

Foster Parent Handbook

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I. INTRODUCTION

This Handbook is written to assist you, as a foster parent, in two distinct ways. First, it provides you with a concise reference of your legal rights and responsibilities as a foster parent. Second, it will assist you when you deal with the practical problems of managing a youth in Foster Care as well as in communicating effectively with the Office of Children and Family Services.

This Handbook is designed to assure effective communication between foster parents and agency staff so that the youth in care benefits from appropriate, efficient and coordinated services. Foster parents should find this Handbook a source of specific and detailed information. Its goal is to help foster parents understand significant agency policies, procedures and expectations.

Foster parents play a vital role in the planning process for youth. A permanent safe home is the goal for all youth in care. Foster Care is intended to provide youth with a temporary residence until they can be returned home, adopted, or live independently. Foster parents provide daily care, understanding and affection to their foster child and thus, promote healthy, physical and emotional growth. The gift that foster parents possess is the ability to open their homes to an unknown youth on a temporary basis, provide a loving and caring atmosphere, bond with the youth, yet be able to assist the youth in achieving independence.

Foster Care is unique, partly because it can be successful only when it is a team effort. Foster parents are vital members of the team, along with the Aftercare/Foster Care Counselor and the youngster's family.

Foster parenting encompasses a wide range of legal rights and responsibilities. These rights and responsibilities acknowledge the importance of your role in our agency. Your rights and responsibilities will be clearly explained in the pages that follow.

II. YOUTH IN FOSTER HOMES

An OCFS youth who is placed in Foster Care has unique needs. The youth are court-placed adolescents. Through various family courts, they have been adjudicated Juvenile Delinquents (JDs). All of these youth have experienced varying degrees of difficulty coping within their own communities. They have histories of school and behavioral problems.

The time, energy and interest that foster parents expend while these youth are in foster homes, often makes a significant difference in their lives. The results of foster parents' efforts with those youth are not always immediately apparent. Sometimes it is not until years later that the impact foster parents have on a youth's life can be assessed.

III. CERTIFICATION OF FOSTER HOMES

In order for foster parents to participate in the OCFS Foster Care Program, they must agree to become a certified foster home. The certification process consists of the following steps:

- A. **APPLICATION:** An application may be obtained by requesting one from the OCFS Aftercare/Foster Care office nearest you or by attending an initial orientation meeting. At this orientation, an overview of the Office of Children and Family Services is presented and an explanation of the OCFS Foster Care Program is given. There is also ample time for questions from the participants. (See pages 25 and 26 for a list of Foster Care/Aftercare offices.)
- B. **STATE CENTRAL REGISTER CLEARANCE:** All prospective foster families must be cleared through the New York State Central Register to determine if anyone living in the home has been the subject of an indicated report of child abuse or maltreatment.
- C. **FINGERPRINT SCREENING:** All prospective foster parents must receive a criminal history review after being fingerprinted. This applies to anyone living in the home over eighteen (18) years of age.
- D. **REFERENCES:** OCFS Foster Care requires three positive references that document your parenting skills and your character.
- E. **PHYSICAL:** Prospective foster parents are required to have a pre-certification physical. The Office of Children and Family Services does not assume the responsibility for the cost of this examination.
- F. **FOSTER CARE HOME STUDY:** This is a written report, which is compiled after, an OCFS staff person conducts a home study visit to your home. The home study includes information about the prospective foster family and relationships between family members, information about the home itself and the neighborhood, financial data, health and safety issues and the interviewer's impressions and recommendations. The home must meet OCFS guidelines regarding physical space and furnishings.
- G. **PLACEMENT AGREEMENT:** This document outlines the responsibilities of both the foster parents and OCFS. Both foster parents must sign this document. A copy is retained by the foster parents and by the Office of Children and Family Services.
- H. **SECURITY AND STORAGE OF FIREARMS STATEMENT:** A signed statement regarding the secure storage of firearms and ammunition kept in the foster home.

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I. **ALL OCFS FOSTER HOMES ARE CERTIFIED ON A YEARLY BASIS:** Recertification ensures that proper health and safety standards are still to be maintained and that required training has been completed. The home study is updated at this time. The agency keeps a record of each approved foster home. Information kept in your record includes:

- Your Application
- Criminal History Clearance
- State Central Register Clearance Form
- Home Study Report
- Medical Reports
- Personal References
- Correspondence between OCFS and your family
- A summary of each annual evaluation of your home
- A physical description of your home, including how space is allocated.

Other information may be added to your record. For instance, if at any point a youth is removed from your home because of a decision made by the agency or at your request, all facts pertaining to the situation would be recorded.

J. **INVOLVEMENT WITH OTHER FOSTER CARE AGENCIES:** As long as your OCFS Foster Care certificate is in effect, other agencies wishing to place Foster Care youth in your home may do so by securing written permission from OCFS on a case-by-case basis prior to the placement of any youth. It is your responsibility to notify the Foster Care office immediately regarding a request by any other agency to place youth in your home at any time during certification with OCFS.

