

CENTRE
COUNTY
CHILDREN &
YOUTH
SERVICE

FOSTER PARENT MANUAL

[updated Feb 21, 2017]

Change a Lifetime | Centre County Government

We are pleased to be able to offer you this Foster Parent Manual. As foster parents, you make an important contribution to the agency and to children and their families.

The agency is hopeful that you will find this manual to be helpful in your role as foster parents. It is designed to be used as a guide when you have specific questions, and also provides a general outline and overview of the Centre County program.

Please contact staff whenever you have questions regarding the foster care program.

The agency is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. After 5:00 p.m., on weekends and holidays, an "on call" caseworker from the agency can be reached by calling the emergency/crisis number, 1-800-479-0050. This will put you in contact with Centre County Communications Center. You should request to speak with a caseworker from Children and Youth Services. You will need to leave your name and number, and your call will be returned shortly by a caseworker.

This service is available for those situations which cannot wait until regular office hours. Examples of emergency foster care situations include: foster children who are sick and in need of **emergency** health care/surgery; reports of suspected child abuse; death of a foster child; foster child runs away from the foster home; foster child does not return from a home visit or other activity at scheduled time.

MISSION STATEMENT:

Centre County Children and Youth Services is the agency within County Government which is responsible for the operations of Children and Youth programs. It is guided and constrained in its functions and services by Federal, State and Local statutes and regulations.

Foster care is viewed as a partnership between the agency and foster parents, towards meeting the needs of a child while they are living away from their own family. The goal of Centre County Children and Youth Services is to work cooperatively with foster parents and the child's own family to develop a plan to meet the child's needs and to reunite the child with their own family whenever possible.

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Section II Foster Family Care Regulations

CHAPTER 3700. FOSTER FAMILY CARE AGENCY

CHAPTER 3130 ADMINISTRATION OF COUNTY CHILDREN & YOUTH
SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS

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- Grievance Procedure for Youth in Out-of-Home Care
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- Discipline, Punishment and Control Policy
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- Information Regarding Liability Insurance
- Pennsylvania Resource Family Care Act (Act 73 of 2005)
- Resource Family and Adoption Process Act: Act 2005; No. 68
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Resource Parent Job Description

General Qualifications

- Ability to provide physical and emotional care.
- Ability to recognize and meet individual needs of the child.
- Experience with childcare or supervision. Ability to accept a child into your home as well as let him/her go.
- Ability to accept and encourage a child's relationship with parents and able to show commitment to Concurrent Planning. (i.e. promoting the reunification process and/or finding permanency for children).
- Ability to work in cooperation with the agency and other community resources as part of a service delivery team.
- Adequate physical and mental health as certified by a physician.
- Ability to provide the child with a minimum of; his/her own mattress with clean linens, and private space for belongings for each child.
- Financially stable and have an adequate income necessary to support your own family.

Responsibilities to the Child:

- To provide a safe and comfortable environment for child.
- To provide consistent and realistic discipline and guidance that is age appropriate and does not involve corporal punishment.
- To provide for the child's basic physical and emotional needs as you would for your own child: food, shelter, personal care and appropriate clothing.
- To attend to medical and dental needs, including regular checkups, as well as attending to special needs.
- To help children through the grieving and adjustment process that accompanies removal from their own home and placement.
- To encourage the caseworker's relationship with the child.
- To inform the child that information the child gives you may need to be shared with the caseworker, especially if the information could lead to harm to the child or others.
- To provide for regular school attendance, monitor progress, note special needs and accomplishments.
- To provide recreational and enrichment activities that will promote the healthy development of children.
- To maintain a record for the child of their time in care, including developmental milestones, photographs, report cards, etc., and other items for their Lifebook.
- To display a positive attitude with the child regarding visits/communication with family members.
- To prepare child for visits, by discussing the specific arrangements for visit and sending special/personal items from the child.
- To avoid demeaning the parents to the child or to others.
- To talk openly with the child about his family, and to allow for the open expression of his emotions.

- To assist children in preparing for permanency (i.e. Return Home, Adoption, Permanent Legal Custodianship, Placement with Relatives)

Responsibilities to the Agency:

- To keep the agency informed of progress that the child makes and/or any problems the child may experience (physical, mental health/behavioral, educational).
- To immediately notify the agency if the child runs away.
- To keep the agency informed of changes in your household, including change in address, phone number, household members, new arrests or criminal charges.
- To notify the agency in advance of any vacations or planned trips.
- To be available for meetings with the agency and service delivery team, and keep notes and/or questions of important matters to have the most productive discussions with caseworker.
- To attend/complete foster parent pre-service training and complete six hours of annual training there after (per foster parent, not per household).
- To attend case reviews when requested, to offer input regarding the child in your home, or to make a court appearance when needed.
- To attend and participate in Reunification Administrative and Family Meetings when applicable.
- To attend and participate in monthly Reunification reviews, meetings and planning sessions as needed.
- To share observations about visitation outcomes with Reunification team
- To keep the service delivery team updated regarding all appointments and information relevant to the child.
- To assist with transportation to and from family visits
- To give 15-day notice when requesting removal of child
- To cooperate with agency workers to implement the case plan for the family.
- To comply with all Department of Human Services regulations and agency policies and procedures as outlined in the foster parent manual.
- To respect the final decisions made by the agency or court.
- To adhere to confidentiality requirements and respect the confidential nature of family information, and not discuss the information given to you by the agency or the child with anyone outside your immediate family.
- To discuss your reactions to visiting arrangements with caseworker, not with the child or parents.

