DCFS website - [www.state.il.us/dcf](http://www.state.il.us/dcf).

Child and Family Team Meetings provide another opportunity for families to share cultural and religious information in regard to their children. Foster parents have an opportunity at these meetings to ask questions regarding cultural and religious information that will assist them in caring for the foster children. Foster parents are encouraged to seek opportunities to increase their cultural competence.

## Index

Advocacy	9, 10, 20, 26, 28, 29, 30, 44
Annual Case Review	15, 21, 23, 29, 41, 43
Appeal	15, 16, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30, 44
CASA	30, 44
Child and Family Team Meeting	19, 21, 25, 46
Confidentiality	7, 18, 19, 20, 29
Court	18, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 41, 43, 44
Critical Decision.....	15, 24
FITS	3, 13, 22, 21, 27, 42
Foster Caregiver Advisory Board	6, 10, 30, 34, 45
Grievance	3, 13, 27
Investigation	15–17, 25, 27, 32, 42–44
Monitoring	3, 7, 9, 15, 21, 29, 32, 33, 35, 38, 39, 41, 45
MEPA/IEPA.....	14
Notice of Change of Placement	15, 24, 44
Normalcy	3, 9
Orientation	7, 20
Parent Skills Training	36
Placement Packet	5, 10, 11, 14, 22, 45
Reimbursement	11–13, 33
Relative	8, 11, 13, 33, 39
Resource Page	4, 9, 11, 27, 40, 46
Respite	12, 37, 38, 39
Reunification	13–15, 23, 33
Service Plan	11, 14, 15, 19, 20, 44
Support Groups	4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 31, 33, 35, 38, 39, 41, 44, 45
Survey	6, 32, 35
Training	4, 6–10, 12, 15–16, 18, 20–23, 25, 27–38, 40–46
Town Call	6, 9
Visitation	12–14, 18–20, 25, 31, 38
Voluntary Hold	39