K. **TRAINING OF FOSTER PARENTS:** Once your home has been certified, the Office of Children and Family Services is responsible for providing orientation and access to training opportunities to help you meet the needs of your foster youth. Certified foster parents must complete ten hours of training during their first year and five hours a year thereafter. Failure to complete required training will result in decertification.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Office of Children and Family Services Responsibilities (per placement agreement)

1. OCFS is responsible for the overall planning and case management for each youth.
2. The Counselor will contact the youth and foster home according to the Aftercare Standards of Supervision.
3. Board payments will be made on a bi-weekly basis

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4. OCFS is responsible for all medical and dental needs, in line with the New York State medical fee schedule.
 5. OCFS is responsible for clothing needs, to the maximum allowable in the clothing schedule.
 6. With prior approval, OCFS will assume responsibility for certain special needs as they occur.
 7. Legal responsibility for the youth remains with OCFS.
 8. OCFS will provide the foster parents with all pertinent information concerning youth placed in their home.
 9. OCFS will provide training opportunities for its foster parents.
 10. OCFS will review and evaluate each foster home on an annual basis.
 11. In those situations where OCFS plans to remove a youth without the consent of the foster parents, OCFS will provide the foster parents at least ten days written notice. In those instances where there are allegations of child abuse, a child must be removed immediately.
 12. OCFS will remove a youth from the home, at the request of foster parents or the youth, within 48 hours whenever possible, but in no case will the removal take more than 10 days.
 13. OCFS will provide in writing to each foster home all relevant Foster Care rules, regulations, guidelines, procedures and any amendments or changes to such written material.
 14. OCFS will develop a treatment plan for each youth in Foster Care and will assist in the referral of the youth to clinical resources to meet the treatment plan
- B. Foster Parent Responsibilities (per Placement Agreement)
1. Maintain the foster home in conformance with the rules and regulations of the Office of Children and Family Services.
 2. Accept only youth placed by OCFS in your home unless a written exception is granted by appropriate OCFS staff.
 3. Provide the day-to-day care of youth placed in your foster home, including adequate diet, clothing and sleeping accommodations.
 4. Safeguard youth's health and arrange for regular medical and dental examinations and needed treatments.

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5. Support the youth's professed religion.
6. Keep the youth's clothing clean and in proper repair.
7. Submit a completed "Statement of Care Provided" (Form OCFS-2027) on a bi-weekly basis.
8. Provide receipts for all clothing purchases and return to OCFS any part of the clothing advance check not used for that purpose.
9. Provide each youth with a minimum allowance of \$7.00 per week from the board payments.
10. Maintain access to telephone service at all times.
11. Report immediately to the Counselor assigned to your home any unauthorized absence, commission of a crime, serious illness or serious incident involving a youth placed in your home by OCFS.
12. Attend training sessions as agreed upon by the foster parent organization and the Office of Children and Family Services.
13. Notify OCFS of all changes in household, such as family composition, illness, employment, address and telephone number.
14. Attend necessary meetings with teachers and/or other school authorities.
15. Treat materials relating to the youth and shared with you by OCFS as confidential.
16. Accept youth placed in your home as a member of the household.
17. Notify the Office of Children and Family Services promptly and cooperate in the development of alternative plans for Foster Care youth whom you are unable to continue to provide for in your home. (It is expected that OCFS will be provided at least 48 hours to make alternative arrangements for care.)
18. Support each youth's program and treatment plan.

V. RIGHTS OF FOSTER PARENTS

The rights of foster parents are:

1. To be given pertinent information on each youth who is to be placed in their home.

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2. To receive an explanation of all agency policies and procedures regarding foster parenting.
3. To receive training from the agency in topics related to foster parenting.
4. To be provided ongoing supervision and assistance from an assigned OCFS worker.
5. To be offered help promptly, if requested, for any special needs or crisis.
6. To have complaints and disagreements listened to and responded to by the agency.

VI. FOSTER PARENTS ORIENTATION

The Orientation Program is an introduction to the Foster Care Program for all foster parents. It is mandatory that all foster parents complete an orientation if they wish to be certified as foster parents with the Office of Children and Family Services. It is an informational session, which is very beneficial to both the Foster Care Program and the individuals who are to become foster parents.

VII. FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATIONS

Foster parents should be aware that there are a variety of local, state and national organizations which provide support to foster parents. Two such organizations are the New York State Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents and the National Foster Parent Association. Some offices have their own Foster Parent Associations.

Western New York Foster Parent Association
c/o Richard Jones
405 Ellicott Square Building
295 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14203

NYC Foster Parent Association
c/o Charles Cooper
Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building
163 West 125th Street
New York, NY 10027

VIII. FOSTER CARE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Division of Rehabilitative Services has oversight responsibility for the Foster Care Program within the Office of Children and Family Services. The Foster Care Program is directly administered by the Bureau of Juvenile Aftercare Services. Direct administration is provided by local Foster Care Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisors. Case management is provided by a Youth Division Counselor assigned to the Aftercare or Foster Care team.

IX. ROLE OF FOSTER CARE SUPERVISOR OR AFTERCARE SUPERVISOR

1. Recruitment
2. Evaluation, certification and recertification of foster homes
3. Foster parent orientation and training
4. Finding appropriate foster parents based upon needs of youth and available resources.
5. Maintenance of accurate records and files on foster parents and homes
6. Supervision of staff
7. Evaluating any pre-placement visit (s)
8. Coordinating the placement of the youth in the foster home.

X. FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT PROCEDURES

If a youth is identified to be in need of Foster Care, the following steps occur:

1. The facility, court or Aftercare Counselor initiates a referral to the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor.
2. The youth will be interviewed by the Foster Care Supervisor or designee.
3. Pre-placement visit(s) with the foster parents and the youth will be arranged by the Aftercare/Foster Care staff. This is highly recommended in order to make an appropriate match between the youth and the foster home.
4. A final decision is made and placement is arranged after consultation with foster parent.

XI. ROLE OF THE AFTERCARE/FOSTER CARE COUNSELOR

The Youth Division Counselor assigned provides case management services for youth in Foster Care. The Aftercare/Foster Care Counselor is responsible for:

1. Providing ongoing case management support services to youth and foster parents.
2. Assessing the youth's special needs and designing a treatment plan, insuring that treatment is ongoing.