Responsibilities to Biological Parents:

- To be flexible and accommodating of a reasonable visiting plan which permits the foster child to spend special days with his/her family.
- To cooperate with visitation; if visitation is in your home to assist in making parent feel comfortable and allowing time with child.
- To help the child maintain a realistic perception and attitude towards biological parents.
- When requested by the worker, to model and discuss appropriate parenting behavior with

the parent.

- To provide necessary and appropriate information about child's growth and development, likes, dislikes, etc. to the parent.
- To prepare the child to return home.

Additional responsibilities For Reunification Resource Parents:

Resource parents may assume different roles and responsibilities depending on the Service Agreement, the child's needs, the parents' feelings, attitudes and behaviors, and the resource parent's capacity, skills, training and attitudes. An increased stipend is available only for those Centre County resource parents who enter into an approved Families Helping Families Plan during the reunification process. This will be a working document and is designed to meet the specific needs of all the parties. Below are listed the tasks that may be expected in order to receive the additional stipend. Each month, the reunification staff will provide feedback, both verbally and in writing, outlining the resource parents' fulfillment of tasks outlined on the Families Helping Families Plan.

Listed below are examples of the additional responsibilities that may be included on a Families Helping Families Plan. Each Families Helping Families Plan is developed based on the child/family's needs. The plan must be approved by the agency's Director to qualify for the increased Foster Care Subsidy.

- To assist with transportation to and from visits whenever possible (for at least 50% of visits).
- To participate in visits and model healthy parent-child interactions and teach child care skills.
- To exchange written/verbal communication with the biological family; help the child to write letters or provide written information to the biological family.
- To provide pictures of the child to the biological family.
- To supervise visits as appropriate.
- To encourage biological parent's progress through identified actions.
- To make statements to the parent that verbally links child's positive behaviors to the parent.
- To encourage /arrange for the biological parent to phone the child and monitor parent/child interaction on the phone.
- When speaking to the biological parent, refer to the child as "your child."
- To help the biological family locate community resources.
- To serve as a mentor to biological parent/family.
- To take the child to biological parent's home.
- To give the biological parents feedback and updates on the child.
- To invite/encourage biological parents to attend medical and dental appointments.
- To invite/encourage biological parents to attend school activities.
- To attend parent education sessions with the biological parents.
- As appropriate, to offer support to the biological family and the child upon the child's return home to biological family.

FOSTER HOME REQUIREMENTS

The number of children living with a foster family is limited to six. This includes the foster family's own children. In addition, foster homes are required to comply with C-3 occupancy regulations, under the provisions of the Fire and Panic Act. This regulation states that the foster family may not care for four or more individuals who are unrelated to the foster parents, without meeting C-3 regulations. In order for more than 3 foster children to be placed in one home, the minimum requirement is interconnecting smoke detectors, so that all devices sound an alarm when any single alarm within the dwelling is activated. Family homes in excess of two stories in height must have a means of external egress from all floors above the second floor. The Department of Labor and Industry must inspect and issue a license to the foster parents.

Foster parents must be a minimum of 21 years of age.

Foster parents must demonstrate the ability to be financially stable.

Foster parents shall pass an initial medical appraisal by a licensed physician prior to being approved. The appraisal must establish that the foster parents are physically able to care for children and are free from communicable disease. Further medical examinations may be required by the agency if the agency has reason to believe that additional medical appraisal is appropriate.

Prospective foster parents must comply with Section 23.1 of the Child Protective Services Law. This requires Child Abuse, State Police and FBI clearances on all adult members of the household. (If you have resided outside of Pennsylvania within the past 5 years we will also need to do an Adam Walsh Check which requires that we complete a priors check with all states where you have resided in the past five years). These clearances must be updated every two years according to agency policy.

Foster Parents are required to complete Mandated Reporters Training in accordance with the Child Protective Services Law.

Foster parents are Mandated Reporters and required to report suspected abuse/neglect to Childline.

Foster parents shall complete annually a minimum of 6 hours of agency approved training.

In the event a foster parent marries or has a life-partner move into the home after the initial approval into the foster care program, it is the foster parent's responsibility to notify the agency prior to co-habiting. These individuals are required to meet foster care regulations and follow agency policies.

