

CHAPTER 2 – PLACEMENT OF A FOSTER CHILD IN YOUR HOME



A. SELECTING A PLACEMENT

It is the policy of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and in accordance with [Public Law 96-272](#) to place children or youth, in care, in the least restrictive, most appropriate setting available and in close proximity to the parents' home, consistent with the best interests and special needs of the child. ACT 350, of the 2021 Louisiana Regular Legislative session, requires diligent and concerted efforts to search and identify all adult relatives/kin, and/or significant individuals immediately when a child enters foster care. Diligent searches should be completed no later than 30 days, which shall include interviews with the child's parents, identified relatives and significant persons.

Placement in a Relative/Kin Setting

When a child requires placement outside of the family home, the first step is to identify potential relatives, or friends, with whom the child may live. DCFS shall first consider placement with a non-offending parent, adult sibling, and/or relative/kin caregiver. An adult relative/kin is connected to a child, or family, through bonds of affection, concern, obligation, and/or responsibility. An extensive search for relatives and friends begins once it becomes known that a child will need to leave their family's home. When a relative/kin caregiver, that can offer a safe, stable home, cannot immediately be located, the search will continue for a certified foster home. However, once a qualified relative/kin caregiver is located, the child should then be moved, to that home, provided all Agency requirements are met.

When multiple relative/kin caregivers are available and equally capable of providing the child permanency, the relative/kin caregiver, with the closest relationship to the child, should be selected and the caregiver should be immediately referred to Home Development for certification.

Consideration of permanency for the child should be paramount after consideration of safety, health, and well-being in the decision to place a child in a relative/kin caregiver's home. The placing caseworker's thorough assessment of the family and home, for appropriateness and capacity for certification, will lessen the need to remove a child from a family, which cannot be certified at a later date.

Children in foster care and relative/kin caregivers shall be prepared for placement in accordance with good practice in maintaining stability and attachments. Staff will discuss all known information regarding the child's behavior, health, and education with potential relative/kin caregivers. The length of placement and reasons for the child's removal should also be discussed, with emphasis placed on the confidential nature of the information.

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Prior to the child's placement in the home, relative/kin caregivers shall be notified of the Agency's requirement of certification. Certification allows for increased potential for permanency for the child. The Agency shall assist relative/kin caregivers with purchasing items required for certification, when applicable. Community resources should also be utilized, when available, to assist with items required for certification. In the event the relative/kin caregiver cannot be certified, the child may be placed with another certifiable relative/kin caretaker willing to provide permanency.

All relative/kin caregivers must submit to criminal background checks, an Agency Clearance and home safety inspections. While many relatives/kin go through the assessment process to become certified, some are unable to complete the entire certification process due to various reasons.

Foster Home Setting

When a relative/kin caregiver is not readily available, the child, in foster care, is then placed in the least restrictive (most family-like), most appropriate setting available and in close proximity to their parents' home. When possible, children, in foster care, should be placed in their home parish, or an adjoining parish, unless there is a clear and compelling reason to place at a distance from their own family.

The best interest and special needs of the child are always considered when selecting a placement. When selecting a home for a child, there are multiple factors to consider, such as the child's age, stage of development, any special needs or problems the child may have, and health and schooling needs. The Agency also considers whether he has siblings who should, or should not, be placed with him in the same home. These factors are used to search for available, certified foster homes who are capable of meeting those specified needs. The final step is to determine which of the currently available foster homes is most appropriate for the child. Agency staff will then contact potential caregivers to discuss using their home for placement of the child in foster care.

B. MEETING YOUR NEW FOSTER CHILDREN

Children, who enter foster care have a feeling of loss due to separation from birth parents, caretakers, relatives, friends, school, culture, and home. Often, the child has had little, if any, time to prepare for the move and placement in your home. The child may have feelings of guilt, rejection, loneliness, anger and frustration over having his life disrupted. He is experiencing trauma due to his removal from one family and placement with another.

There are a number of actions you can take to help ease the child's placement in your home and to establish a framework for caring and helping the child. Meeting with the child will probably be exciting for you and frightening for him. You are meeting this child during

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one of the most traumatic periods of his life. This initial meeting is part of the trauma because it signifies more loss and change. It is helpful to put yourself in the child's place. Making a child's first few days in foster care as comfortable as possible in your home may mean an easier adjustment to foster care and your family's ways. The child's previous lifestyle may have been very different. Depending on the child's age and developmental level, foster caregivers will need to approach the child's introduction to the foster home with care and sensitivity. Here are some things to keep in mind:

Infants: (Birth to 18 months)

What Infants may experience:

While many people may believe that newborns, or infants, are not impacted by separation from their families and placement into foster care, the reality is that they are! Given their young age, infants lack language skills (except crying) to express themselves and do not understand what is happening to them. New experiences and environments frighten them. Since they are dependent on adults to meet their needs and their primary attachment figure is absent, infants can be anxious, distressed, and not easily comforted. Infants have not formed coping skills and it is likely they will be stressed. It may be difficult for infants to attach to a new caregiver.