3. Arranging and coordinating school placement.
4. Maintaining regular contact with school personnel and foster parents regarding youth's adjustment.
5. Responding to crisis or emergency situations in a timely manner.
6. Compiling and writing all required reports.
7. Arranging home visits with natural parents in accordance with agency policy.
8. Arranging transportation for youth on home visits.
9. Requesting extensions of placement for court placed youth in accordance with OCFS policy and procedures.
10. Developing and implementing permanency and release plans.

XII. GUIDELINES

1. ALLOWANCE

Each youth in care is to receive a minimum allowance of \$7.00 per week. Allowances are included in boarding care checks on a bi-weekly basis. It is your responsibility to give youth his/her allowance. We do not encourage the withholding of the youth's allowance as a disciplinary method. However, if you wish to temporarily withhold the youth's allowance, you need to inform the youth's Aftercare/Foster Care Counselor. This will reduce the chance of the youth misinterpreting your intentions. You may not permanently withhold a youth's allowance, as the fund must go to the youth or be returned to OCFS.

Youth are not expected to provide for their own personal care items i.e., (soap, shampoo, toothpaste, sanitary napkins, haircuts, from their allowance). OCFS will provide you with a notebook to record the distribution of allowances in your home. You are responsible for maintaining these records accurately and staff may periodically review your records.

2. ALTERNATIVE SUPERVISION

It is recognized that, as foster parents, you may need time off from caring for an extended family. Whether you need just a few hours or a few days, you are expected to maintain a high level of care and supervision for the youth in your home. OCFS must approve all alternative living or supervision arrangements for OCFS youth prior to the finalization of your plans. If you plan to be away overnight or for a few days, you must notify the

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youth's counselor. In the event of an emergency that requires your absence from the home, you must contact the Counselor, immediately.

As foster parents, you are responsible for the daily care and supervision of youth placed in your home. However, youth in your home are ultimately the responsibility of OCFS. If you anticipate being unable to provide this care and supervision, notify the Counselor immediately so OCFS can make arrangements for the foster youth in your absence.

Please remember that Foster Care youth are not to be left in your home unsupervised overnight.

Foster Care youth may be involved in daily family chores, but they are not to be viewed as a "live-in" baby sitter nor are they expected to supervise other children in the home during your absence.

3. BANK ACCOUNTS

Foster parents should encourage youth to open bank accounts, especially if they are employed. Bank accounts must be in the youth's name only.

4. BOARDING RATES

The rate for OCFS foster home care is based on a three-level system. The actual rate paid will be determined by the youth's needs and the training level of the foster parents. All level "A" foster parents receive the same per diem rate. Level "B" foster parents receive a higher per diem rate than level "A" foster parents. Level "C" is for exceptional needs and rates are individually negotiated within a given range.

Whenever possible, it will be the objective of OCFS to provide the necessary guidance and training to elevate the foster families to the "B" level. Level upgrading is based on training completed and/or evaluation and assessment of foster parents' skill level in consultation with the Counselor. Recommendations for advancement require documentation.

The Counselor works closely with foster parents to help them develop the skills and experience necessary to elevate them to higher levels of care. The Counselor is responsible for measuring the foster parents' skills and recommending the appropriate level of care.

Outlined below are the services to be provided by the foster parents as well as the characteristics of youth who will require services.

Level "A" – Entry Level

At the "A" level, foster parents are expected to provide basic physical care including regular, well balanced meals, a well maintained home and clothing that is clean and in good condition. The "A" level is the entry level for all foster parents who are being certified by OCFS for the first time.

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The foster parents should develop a cooperative relationship with OCFS, be available for case conferences, attend in-service training and cooperate in arranging for contact with a youth's natural family as appropriate.

Level "B" – Special Skills

Upon completion of a successful evaluation, OCFS may, at their discretion, authorize advancement of foster parents to a higher level. Foster parents can be advanced from level "A" to level "B" with the recommendation of the Counselor and approval of the Director of the Bureau of Juvenile Aftercare Services based upon quality of care provided. Level advancement is generally recommended after at least six months of successful performance at the existing level and/or completion of training requirements.

Level "C" – Criteria

Level "C" youth have the greatest level of need. The foster parents must interact with physicians, nurses, social workers, psychologists, teachers and other professionals in delivering the youth's service plan and must be able to accept assistance and guidance in caring for the youth. The foster parents should have some experience dealing with problem behaviors and special needs through past training and experience (i.e.; nursing, special education, childcare, etc.) or through the completion of, or current participation in a training class provided by OCFS. Advancement to and payments at the "C" level also requires administrative approval.

The boarding rate payments are not always made on a specific date. Foster parents should not be financially dependent on Foster Care payments as a primary means of family support.

5. CLOTHING ALLOWANCE

Basic Wardrobe

If needed, OCFS will provide an initial allowance. At the time of placement, an amount will be allocated for each youth so that the Counselor and/or the foster parents can purchase articles of clothing. This is a one-time clothing voucher provided for the youth at the time of their initial placement in Foster Care.

If less than the allocated amount is required at the time of placement, the remainder may be held in reserve for the youth so that seasonal clothing can be purchased as necessary.

SAMPLE BASIC WARDROBE – ADOLESCENT BOYS AND GIRLS

Year Round

Underwear	4 sets
Socks	4 pairs
Pajamas	2 pairs
Bathrobe	1 each

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Shoes or Sneakers	2 pairs
Bedroom Slippers	1 pair
Rainwear	Raincoat (hat, boots)
Shirts or Blouses	4 each
Pants or Jeans	4 each
Skirts or Dresses	4 each
Sweaters	2 each

Summer

Light Jacket	1 each
Shorts	2 each
Swimsuit	1 each

Winter

Heavy Jacket	1 each
Gloves	1 pair
Boots	1 pair

Clothing Replacement Allowance

A clothing replacement allowance will be available for each youth. Clothing replacement allowances are authorized by the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor. OCFS provides an initial clothing allowance at the time of placement and a replacement allowance yearly, which is issued in three installments during the months of April, August and December.