While involved in the foster care program, no other children or adults may reside in the foster home for an extended period of time (more than 30-days) without agency approval.

Foster parents must continually comply with the following residence and safety requirements:

- Residence must have one flush toilet, one wash basin and one bath or shower with hot and cold running water.
- Residence must have an operable heating system.
- Residence must have an operable telephone. Emergency phone numbers for fire, police, ambulance and poison control must be conspicuously posted adjacent to all telephones. A “No Smoking” sign must be posted in the home.
- Sleeping areas may not be in an unsuitable area such as a hall, stairway, unfinished attic or basement, garage, bathroom, eating area, closet, shed or detached building. Each foster child shall be provided his/her own clean, comfortable mattress and clean linens, blankets and pillow.
- Foster children of the opposite sex, who are 5 years of age or older, may not share the same bedroom.
- Medication and containers of poisonous, caustic, toxic, flammable or other dangerous material kept in the residence must be distinctly marked or labeled as hazardous and stored in areas inaccessible to children under 5 years of age. The agency suggests using Mr. Yuk stickers.
- Fireplaces, fireplace inserts, wood and coal burning stoves and free-standing space heaters, if allowed by local ordinance, must be installed, equipped and operated according to manufacturers' specifications and requirements specified by local ordinance.
- There must be an operable smoke detector on each level of the residence. This includes, in addition to the main floors, the basement and if used as a living area, an attic.
- A portable fire extinguisher, suitable for Class B fires, must be available in the kitchen and other cooking areas. The extinguisher must have a gauge.
- Protective safety caps must be placed in electrical outlets that are accessible to children younger than 5 years of age.
- Exposed electrical wires are prohibited.
- Drinking water which is obtained from a water source other than municipal must be determined to be potable. This will be determined by an annual microbiological test conducted by a laboratory certified by the Department of Environmental Protection.
- A foster family must obtain and maintain fire insurance coverage for the residence.
- The agency maintains general liability insurance, as required by regulations, for all foster families.
- The agency must visit and inspect annually each foster family, in order to determine continued compliance with the foster care requirements. The evaluation will be scheduled on or before your original approval date.

The agency will give written notice to each foster family of its decision to approve, disapprove or provisionally approve a foster family following the annual evaluation. Any part of the evaluation that is found to be in need of correction or improvement will have a plan of correction established. If corrections need to be made, your foster home will be considered out of

compliance, and will be placed on provisional status. While on provisional status, no additional children may be placed in your home. If after one year you have not made the necessary corrections, your home may be closed.

As foster parents, you have the right to appeal the agency's decision to provisionally approve or close your home if you believe you have met necessary regulatory requirements. The foster family should submit, to the agency administrator, a written appeal, postmarked no later than 15 calendar days from the date of the written notice of an adverse approval status action. If the agency is unable to resolve the issues of disagreement, the appeal will be forwarded to the Department of Human Service's Office of Hearings and Appeals for a hearing to be scheduled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

As a foster parent you become a member of the agency team providing services to foster children. Foster parents, as authorized agents of the agency, are governed by all agency policies, procedures and regulations. Information will be shared with you that is necessary to care for your foster child: i.e. a foster child's family case history and the reason(s) that the child was removed from the home. During the course of care, children may also share with you personal information about their family life. Foster parents must understand the need for confidentiality. This information is confidential and cannot be discussed with extended family members or friends. The information that you receive as a foster parent can only be discussed with the child's caseworker, supervisor or other agency personnel. With prior agency consent, confidential information may also be shared with other professionals who may need such information in order to effectively work with the family. Confidential information includes the foster child's parents' names, residence, activities and case histories. Discussing with neighbors, friends or relatives the confidential information given to you by the agency or the child could jeopardize your status as an approved foster parent.

When a child is involved in an activity which might reach the media, i.e. picture in a newspaper story, the agency must be notified prior to the event. The agency will then obtain parental consent. A foster child may not be identified as such in any media: newspaper, magazine, radio television, or social medial.

Foster parents need to exercise extreme caution regarding their foster children while on the internet/social medial. There should be no reference to you as a foster parent, nor any identification of children in your family as foster children. No pictures of your foster children, their names, stories about them, or any references to meetings, court, their case status, etc., may appear on social media.

Foster parents need to be prepared to deal with normal curiosity and prying regarding the background of the foster child. This will require some tact. (You may ask the agency or service delivery team if you have questions on how to answer these questions). Also, help the foster child to know what they can safely say about themselves and what they can say that will help them get along with their friends.

DISCIPLINE

One of the most basic and important duties of a parent is to teach a child to become self-disciplined. Discipline is an educational learning experience which includes making rules, setting limits and imposing a consequence when a limit is violated. We are teaching them in turn to become loving parents to children of their own. Foster Parents are required to review and sign the Discipline Policy prior to being licensed. This policy is reviewed annually.

