



Foster Parents and Social Workers: Allies and Advocates for Youth in Care

Foster parents and social workers provide essential and critical roles in ensuring the health, safety and welfare of the children who are entrusted in their care and supervision.

By working together; as allies and advocates for youth in care, foster parents and social workers will be able to effectively identify, address and successfully fulfill the needs of children in care.

Tom Eckels, social worker with the Wood County Department of Social Services, shares his perspective on the importance of foster parents and social workers uniting together to ensure that the best interests of children in care are being met:

- **Develop and maintain a mutually respectful and cooperative working relationship with one another.** Youth in care rely on their foster parents and social workers, to form a partnership in order to ensure that their needs are being addressed, assessed and met.
- **Establish open and consistent lines of communication.** Just as communication is important for maintaining all healthy relationships, it is essential for meeting the needs of children in care. Communication between foster parents and social workers is vital, and by establishing open lines of communication, potential misunderstandings and misinterpretations will be avoided.

Social workers need to receive feedback from foster parents on a consistent and continual basis. Foster parents should **never** feel that what they have to say is not important, relevant, etc. This information and input is **always** valuable and appreciated.

Conversely, social workers have the responsibility of sharing information regarding a child who is in need of placement, but that information is not always available to the social worker.

For example, when an emergency placement occurs, the social worker is not always able to obtain all of the information at that time, due to many factors: time constraints, lack of the parents willingness to share information, not being able to find the key people during the emergency. However, it is imperative to share information, feedback, and input with one another throughout the course of the child's placement in care.

- **Comply with the guidelines that are outlined in the case plan.** Foster parents have a natural advocacy role in all areas and as a result, they need to fully consider the goals and objectives outlined in the case plan throughout their advocacy efforts. Again, open communication is essential to ensuring the ultimate success of the case plan. Be willing to share your opinions and suggestions with the social worker.
- **Work effectively with birth parents and extended family members.** In foster care, the goal is to reunite children with their family when it is deemed appropriate and in the best interest of the child. Therefore, the child's family plays an integral role throughout the placement.

Teach and model positive parenting skills to the birth parent(s) by being supportive, consistent, respectful, and flexible regarding their child. Family interactions are a priority; unless deemed otherwise by the court.

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- **Confidentiality.** Keep information about your child/youth in care and their families confidential at all times. Wisconsin Statutes, Chapter 48 -Children's Code and Chapter 938 – Juvenile Code, and “Rules for Licensing Foster Homes” prohibit the sharing of confidential case information with unauthorized people. If you have additional questions regarding confidentiality issues, we encourage you to talk with your foster care coordinator.
- **Collaborate with community groups, community agencies and local and state resources** to provide the child and his or her family with assistance and support. Community groups and organizations are valuable resources for yourself, your child and your child's family. Consult with your child/youth's social worker about what opportunities would be available and appropriate.
- **Seek out guidance and training opportunities** through local and state foster and adoption support groups, associations and resource centers. Local and state associations provide guidance, support, training and mentoring/peer network support opportunities and are highly recommended resources.



Resources Available From the FCARC Lending Library:

- *Team Decisionmaking: Involving Family and Community in Child Welfare Decision* (VHS). This video from Casey's Family to Family initiative provides a look at team decisionmaking meetings and the benefits derived when placement decisions are made in partnership with parents, youth, community members, and other key stakeholders in a child's life. (21:00 minutes)
<http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/advancedsearch.asp>

Other Resources:

- The National Foster Parent Association <http://www.nfpainc.org>
- “A Social Worker's Heartfelt Tips for Foster Parents,” by Jenifer Montsinger's. Fostering Perspectives, http://sswnt7.sowo.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/fp_v11n1/jenifer.htm