The Office of Children and Family Services may allocate an additional amount per youth to be included in the December clothing allowance.

The initial clothing allowance purchases clothing for a youth in Foster Care through a purchase request for a specific store. Usually, it is issued for a store that is agreeable and convenient for you and the youth. The Foster Care Supervisor will inform you of which stores will accept New York State vouchers. Purchase requests will be given or mailed to you after the youth is placed. Shopping with the youth is often an excellent opportunity to get to know him/her better and to begin to establish a relationship with him/her. While the youth is generally allowed to choose his/her own clothing, you, as a foster parent, should exercise your experience and good judgement as an adult and a parent in guiding the youth in choosing reasonably priced and appropriate clothing.

When clothing is purchased, it is the store's responsibility to supply the foster parents with a receipt, which must be submitted to the Foster Care Counselor. OCFS cannot reimburse the store for your purchases without the receipts.

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After the youth is in care for a period of time, the foster parents will receive a check to purchase the youth's clothing. Foster parents are then free to purchase the youth's clothing at the store(s) of your choice. No youth should be allowed to purchase clothing unless accompanied by the foster parents or an OCFS staff. The youth should not be given money or a voucher to purchase clothing on his/her own. After purchasing clothing, all receipts must be returned with the Clothing Receipts Report to the Foster Care Supervisor. If you do not spend the entire clothing check, the unused portion must also be returned to OCFS.

Clothing checks are to be used for purchasing clothing for Foster Care youth only. Accessories such as purses, jewelry, wallets, etc. are not clothing and will not be paid for by OCFS. Please do not purchase luxury items such as designer jeans, leather coats, etc. If you are unsure as to whether or not items are appropriate, please discuss it with the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor.

If a youth is in need of a special item of clothing, such as prom attire, please discuss it with the Foster Care Counselor well in advance so that they may take the necessary steps to secure permission to purchase the item. Permission is usually granted, but it is important that the request be made well ahead of the event.

You are ultimately responsible for the clothing check/voucher being appropriately spent and the receipts being returned to the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor within the designated timeframe. **CLOTHING TAGS ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE AS RECEIPTS.**

If you lose your receipts, please be aware that this places your foster youth's next clothing check in jeopardy. There is also a possibility any unreceipted amount may be deducted from your next boarding care check.

6. COMPLAINTS AND CHILD ABUSE

OCFS sometimes receives complaints regarding a foster family or foster youth. These may come from the youth, natural parents, neighbors or community agencies. For everyone's protection, OCFS is mandated to investigate these complaints to determine their validity and for the protection of the youth, your family and the community. Complaints, by law, must be investigated. It may also be necessary to remove the youth from your home upon receipt of the complaint. If an allegation of child abuse is founded, youth foster home will be closed.

Occasionally, natural parents, neighbors or a community agency will register a complaint against a foster family with the Child Abuse Hotline. In the event that this occurs, OCFS staff will immediately follow through on investigating the incident. It is mandated by law that complaints received by the Child Abuse Hotline must be investigated. It is essential that open communication between the Counselor, foster parents and any other investigative person be maintained until the matter is resolved. If you are involved in a child abuse investigation, remain calm, be courteous, get the name and phone number of the person who contacted you. Advise them you will cooperate, but that they need to contact the office of Children and Family Services prior to your sharing any information with them.

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Should you have knowledge of any acts of abuse or maltreatment against your foster child, you are encouraged to report them to the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-635-1522 and to the Counselor as soon as possible.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY

The Counselor will share information and reports with you concerning the Foster Care youth and his/her family to help you in your role and relationship with the youth. All such information is, by law, confidential and may not be divulged to family, friends, neighbors or the media. Foster parents should use their own discretion when determining how much and what type of information to share with their own children regarding the foster youth living in the home.

8. CONTRACEPTION, VENEREAL DISEASE AND SEXUALITY

An effort should be made to assure that youth in Foster Care who request or have the need for health care services in the area of contraception, venereal disease and sexuality are provided with or have the services made available to them. Parental permission is not required to obtain these services. Contraceptive services may be made available to both male and female youth in care.

9. DAMAGE CLAIMS

Damage to foster parents' personal property by the OCFS youth in their care may be reimbursable up to \$350.00 through the following steps:

- a. Inform your Counselor of the damage immediately so that he/she may come out to your home to investigate and record the claim. If possible, please do not clean up or repair the damage before the Counselor can assess it. It is advisable to take photographs of the damage.
- b. A report substantiating and documenting the claim and requesting reimbursement is then submitted by the Counselor to the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor who will process the claim.
- c. The report, when approved, will be submitted to the OCFS Legal Unit for review.
- d. The Legal Unit they forward the claim to the Commissioner of OCFS for signature.
- e. After signing, the Commissioner sends the claim to the Finance Unit for processing.
- f. The Finance Unit submits the claim to Audit and Control for final approval and payment.
- g. All damages and the value of stolen items or repairs must be documented.
- h. OCFS is not responsible for foster parents' negligence.

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- i. Any theft, the value of which exceeds \$25.00 should be reported to the local police.

In the event the foster youth is involved, legal actions may be pursued against him/her. All claims are subject to investigation and may or may not be approved.