Foster parents must abide by the Department of Human Services regulations regarding discipline, punishment and control of foster children which prohibit foster parents from using corporal punishment as a consequence when a foster child violates a limit. Other forms of punishment prohibited by the policy are the following:

DISCIPLINE POLICY

- Foster children shall be directed with techniques that stress praise and encouragement.
- Foster children may not be subjected to verbal abuse, derogatory remarks or threats of removal from the foster home.

PUNISHMENT (the following forms are prohibited)

- Abusive discipline practices.
- Physical punishment inflicted upon the body.
- Punishment for bed-wetting or other actions related to toilet training.
- Delegation of punishment to another child.
- Denial of meals, clothing or shelter.
- Denial of elements of the service plan.
- Denial of communication with, or visits by, the child's family.
- Assignment of physically strenuous exercise or work solely as punishment.

CONTROL

- Passive physical restraint is the only allowable method of restraining a child.

PER DIEM RATES AND PAYROLL

The per diem received by the foster parent is expected to provide for food, shelter and on-going clothing needs for the child. (Transportation expenses are covered under transportation section.)

It is expected that an average of \$50 of the monthly per diem will be used to purchase clothing/diapers for the child.

For new children entering the foster home, payment is made separately for the first 30 days of placement. Therefore, foster parents will get paid when the first 30 days are complete, not at the beginning of the month with the regular payroll. Initial placement expenses, if any, will be reimbursed on a case-by-case basis and will require prior approval from the agency .

"Special needs" foster care rates are established on a case-by-case basis. Examples of a special needs child include: a child who has been diagnosed as Intellectually Disability, has a mental health diagnosis, or exhibits severe behavioral problems. Severe behavioral problems are beyond the behaviors anticipated during the initial adjustment stage in a placement and may be time-limited. The agency may readjust the per diem to the standard per diem if at some point it is felt the child's behaviors no longer warrant the increased per diem. The decision to designate the child as a special needs placement will be made by the agency, after discussions with the foster parents.

On occasion, it is necessary for foster parents to utilize childcare due to employment, job training, or the foster child's special needs. In order for childcare to be paid for by the agency, childcare providers must be approved by the Keystone Star Program and have two or more stars. Child Care Information Services (CCIS) subsidizes childcare for foster parents who work 25 hours or more per week and have the agency's permission to utilize childcare. Foster parents will be assisted in completing a CCIS application for the childcare subsidy. Once approved, CCIS will directly reimburse the childcare provider. CCIS requires that co-payment, typically \$5 per week, be made directly to the childcare provider. The agency will cover the cost of the co-payment which should be billed directly to our agency. (if you receive a bill, please do not pay it. Immediately submit it to the Foster Home Specialist for reimbursement). **IF YOU NEED CHILD CARE OUTSIDE OF TRADITIONAL HOURS ON A REGULAR BASIS CONTACT THE FOSTER CARE SPECIALIST AND ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE MADE FOR THE CHILD TO RESPITE WITH ANOTHER APPROVED FOSTER PARENT.**

The foster parent payroll for the preceding month is submitted to the county treasurer at the beginning of each month. Checks are processed by the county treasurer and mailed out by the agency. The agency has no control over when those checks are processed. They are generally mailed out on the second Friday of the month and received the following week. Please remember, that mail is not delivered on holidays and this may delay receipt of your foster parent check.

Current foster care rates, effective 2-1-08:

age group	regular rates	special needs rates	FHFP (Families Helping Families Plan)	special needs and FHFP
age 10 and under	\$20	\$26	\$25	\$31
age 11 and older	\$24	\$31	\$29	\$36
respite care	\$21	N/A	N/A	N/A

Respite care policy: In most cases, when a child respites in another foster home, the agency will pay both foster families during the period of respite. Under normal circumstances, the respite rate will be \$21.00. Not all families need or want to use respite, nor is it by any means required that a child be respited out of your home. Any request for more than once-monthly respites will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Vacation policy: if foster parents request that a youth be placed in another foster home due to vacation plans, then the agency will suspend the per diem to the foster parents during the time that the youth is in another placement situation.

The per diem received by the foster parents does not have to be claimed as income for tax purposes. **A foster child may not be listed as a dependent on Income Tax forms**, unless the foster parent can document that they provided more than fifty percent of the child's expenses for the year.

Foster children are eligible for the school free lunch program. Each school district has the form that is required to enroll the child. Foster parents will need to complete and sign these forms at the beginning of each school year. It often takes 1 – 2 weeks for the child to be enrolled in the free lunch program. You will need to pack or purchase a school lunch for your foster child during this time.

Foster children under the age of 5 are often eligible for the WIC program. WIC provides infant formula, cereal, milk, and cheese in the form of vouchers redeemable at the grocery store of your choice. Foster parents should contact the local WIC office as soon as possible following the placement and make an appointment for the child. A letter is required from the agency that verifies the child is in agency custody and is placed in your foster home. The Foster Home Specialist will fax this letter directly to the WIC office.