What you can do to help:

- Make your home environment and schedule as consistent as possible. Talk with the infant's birth parents, and caseworker, to get important information. Using the same diapers, formula, and bath products can help the infant feel some familiarity in a new home. Maintaining the infants eating and sleeping routine is also critical. Over time, altering the routine can occur in incremental steps.
- Have patience! Remember that the infant is being bombarded with new smells, sounds, sights, feelings, faces, etc. There may be excessive crying, and you may become frustrated. If there are two foster caregivers, tag teaming may help you to maintain your calm. As a single parent, having a strong support system is essential. Calling a relative, family friend or another foster caregiver will be helpful.
- Regular and frequent visitation with the infant's parents is essential. Since infants under age one have not developed "object permanence", which is the ability to maintain a "picture" in their memory, the infant will quickly forget their primary attachment. As the goal of foster care is to return the infant to their parents as soon as safely possible, it is imperative that face-to-face visitation is frequent and includes the opportunity for parents to perform caregiving tasks such as feeding, diaper changing, etc. The DCFS caseworker will assist with the development of a visitation schedule for the child and the birth parents.

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- Stay in contact with the infant’s birth parents between visits. Infants change rapidly! Keeping the birth parents up to date on pediatrician’s visits, sending pictures daily and sending emails with developmental progress will assist the birth parents in becoming knowledgeable about their infant and build a strong attachment. The DCFS caseworker will assist you in developing a plan for your ongoing contact with the birth parent and is a great support resource.
- If possible, pre-placement visitation between you and the infant is valuable. For example, if the infant is in the hospital, arrange a time to visit and interact with the infant.

Preschool Children: (2-5 years)

What Preschool Children may experience:

The child probably does not understand, or have an accurate perception of, why he has been separated from his parents and is now living with another family. He may believe he has done something, “bad” and is being punished. The child may have anxiety and feel negatively about himself. Because this is an unknown situation for the child, he may not realize that you will provide meals, have toys or Band-Aids. This will create anxiety and stress for the child. In addition, the child will “wait” for his parents to come back to pick him up. He may grow distressed when that does not occur, and feel abandoned and hopeless.

What you can do to help:

- Offer physical comfort to the child (if appropriate), talk little and accept the feelings that the child may have. Do not rush the child into play or another activity.
- Give the child a tour of your home immediately. Show them where they will sleep, the bathroom, where you keep food, drinks, etc. The child needs to learn that your home has all the essentials he will need. Also, let him see where their seat is at the dinner table, where his toothbrush will go and where you will put his clothes. Some toys or clothing may be tattered or dirty—do not throw them out! It is a connection for the child to their home.
- Have, and point out, nightlights in the child’s room and bathroom, and where you will sleep. Point out the child’s play space, toys, stuffed animals, etc.
- The child, in foster care, needs the security of a regularly scheduled day. Regular playtime, naptime and mealtime for young children are important to give them a sense of predictability and security. Birth parents can provide you with valuable information to guide you in knowing how to make the child comfortable.

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- Allow the child to make small decisions or choices such as “Do you want peanut butter and jelly or grilled cheese for lunch?” One or two small choices a day gives the child the sense that he still has some control over his life.
- Use children’s books, or stories, to help the child understand his experience. There are many books available, on-line or at the library, on a variety of foster care topics that may help.
- Obtain pictures of the birth parents to put in the child’s room. A phone call or FaceTime with the birth family can go a long way to relieve the child’s anxiety and fears.

School-aged Children (Ages 6-9)

What School-aged Children may experience:

School-aged children have developed some logical, concrete thinking abilities, yet the separation and placement into foster care may still not make sense to the child. Given the child’s sense of right and wrong, it may not feel “fair” to the child that he had to leave home due to his parents’ behavior. The child is strongly attached to his family and gains a great deal of his identity and self-esteem from them. Negative comments about the child’s family will result in poor self-esteem and defensiveness.

The school-aged child can build attachments with new caregivers and come to depend on them. However, the loss of their friends and loved ones may be very difficult. In a new school, he may feel self-conscious about being a child, in foster care, and have a hard time making new friends. Structure, rules, and routine are important to the school-aged child. It creates a sense of security and stability. He may have difficulty adjusting to the new rules and schedule of the foster home, which can make the child feel out of place and uncomfortable.

What you can do to help:

- The school-aged child can communicate and should have a good listener—the foster caregiver! Give him the opportunity to share how he feels and cry if he wants to. It is important that you assure the child that his feelings are normal considering the situation. “I bet lots of kids who have to go to a foster home feel like that” can help the child feel like he is not the only one who is experiencing this upheaval and feelings. Letting the child know that you can tell how hard it is for him to be away from his family is important. Validate that he misses his family and give him permission, and a safe space, to express feelings.
- Ask the child to share information about their family. What holidays do they celebrate? Favorite foods? Activities they enjoy? Incorporate these ideas, when

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appropriate. This will help the child feel included and valued in the new environment.