10. DISCIPLINE

Discipline of the Foster Care youth within the foster home is left to the discretion of the foster parents. **HOWEVER, UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD FOSTER PARENTS EVER STRIKE A YOUTH. CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IS NOT ALLOWED.**

11. DRIVING

The youth's natural parents or a Family Court Judge are the only ones permitted to sign the necessary papers for a youth to obtain a learner's permit or a driver's license. Foster parents are not permitted to sign these papers under any circumstances. OCFS strongly discourages the driving of foster parents' vehicles by OCFS Foster Care youth. Foster parents who allow licensed youth to drive their vehicles do so at their own risk and must guarantee that the youth is adequately insured.

12. EMERGENCY AND CRISIS SITUATIONS

If an emergency or a crisis situation with the youth in your care occurs during normal business hours (Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.), you should contact the Counselor or his/her supervisor. Since many emergencies occur during other than business hours, OCFS maintains a 24-hour Central Communications Unit (C.C.U.) (1-800-848-4812). If you should have to contact CCU, give the staff your name, the youth's name, the Counselor's name, your phone number, and briefly state the nature of the problem. The staff will then contact the appropriate person, who will return your call as soon as possible. If you are not contacted within a reasonable length of time, phone CCU again.

You should not hesitate to call when you encounter any situation that you are uncertain about.

The Counselor or CCU must be contacted in the event of serious or critical circumstances such as:

- a. Any serious medical problem that requires either emergency hospital services or hospitalization.
- b. Youth's arrest or involvement in criminal behavior in the community.
- c. A family crisis in which foster parents have to remain out of the home overnight.

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- d. Explosive acting-out behavior either in the home, in the school, or in the community by the Foster Care youth.
- e. Drug involvement.
- f. Youth runs away.
- g. Youth remains out of the foster home for 2 hours beyond the curfew agreed upon by the foster parents, youth and Counselor.
- h. Any incidents that require the use of a spill kit.

13. FIREARMS

The Office of Children and Family Services, as a matter of policy, prohibits the carrying or storing of firearms and ammunition in areas or programs serving OCFS youth. This policy is extended to foster parents and foster homes. Exceptions to this policy are granted on an individual basis.

OCFS recognizes that foster parents are not OCFS employees and foster homes are not OCFS property and that a number of foster parents, for personal and professional reasons, may own firearms and ammunition. To balance OCFS' responsibility to provide a safe and healthy environment for youth in it's custody with the rights of foster parents, OCFS has developed a specific policy and procedures for firearms and ammunition.

The following is a summary of the policy:

- a. There shall be no loaded firearms in OCFS foster homes
- b. All firearms in the homes of OCFS foster parents must be kept in areas not accessible to the OCFS foster youth, securely locked, and inoperable (such as the trigger locked).
- c. Ammunition must be stored separate and apart from firearms.
- d. Ammunition and handguns must be under lock and key.

The written request shall include the reason for the exception and the proposed arrangements for storing the firearms and ammunition.

14. FIRE SAFETY

All foster homes certified by OCFS are required to have operating smoke detectors. You should acquaint the youth in your care with all exits in your home and what to do in case of a fire. It is strongly recommended that both day and night fire drills be conducted in your home so that everyone in your family will know what to do in the event of an emergency. We also strongly recommend that your home be equipped with workable fire extinguishers.

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In the event that you do experience a fire in your home, please notify the Counselor immediately.

15. FOSTER CARE PAYMENTS

The Statement of Care Provided form (OCFS-2027) is the document which foster parents fill out bi-weekly to certify that they had youth in their care during that period of time. It is verified by the Counselor and forwarded to the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor and then to the Office of Children and Family Services Central Office for processing.

The Statement of Care Provided form is ESSENTIAL to you receiving your boarding care check. The initial boarding care check, after a youth is placed in your home, generally takes four to six weeks. Although all of the necessary documents for you to receive payment are processed in the local office, checks are issued by the Office of the State Comptroller in Albany. The boarding care check is for room and board, personal care items, household furnishings, normal recreational activities, transportation, youth's allowance and minor damages.

It is OCFS policy that your home must be certified and a Certificate to Board issued prior to you being eligible to receive payment.

16. HOME VISITS

Visits between foster youth and their natural family are encouraged and are arranged by the Counselor or Supervisor. It is the responsibility of the Counselor to contact the natural family regarding the visit, to discuss conditions of the visit with the youth and the natural parents, and, after the visit, to discuss how the visit went. The Counselor should share with the foster parents the visiting plan and travel arrangements for the youth and the dates and times of departure and arrival back to the foster home. The Counselor should also discuss with you feedback he/she has received on the visit. You should share with the Counselor your observations of the youth's behavior and attitudes before and after the visit. As the people directly involved with the youth 24 hours a day, you are in a better position than anyone to observe the effects of home visits on foster youth.

The cost of transportation for home visits (train fare, bus tickets, etc.) may be assumed by OCFS. The Counselor is responsible for making sure the youth has round trip bus transportation for the visit. It may, at times, be necessary for you to provide transportation to the bus/train station, but you are not required to transport youth to his/her home.

17. INCOME TAX

Foster youth in your home are not considered as a deduction on your income tax. Foster parents are not required to list Foster Care payments as income. Foster Care payments are considered reimbursement of expenses and not income. For specific details, see Internal Revenue Services Publication #17.