CLOTHING ALLOWANCE

Each child entering placement is expected to have a minimum clothing inventory:

infants: 6 undershirts; 6 sleepers; 6 pair socks; 1 outfit; 1 sweater; blanket; 4 bottles; 1 box diapers; baby wipes.

one year +: 6 pair underwear; 6 undershirts; 6 pair socks; 2 pair shoes; 2 coats (good & play); 2 pair jeans; 3 shirts; pajamas; toothbrush; comb.

In order to help foster parents with clothing expenses, the agency will provide a lump-sum amount to be used to meet the ongoing clothing needs of the foster child. This will be a twice a year allocation of \$400 and will be sent to foster parents in February and in July of each year. The money is to be spent on clothing purchases, with the foster parents retaining all receipts and submitting a voucher to the agency, along with the clothing receipts. The voucher and necessary receipts must be returned to the agency by the deadline noted at the time the check is received. **If receipts totaling at least \$400 are not received at the agency by the deadline, the clothing allowance will be deducted from the foster parents' next payroll check.** The voucher forms that should be used to record purchases will be sent to the foster parents along with the clothing allowance checks. Additional clothing vouchers are located in Section V of this manual and on the county website www.centrecountypa.gov.

TRANSPORTATION

Foster parents are expected to help in providing transportation for medical/dental appointments. It is often more comforting for the foster child if the foster parent is present at these appointments.

If the foster parents are unable to provide transportation, agency personnel are available to assist as needed. (Please provide the agency with ample notice when transportation to/from appointments is needed).

The agency does not reimburse foster parents for mileage incurred for transporting foster children. If your foster child has extraordinary transportation needs, additional reimbursement may be requested and may be provided on a case-by-case basis. If mileage reimbursement is approved by the agency, Foster parents are expected to submit transportation expenses forms on a quarterly basis. **Expense forms will be provided by the agency upon approval of reimbursement.**

Youth who have part-time jobs are expected to contribute to the expenses incurred by foster parents who drive them back and forth to their job.

VACATION AND TRAVEL

Foster parents are permitted and encouraged to take foster children on vacation or short trips, but in all cases must notify the caseworker in advance of the trip. All vacations and travel are subject to the following restrictions.

- Any out of state travel involving a foster child must have the prior approval of the birth parent, the agency and/or the Court. A travel consent form must be signed by the agency.
- The agency must be notified of all overnight, out-of-county trips. A travel letter from the agency is required.
- Vacations and extended trips that will result in a foster child being unavailable for family visits must have prior agency approval, the parents and/or the Court.

MEDICAL

Foster children are eligible for Medical Assistance, a government funded program that provides payment for health care costs. As a foster parent you will be given a Medical Assistance/Access Plus card in the name of the child for which you are caring. The medical assistance card **must** be used for all medical/dental/visual care.

Medical cards can take up to two months to obtain after application. In situations where the child's medical assistance card has not been received, do not pay for prescriptions and doctor's fees. Request that the bill be held, pending the receipt of the MA card or that the agency be billed directly. If a bill is being held, notify the agency. All medical services are eligible for payment from the child is placed into the care and custody of the agency .

Whenever possible, a child will continue with the same medical providers that followed them prior to placement. If it is necessary to change the child's medical providers, a new provider, who accepts Medical Assistance, will be selected. If the foster parents request and subsequently receive approval from the agency to change a child's medical/mental health provider and the provider that the foster parent chooses does not accept MA, then the foster family must pay expenses out of the per diem rate.

The agency is required by regulation to ensure that all foster children receive medical, dental and psychological care while in your home. Foster children must receive medical attention according to the following schedule:

- A child must have an initial physical and medical appraisal within 30 days of entering foster care.
- Following the initial physical, a child must have contact with a licensed physician according to the following schedule:

Birth through 6 months	once every 6 weeks
7 months through 23 months	once every 3 months
23 months and older	once a year

Children, 3 years of age and older, must receive a dental exam within 60 days of entering foster care. Thereafter, a child must have a dental exam every 9 months. There are a limited number of Dental Providers in the area who accept Medical Assistance. Please contact the child's caseworker for information on approved dental providers.

The agency must have written documentation in the child's file that the child received medical/dental care.

Agency forms must be completed by the physician/dentist. Foster parents can find copies of these forms in Section V of this manual or on www.centrecountypa.gov

Foster parents are expected to be involved in the foster child's medical/dental care. Foster parents often have information that is needed by an attending physician, which cannot be provided by the caseworker. Whenever possible, the agency also encourages the birth parents to participate in all of the children's medical/dental appointments. Also, it is important for the foster parents to be involved in the child's daily activities.

CHILD CARE/BABYSITTING

The agency expects the foster parents to exercise sound judgment in choosing a caretaker. (Refer to Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Policy/training materials)

The caretaker must be a minimum of 13 years of age, for short-term care (no more than 3 hours daily) and a minimum of 16 years of age to provide care for 3 to 6 consecutive hours. For situations that involve a foster child being the caretaker for other children, this decision will be on a case-by-case basis and will be decided by the caseworker and foster parent.

It is important that any caretaker be responsible and able to meet the individual child's needs. The caretaker must be made aware of the agency policy regarding discipline. The foster parents must be reasonably sure that the caretaker left in charge will be able to deal with the children given the number of children to be cared for (the greater the number of children lessens the amount of individual attention and supervision that can be provided) and the age range of the children (frequency of conflict is likely to increase between children who are close in age).

In situations where the caretaker is used on an on-going, daily basis, or care is provided in excess of 5 hours per week, child abuse, FBI and state police background clearances are required. The only exception to this is if the foster parent is using a licensed daycare provider.

If foster parents are absent from the foster home on a single overnight basis, the foster parents are expected to secure temporary/short-term care by a responsible adult over the age of 21 years.

If foster parents are planning to be absent from the foster home for more than 48 hours, the following options are available (with agency approval):

Respite care may be provided by another approved foster home.

Respite care may be provided by a responsible and mature adult over the age of 21, who is a relative/friend of the foster family (See Reasonable and Prudent Parenting). If respite care is occurring on a regular basis OR is for an extended period of time, background clearances are obtained in advance. This requires at least 4 weeks advance notice to the caseworker.

The general rule of thumb is if another individual is providing care for your foster child on a regular basis, (in most situations this will be after school hours, before parents get home from work, or during the

summer when parents work), then the agency needs to do the background checks on these individuals. If you are using a licensed daycare provider, these background checks have already been done.

FOSTER CHILD ACTIVITIES- In December of 2015, Pennsylvania enacted House Bill 477 also referred to as Reasonable and Prudent Parenting. During the initial approval process, and during each annual foster home reevaluation, the agency's Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Policy is reviewed with all foster parents. Reasonable and Prudent Parenting allows for normalcy for children/youth placed in the care and custody of the agency and allows foster parents to make some of the day to day parenting decisions for the children placed in their home. Foster Parents may not make decisions regarding children/youth placed in their home if it falls under one of the categories listed below. You can find a chart at the end of this section that lists examples of some of the parenting decisions that can/cannot be made by foster parents.

Prudent Parenting does not allow for decisions that involve:

- Religious Training
- Activity that violates Court Order
- Educational Placement
- Non-Routine Medical/Mental Health Care
- Psychotropic Medications
- Out-of-state travel (this is a Centre County Children and Youth Policy)

PERSONAL POSSESSIONS

Anything purchased for the foster child during the time he/she was in care becomes the child's personal belonging. As such, when the child leaves care, all personal belongings go with him/her. Personal belongings include individual gifts purchased solely for that child's use, gifts for birthdays and holidays, and gifts given by natural parents. Purchases that are for the entire family's use, such as Nintendo games, TV sets, communal toys, or bikes intended for the use of the entire family, are not considered the foster child's personal possessions. Such situations need to be made clear to the child at the time of purchase/giving.

Clothing that is outgrown, unless purchased by the parents, can be disposed of at the foster parents' discretion. Clothing purchased by biological parents should be returned to them.

Pets should not be given as gifts to foster children without the approval of biological parents.

Money should be made available to the child to spend on miscellaneous items, i.e. an allowance. The amount should be kept in line with what is typical for the family (please refer to Children's Money Policy below).

CHILDREN'S MONEY POLICY

All money earned, received as a gift or received as an allowance by the child while in foster care, is the child's property.

Limitations may be placed by the foster parents, in consultation with the caseworker and the child, when

old enough, on the amount of money to which a child has access. Each child will be considered on a case-by-case basis, according to the child's chronological age, mental age, needs, and maturity.

Any amount in excess of \$100 shall be deposited in an individual savings account for the child by the foster parents.

All money received by the agency on the child's behalf from child support payments or from federal, state or private benefits (such as SSI), shall be applied to the cost of the child's care and expenses incurred for the child while in placement. When the income exceeds the expenses, an individual savings account shall be opened for the child. All excess income will then be deposited in this account. Interest earned on a foster child's money shall be applied to the child's account.

Any money in the child's individual savings account shall be returned to the child when the child leaves placement.

MISCELLANEOUS

Religion: Foster children have the right to attend the church of their choice. Foster children may not be baptized without parental permission.

Child's Name: **Foster children are expected to use their birth name and a foster family may not call the child by different name.** This is important for a child's identity. If parental rights are terminated, and a foster family is identified to be a permanent placement resource for the child, it is necessary to discuss all name changes you will make after the adoption is finalized with the caseworker as soon as possible.