18. LEAVING PLACEMENT

There are a number of reasons why a youth leaves care. Whenever a youth leaves care, it is with the knowledge and consent of the agency. Some of the reasons for leaving placement are:

- a. **Going Home:** A youth is discharged from Foster Care to go back to his/her natural home.
- b. **Independent Living:** A youth has acquired the skills to live on his/her own.
- c. **Going to a Facility:** A youth requires more structure than the Foster Care Program can provide and placement in a facility or group home is more appropriate.
- d. **Another Family Foster Care Placement:** A youth moves from one foster home to another for a number of reasons. In some cases, foster parents ask to have a particular youth removed from their home for various reasons. It is the Counselor's responsibility to respond to this request in a timely manner.

The decision to move a youth from a foster home to another placement (group home, facility, Independent Living) is one which is made carefully. Although the ultimate decision is the Counselor's, your input, understanding and cooperation are essential. You should be fully informed as to the reasons for the move. All transfers must be accomplished as smoothly as possible. While foster parents observations and input are of great value, the Office of Children and Family Services may not delegate the ultimate responsibility for case decision. Many youth leave Foster Care because you have helped them to be ready to go home or to Independent Living.

19. MEDICAL AND DENTAL

As a foster parent, you are responsible for arranging and ensuring that the youth in your care are receiving appropriate and adequate routine medical and dental care. If there is no evidence that a youth has received regular medical and dental care, it is your responsibility to arrange for both a physical and a dental exam for your foster youth within thirty days of placement in your home. Generally, a youth coming into Foster Care from an OCFS facility should have received routine medical and dental care. Your foster youth's health needs should be discussed with the Counselor prior to placement in your home.

Upon certification, foster parents receive an ID card that allows you to obtain medical and dental treatment for youth in your home. Remember, in the event of medical emergencies, you must notify OCFS staff immediately or contact the hotline after hours.

You may take the youth to a doctor/dentist of your own choice. However, prior to treatment, it is your responsibility to inform the doctor/dentist that the youth is a ward of the state and OCFS only pays at the Medicaid rate.

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Purchase requests or vouchers are used for any medical visits for youth in your care. All charges must be at the Medicaid rate and submitted to your Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor for payment.

If you have difficulty locating a doctor, dentist or other health provider who accepts Medicaid, ask your Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor for assistance.

If your foster youth should need eyeglasses, they can be obtained with a purchase request or voucher. It is important to locate an optometrist or vision center that accepts Medicaid.

OCFS cannot assume medical, dental or optical fees, which exceed the Medicaid rates. Therefore, if a youth requires more than routine medical services, excluding emergencies, you **MUST** contact the Supervisor. Foster parents should not hesitate to seek emergency medical services, but should contact the Counselor as soon as possible. If extensive dental work is needed, prior approval is necessary.

20. PRESCRIPTIONS

When your foster child needs a prescription drug, you should obtain it at your local drug store using a purchase request or voucher, which can be obtained from the Aftercare/Foster Care Counselor.

21. MOVING

In the event that foster parents decide to move, they must notify the Counselor of their intentions as soon as possible. If the move necessitates planning other living arrangements for the youth, the more time OCFS has to plan, the smoother the transition will be.

22. NATURAL PARENTS

It is important to know that your foster youth's natural parents have rights regarding their children who are in Foster Care. These rights include:

- a. To help make the plans for their youth in placement
- b. To be notified as soon as possible of any serious medical emergency or major treatment given without parental consent.
- c. To visit their children and develop a visiting plan with the Counselor.
- d. To be represented by a lawyer in any court action concerning their children or affecting their parental rights.
- e. To give consent for medical care, hospitalization, marriage, release information, driver's permits and out of state travel.

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The Counselor has a variety of responsibilities for Foster Care youth, foster parents and natural families.

Guidelines for contact between the foster parents and the youth's natural parents are established by the Counselor and the foster parents on an individualized basis and in conformation with OCFS visitation policies.

23. PREGNANCY

In the event that a Foster Care youth in your care becomes pregnant, you must notify the Counselor immediately. Once the pregnancy is medically verified, certain information will be provided to the youth by OCFS. It is the responsibility of the Counselor to notify the Director of the Bureau of Juvenile Aftercare Services of the pregnancy. In all cases:

- a. The girl's right to privacy shall be maintained and OCFS' confidentiality provisions provided.
- b. The girl shall be referred to a licensed physician or other appropriate licensed health care provider who shall be responsible for the girl during pregnancy.
- c. The girl shall receive counseling from the Counselor related to her pregnancy and the options available to her. She should be strongly encouraged to consult with an outside agency that provides counseling and supportive services so as to be apprised of all possible options available to her prior to making any decisions regarding the pregnancy. This counseling should be documented in the youth's case file.

If there is a question about a girl's mental competence to make an informed choice regarding her options, she must be referred to a mental health specialist for evaluation. If it is determined she is competent, the girl has the right to make her own decision without the consent of or notice to her natural parents. If it is determined the girl is not competent, the consent, with regard to the options to be followed must be obtained from the natural parents or legal guardian. It is the girl's choice whether or not her natural parents or guardian are informed of the pregnancy.

- d. The girl must be interviewed by her OCFS Counselor to ensure that her right to make an informed decision, free from pressure or coercion, has been maintained and that appropriate consultations with the outside counseling agency and appropriate mental health specialist, if necessary, have been held. The Counselor is responsible for making the necessary arrangements to ensure that these steps are followed as quickly as possible.

The issues around pregnancy of youth in Foster Care are often very sensitive and emotionally charged. The legality of the mandated procedures is constantly scrutinized, evaluated and subject to change. However, foster parents are often willing to extend their home to the young woman in their care and her infant. If that decision is made, after careful discussion and planning between the foster parent and the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor, arrangements can be made for services and

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provisions for the needs of the infant through the County Department of Social Services or the Administration for Children Services.