Haircuts: The caseworker should have the opportunity to discuss this issue with the biological parent **before** the foster child's hair is cut for the first time after they enter the custody of the agency. On-going hair maintenance will be decided by the caseworker on a case-by-case basis, after discussion with all parties.

Ear/Body Piercing: Foster parents must have approval of the biological parents and the child's caseworker in order to have the foster child's body pierced in any way.

ETHEL BEAVER FUND

This fund has been set up to provide money for children in placement. The purpose of the fund is to: a) help pay for those extra expenses incurred by children in placement that usually cannot be met by the per diem rates; and b) help defray the cost of gifts at Christmas.

The following guidelines have been established in regards to the use of these funds:

Activity Fund: This provides for \$250 per foster family for a family activity which will include the foster child. The \$250 is to offset the family's expenses for a special activity and is intended for the entire family's expenses for the family outing. The amount of \$250 is available each fiscal year, which runs from July 1 through June 30. The activity fund is typically used for activities such as camping, summer vacations, amusement parks, tickets to sporting events, or going out to a special restaurant. Activity Fund forms are located in Section V of this manual and are to be submitted to the Foster Home Specialist at least one month prior to the activity if funds are needed before the

activity. Receipts are not required.

Camp Scholarships: Money is available for camp scholarships during the summer. At this time, the Advisory Board is able to provide \$100 per child towards summer camp. Please submit the request for camp expenses to your caseworker.

Senior Year Expenses: Because high school students typically have numerous school-related expenses, funds are available for each youth during their junior and senior years. These funds can be used to purchase school rings (note that this purchase will not be paid for by the agency until the youth's **junior** year) and senior pictures. Please submit the request for funds to your caseworker who can verify the amount available for these senior year expenses.

Uniforms/Class Supplies: If a youth is required to purchase uniforms and/or supplies, as a requirement for a class/training program, funds are available to assist in this purchase.

Christmas Gifts: The agency establishes an amount to be given to each youth in placement during the Christmas season. This money is sent to the foster parents and is to be used to purchase Christmas gifts for the foster child and/or to assist the foster child with the purchase of gifts for his biological family. The amount varies based on the age of the child.

Because the fund relies on voluntary contributions, the amount in the fund fluctuates. Therefore, the amount available to children in placement will vary and the agency may be required to restrict the amount available to an individual youth if reserves are low.

EDUCATION

Foster parents or the agency can register the foster child in the appropriate school, after background information has been furnished by the caseworker.

Foster children may not be enrolled in any private or parochial school without permission from the biological parents and the agency.

Foster children must be registered under their own names.

Foster parents should sign report cards and give the report cards to the child's caseworker, who will in turn share them with the biological parents.

Foster parents are expected to attend conferences related to the foster child's academic achievements. When a conference is called because the child is having serious problems, both the foster parents, biological parents and caseworker should be involved in the conference.

Biological parents retain educational rights by law and must sign the child's IEP. Therefore, all conferences and paperwork related to special education planning, i.e. Individual Educational Plan (IEP) conferences, are to include the caseworker, foster parent and biological parent. Foster parents, unless trained and appointed as the child's surrogate parent by the school district, may not sign IEPs.

If the foster child has unusual expenses related to their educational needs, such as uniforms, vocational

supplies, the agency will decide on an individual basis how much financial assistance will be made available. Foster parents should discuss this with the child's caseworker.

VISITATION

While the child is in foster care, the agency is required to safeguard the parents' rights by allowing them to maintain a relationship with their child. We believe that in most cases it is in the best interest of the child to visit with their family. Visits are important because:

- The goal of foster care is for the child to return to their family and visiting is necessary to maintain the relationship between the child and his/her family.
- The biological family is very much a part of the foster child's thoughts and the child needs to see that their family cares. Also, the child is better able to deal realistically with the parents' weaknesses. Without regular contact, a child may develop unrealistic thoughts regarding their family.
- Visits are the primary tool used by a caseworker to assess how well the parents are working toward the goal of getting the child home again. Regular visitation shows the parent is demonstrating responsible and consistent behavior; visits help the caseworker evaluate the relationship between the child and his/her parents.
- Visits provide foster parents with an opportunity to support the tie between the child and his/her family.

Department of Human Services regulations require that visitation between foster children and their parents take place at least every 2 weeks, unless otherwise ordered by the Court. Visits can be more frequent and may increase in length as formal reunification services work with the family to resolve the issues which resulted in the child's placement. Longer visits, which may include overnight stays at the parent's home, helps to prepare the child to return home.

Visits will be planned by the foster child's caseworker and/or reunification team. Visits can be held at the office, in the parents' home, in the home of relatives, in the community, or with your permission, in the foster home. Decisions about the location, duration of visits, and whether or not visits should be supervised will be made by the agency with input from you.

Visits are often confusing and disruptive for the child. Your emotional support and positive reinforcement is very important as your foster child prepares for and returns from a visit.

RUNAWAY

In the event a foster child has left your home without your permission or is not home when expected, and a reasonable period of time has elapsed, the police should be called.

Foster parents should call the police department that has jurisdiction in their area of residence.

You should identify yourself as a foster parent reporting a foster child who is missing. Police departments

will not accept these reports from caseworkers.

In some cases a police officer will be sent to your home to obtain additional information. Be prepared to give the police the child/youth's name, date of birth, description, type of clothing the child/youth was wearing and any ideas as to where the child/youth may have run to.

Foster parents should immediately notify agency personnel that the child/youth is missing. If it is not during regular office hours, the crisis number should be called.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE FOR YOUTH IN PLACEMENT

There is a formal grievance procedure that is effective for all children in out-of-home care through Centre County Children and Youth Services (CYS). The Grievance Procedure is to be implemented if a child believes that his/her rights have been violated, are being treated unfairly, have a complaint that cannot be resolved and needs more attention or if he/she thinks something is wrong, they should file a grievance with the agency. (A copy of the Grievance Procedure can be found in Section III of this handbook.)

Any child in placement, who is capable of understanding this policy, (5 years and older) shall receive a copy of this procedure and will have this procedure reviewed and explained to them at the time of placement. For purposes of this procedure, children 5 years and younger are determined to be too young to understand the grievance procedure; a mentally disabled/intellectual disabled child will be assessed individually to determine if he/she is capable of understanding the grievance procedure. For those children determined to be unable to understand the grievance procedure, the CYS caseworker will sign the form.

RELOCATION OF PLACED CHILD

Foster children are relocated for a variety of reasons. Foster parents must be given written notice of the agency's decision to remove a foster child from their home fifteen days in advance of the date of removal.

Foster parents may appeal the relocation of a child from the foster family except under one of the following conditions: the child has been in your home less than 6 months; the court has ordered the child's removal; the child is being returned to his/her biological parents; the child is being placed in an adoptive home; the child is being removed due to a report of alleged abuse against the foster parent(s).

Foster parents who wish to appeal the relocation of a child shall submit to the agency a written appeal, postmarked no later than 15 days after the date of the notice of the right to appeal the child's relocation.

Upon receipt of the foster parents' appeal, the agency shall date, stamp and submit it to the Department's Office of Hearing and Appeals, P.O. Box 2675, Harrisburg, PA 17120, within 3 working days.

TERMINATION OF PLACEMENT

The agency will let you know as soon as possible when a change in placement is anticipated. The caseworker will discuss the situation with you and help you to prepare the child for a return to his/her parent.

If the placement is not working in your home, it is absolutely necessary to give the agency time to find another home. The agency prefers that foster parents not request the immediate removal of a child, except for the most compelling reasons; time is needed to prepare the child for the move. Also, the agency needs time to locate another home for the child. Any move between foster homes is damaging to a child, and the agency hopes to only make a move when absolutely necessary.

After a child has been moved from a foster home, and/or returned home, it is natural for foster parents to want to keep in touch with the child. This is sometimes encouraged by the caseworker, however, in certain instances this contact can be detrimental to the child in his/her new living situation. Before contacting the child, a foster parent should call the caseworker for information about what effect this contact will have on the child. The former foster parents should then act according to the caseworker's recommendation.

When a child is returned to the custody of their parents, the agency customarily maintains contact with the child and family for 6 months. When foster children leave, they will take with them the knowledge of life that you and no one else could have given them. You have made an investment in the future of our society.

ABUSE ALLEGATIONS AGAINST FOSTER PARENTS

Child abuse reports are sometimes filed naming the foster parents as alleged perpetrators of child abuse. So that there can be no alleged conflict of interest for an agency when foster parents are the subject of an abuse allegation, staff from the regional office of the Office of Children, Youth and Families conduct the investigation. Regional offices are located in Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Scranton and Philadelphia.

Following the report and during the course of the investigation, the agency needs to ensure the safety of the child. In many situations, it will be necessary to remove the child from your home while the investigation is conducted.

You will receive a copy of the reports that are filed if you request them. If the report is indicated, meaning that there was evidence to support an allegation of abuse, then the agency will need to decide what course of action is most appropriate. If the abuse is unfounded, the report of abuse is destroyed and there is no remaining record that an allegation was made.

SIGNATURE AUTHORIZATION

Often times questions arise about who may sign permission authorization on behalf of a foster child. There are some situations where foster parents may sign as authorization for the child, and other times when a court order may become necessary.

The possible situations where authorization may be necessary are numerous. There are no hard and fast rules about how each situation must be handled. The following charts identify some of the most common situations that could occur and provide suggestions about what level of signature authorization would be appropriate. To the extent possible, it is important that you and your caseworker be clear about who will accept responsibility for signature authorization before situations develop. The following charts are intended only as a guide.