24. PRIVACY

The Office of Children and Family Services policies and regulations guarantee the following privacy rights of foster children and youth:

- a. Mail: A youth in care has an unrestricted right within the legal limits of the law to send or receive mail without prior censorship or prior reading.
- b. Telephone: A youth has the right to receive or refuse any or all calls made to him/her during reasonable hours, which are determined by the foster parents. Except at the youth's request, neither agency staff nor foster parents are to listen in on a youth's phone conversation.
- c. Access to Attorney or Clergy: Nothing is to be done that might impede a youth's access to his/her attorney or clergyman.
- d. Searches: Searches of a youth's property may be made only when there is reasonable cause to suspect that the youth has in his/her possession:
 - (1) An item that belongs to someone else.
 - (2) An item that is a crime or offense to possess.
 - (3) An article that the agency or foster parents may consider to be dangerous or harmful.

These provisions apply unless a condition in a court order states otherwise.

25. RELIGION

Youth may attend religious services with foster families. However, youth should be able to pursue the religion of their choice and the foster parents should encourage and provide them with the opportunity to do so.

26. AWOLs

If a youth runs away from your home, you must notify the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor immediately. If the youth runs away after 5:00pm weekdays or on a weekend or holiday, you must notify the OCFS Central Communications Unit (1-800-848-4812).

The Counselor will attempt to contact the youth's natural parents and every effort will be made to locate the youth. While the youth is AWOL, if he/she returns to your home, you must notify the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor or Counselor immediately. It does not necessarily mean the youth will be removed from your home, these decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

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Boarding care payments may be made for the days when youth are on AWOL status but not beyond seven days.

27. SCHOOL

The Counselor and foster parent are responsible for registering a youth in school. Foster parents are responsible for the youth's attendance at school and are encouraged to attend school conferences and to be involved in the youth's overall academic activities.

The Counselor and foster parents should work closely with school personnel to monitor the youth's educational adjustment. The Counselor and foster parents should work closely together to ensure that the educational experience is a beneficial one.

28. SELF-PROTECTION

The Foster Care Program makes every attempt to screen youth identified to need Foster Care to ensure the safety of the foster family and the community. The youth that we serve often have emotional problems and poor impulse control and, thus, may react to stressful situations in an inappropriate fashion. As much as possible, the Counselor will share with the foster parents all information and/or concerns that they have regarding particular youth prior to placement.

If the foster parents perceive themselves to be in danger as a result of an aggressive act by a Foster Care youth, they have the right to protect themselves from physical harm. However, in an attempt to protect themselves, they should take every reasonable precaution to not inflict any physical harm on the youth. Foster parents may summon help, such as the police, if they feel they cannot control the youth during a violent, physical outburst. In the event that a youth should strike you or harm you physically, you have a right to file charges against the youth with the police.

Any physical confrontation between a foster youth and a foster parent is a critical incident and must be reported to the Counselor and/or the Central Communications Unit (1-800-848-4812) as soon as it is possible to do so.

29. SOCIAL SECURITY PAYMENTS

If a youth receives Social Security payments when he/she enters Foster Care, the youth's home county becomes the payee and the money is used to cover the cost of his/her care.

30. SPECIAL NEEDS

The Office of Children and Family Services is proud of our youth who successfully participate in school and community activities. We want you to encourage the youth in your care to enjoy these activities, therefore, OCFS will pay for special needs items. Purchase of any special need items must be approved by OCFS staff.

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If the cost of an item exceeds \$50.00, the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor and the Director of the Bureau of Juvenile Aftercare Services must be contacted for approval. The following items are generally considered special needs; school books (deposits on books or purchases) that the school district does not provide, graduation cap and gown, school jewelry, pictures, transportation (in special circumstances), yearbooks, prom attire, field trips, attire for religious occasions, athletic uniforms and equipment, musical instruments, dancing, or art lessons.

Approval is generally granted for the purchase of these items. However, the granting of approval may take several days. Foster parents can help expedite matters by discussing the youth's request as early as possible with the Counselor. You can also encourage the youth to gather the necessary documentation as quickly as possible.

31. STATEMENT OF CARE FORMS

State of Care forms are provided to you by the Foster Care Clerk along with a schedule of when to mail the forms. It is your responsibility to complete the forms for the youth in your care and return them to the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor on the last day of each pay period. Failure to mail the forms on the specified date will result in a lengthy delay of your boarding care check. A boarding care check cannot be processed without the Statement of Care form being received on time. A calendar will be provided to foster parents indicating due dates.

32. TELEPHONE CALLS

All foster homes must be equipped with working telephones to receive incoming calls and to make outgoing calls. The Office of Children and Family Services cannot be held responsible and will not reimburse long distance or local calls made by Foster Care youth and charged to your phone. It is, therefore, in your best interest to establish guidelines for the use of the telephone with the youth in your care immediately. Don't be afraid to set rules such as:

- a. The youth asking permission to use the phone.
- b. The youth informing you as to the type of call being made.
- c. Reminding the youth that he/she has to pay for any long distance calls he/she makes and ask them to sign a contract to that effect.
- d. Keeping a record of the calls the youth makes.
- e. Don't be afraid to say "no" if you think the request is inappropriate.
- f. Limit the amount of time spent on the phone.

Share with the Counselor and the Aftercare/Foster Care Supervisor the guidelines you have established with the youth regarding use of the phone and discuss any problems you may be experiencing.

33. TRANSPORTATION OF INFANTS AND CHILDREN

Section 1229-C of the Vehicle and Traffic Law states that no person shall operate a motor vehicle registered in the State, nor shall the owner knowingly permit a passenger motor vehicle to be operated unless EACH passenger under the age of four is restrained in a specially designed detachable or removable seat which meets the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards. A passenger over the age of four, but under the age of five, must be restrained in such a seat or by a safety belt approved by the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles.

A violation of the infant restraint provision is punishable by a civil fine of not more than \$25.00

Any foster parent who has a young woman in their care with an infant, or a child under the age of five, is responsible for compliance with this law. If you transport the young woman and her infant, you must use an appropriate car seat.

The Office of Children and Family Services will not assume responsibility for any fine you might incur if you are not in compliance with the law.

34. TRIPS

Any overnight trip involving the youth in your care must be approved by the Counselor. Youth in OCFS custody and care are not allowed to leave the State without prior approval.

If you are planning a trip out of the State that involves the youth in your care, discuss your plans with the Counselor as soon as possible so that necessary permission can be secured or appropriate arrangements can be made for the youth during your absence.

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PROCEDURE TITLE DISCIPLINE	EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/19/94	PROCEDURE NO.
SUPPORTING AGENCY POLICY: FOSTER PARENT HANDBOOK	POLICY NO. PAGE 10	APPROVED BY: <i>Georgette E. Furey</i>
SELF ASSESSMENT SECTION ITEM NO. PAGE 10		BUREAU DIRECTOR
ACA STANDARD (s) No:		

DISCIPLINE

POLICY/PROCEDURE

Foster Home Parents must be informed in writing that agency policy prohibits, at a minimum, corporal punishment of any kind, threats, derogatory remarks, or other verbal abuse directed toward the juvenile or his/her natural parents, deprivation of meals, deprivation of visits with natural parents without prior contact with the agency representative, and any unusual or unnecessary punishment.

PURPOSE OF POLICY/PROCEDURES

Discipline is an essential and positive educational process designed to help a child live usefully and cooperatively with others. It is an inherent part of his/her total training and preparation for meeting life experiences. The ultimate goal of discipline is a self-discipline intended to help the youth learn to successfully control and direct his/her impulses and responses to meet the expectations of society. It is designed to help a youth develop respect and understanding for himself and others and for rules and values of society. Another purpose of discipline is to enable a youth to develop a sense of responsibility for his/her own conduct and to help him/her accept and handle normal and difficult situations.

In a broader sense, discipline involves the total organization and every aspect of the youth's daily living. It is inherent in the process of socialization. Its function is to help the youth develop and accept the values and standards, and inner controls to meet these standards which represent socially acceptable patterns for adjustment. All youth require standards, controls, and limits set for them by the adult. It is important for youth to know what these limits are and what they can and cannot do. It is also essential for a youth to be helped to understand why these limits are necessary.

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PROCEDURE TITLE	EFFECTIVE DATE:	PROCEDURE NO.
DISCIPLINE	07/19/94	

Discipline in the narrow sense may indicate a corrective approach to more specific situations. In considering the question of discipline, it is important to remember that discipline is primarily based on the confidence and trust of the youth for the adult. Therefore, it is vital for the adult to be aware of his or her role and attitude pertaining to discipline. A youth must sense the interest and concern of the adult, and, at the same time, realize it is not the youth himself that is disapproved of, or disliked but that it is the behavior which is unacceptable. It is also important to be sensitive to the causes and purposes of a youth's individual behavior and the meaning of expressed behavior. Usually a youth's pattern of behavior is related to past experiences.

Related Issues

Section 470-9 of Chapter 2 of Regulations of the NYS Department of Social Services says:

Deprivation of meals, snacks, mail or visits by family as methods of discipline are prohibited.

Room isolation as a method of discipline is prohibited.

Corporal punishment is prohibited

Solitary confinement is prohibited.

Discipline shall be prescribed, administered and supervised only by adults. Such responsibility shall never be delegated to children.

Praise, reassurance and recognition are simple tools that are effective in discipline. Positive approaches are recommended. Corrective measures should be kept to a minimum.

Disciplining of foster youth is expected to be consistent with that which foster parents use for their own youth.

If physical interference is necessary, it should be used for the purpose of restraint or protection, not punishment.

All discipline problems should be discussed with the Foster Care/Aftercare counselor.

For the protection of all persons, all complaints of abuse or maltreatment by foster parents will be investigated.

Foster Care/Aftercare Offices

- ALBANY/RENSSELAER
79 Ryckman Ave.
Albany NY 12208
Phone: (518) 438-8044

- BINGHAMTON (satellite)
State Office Building
164 Hawley Street
Room 604
Binghamton, NY 13901
Phone: (607) 773-7945

- BUFFALO
405 Ellicott Square Building
295 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14203
Phone: (716) 852-7541

- NEW YORK CITY
Adam Clayton Powell
State Office Building
14th Floor
163 W. 125th Street
New York, NY 10027
Phone: (212) 961-8681

- NEWBURGH
164 Lake Street
Suites 13 & 14
Newburgh, NY 12550
Phone: (914) 561-5620

- ROCHESTER
259 Monroe Ave.
3rd Floor
Rochester, NY 14607
Phone: (716) 238-8210

- SYRACUSE
333 East Washington St.
Syracuse, NY 13202
Phone: (315) 428-4202

- UTICA
State Office Building
207 Genesee Street
Room 409
Utica, NY 13501
Phone: (315) 793-2576

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- WATERTOWN (Satellite)
State Office Building
317 Washington Street
4th Floor
Watertown, NY 13601
Phone (315) 785-2426

- YONKERS (Satellite)
c/o Yonkers Youth Services
70 Ashburton Ave.
6th Floor
Yonkers, NY 10701
Phone (914) 963-6377

- **AFTERCARE/FOSTER CARE HOTLINE NUMBER:**

1-800-848-4812