- Share information with the child about yourself, your family, activities, schedule, and house rules/expectations. If the child is confused about a house rule, explain why it exists. For example, “We always make sure the doors are closed to the house because we don’t want the dog to get out and get hurt.”
- Ask the child about his likes and dislikes. What are his favorite foods, activities, games, and interests? This will help him feel that you care about him and want to get to know him better.
- Reassure the child that the move is not his fault! Sometimes kids have to stay with another family while their parents get some help.
- If the child is racially, or culturally, different from your family, openly discuss those differences and reassure the child he will be accepted. Be sure to make this an ongoing discussion and ask him about his background too. Discuss the differences with the child’s birth parents who can provide you with information about their cultural, and/or racial, practices you can integrate into your home.
- You may want to give the child a special code, or signal for him to use if he has something very important or urgent to tell you. The child is not to be told that statements and actions in the foster home are not to be shared with people outside the foster family. The child may have been in an environment where he was required to maintain secrecy about their family.

Pre-Adolescent Children (10-12 years) and Early-Middle Teen-Aged Youth in Foster Care (13-17)

What a Pre-Adolescent Child, in foster care, may experience:

Since the pre-adolescent child, in foster care, has increased thinking ability, including abstract thinking, he can understand that the placement is not his fault. Likewise, he is able to recognize that no one person was at fault for the situation.

This aged child, in foster care, is accustomed to autonomy and making some decisions for himself. He is able to occupy and entertain himself, as well. He may prefer to keep to himself as he sorts out how he feels and how he plans to cope. Likewise, the child may be angry, upset and traumatized and can displace those feelings via behaviors towards the caregivers. This is not intended directly for the foster caregiver, but is a result of triggers to his current and past traumas.

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Loyalty is a primary concern for the pre-adolescent. He is aligned with his family, friends and school. Challenging that loyalty and pressuring the child, in foster care, to choose between his family and the caregiver will result in a great deal of tension, anger, and hurt.

If you are of a different culture, or race, than the child, he may feel that he “sticks out” in the family, community, at school, and with peers. It is critical that this is openly and frequently discussed, providing the child with reassurance and strategies for dealing with uncomfortable situations. Regular conversation can uncover bullying that can trigger past trauma leading to difficulties, both emotionally and behaviorally, for the child in foster care.

What an Early/Middle Teen-Aged Youth, in foster care, may experience:

Early/Middle teens still have loyalty to their families. Even if he is currently in conflict with his parents, he is likely not to want to be presented with a “new family”, but rather as “a safe home to live, while family issues are resolved”. As growing adolescents, they may not be thrilled with “another set of parents” telling him what to do! These youth will need open conversations about the reasons for their placement, what will happen next and in the future.

Do not be surprised if there are control battles! This is a normal part of adolescence as they struggle to find their place in the world and make their own decisions. Emotionally, teens may try to hide their fears, anxieties and distress about the removal and placement. Some may deny they have any feelings about the move and display an “I don’t care” attitude. He does care and the move will likely trigger past trauma.

What you can do to help:

- Provide the teen with opportunities to talk if he is open to it. Sharing information you have learned about the placement, from the assigned foster care caseworker, demonstrates your willingness to talk and listen. Being honest, and transparent, will go a long way to building a positive, trusting relationship with the teen.
- Show interest in the teen, in foster care’s, family, extended family and friends. This may uncover important connections of the teen that can provide support, encouragement, visitation opportunities or perhaps an alternative permanent family should he be unable to return home.
- Peers are critically important to the early/middle teen. He will miss friends and may have a friend that he desires to spend time with. Phone calls, texts, emails and visits will be essential in maintaining these relationships.
- The middle-aged teen often manages his own life...making day-to-day decisions about food, dress, grooming, planning their future, etc. Some may have jobs or are involved in sports or community activities. When appropriate, allow the teen to make as many decisions as possible. Make time to have discussions regarding his

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plans for activities; helping to schedule and offering suggestions can lessen conflicts in the home.

- If the teen is culturally, or racially, different from you, make every effort to support the teen and to maintain his cultural, ethnic and racial identity. Be alert for the potential for bullying and discrimination in your community and school. You will have to go to bat for the teen, in foster care, if this occurring!

C. CHILD'S NAME

When a child, in foster care, is initially placed in your home, the following question may be on your mind: What name should the child, in foster care use? For legal purposes, and most importantly for his identity, it is necessary that the child be recognized by his given name. He should not assume the last name of the caregivers, nor should the caregivers change, or give, the child a new first name.

Sometimes children in foster care have a need to belong and to not feel different; therefore, they ask about calling themselves by your last name. It is important, at such times, to talk with the child, recognizing his need to belong to a family, but explaining his foster care placement is temporary. Do not support or encourage the child to change his name. Generally, changing a child's name, or using another name in your home, conveys rejection of the child and will elicit distrust and perhaps anger from his biological family. Discuss this with the child in such a way that he does not feel that you are rejecting him. The caseworker should be told of the child's desire to assume the foster caregiver's name. Remember, before people ask, it is a good idea to practice with the child his "responses to questions" about why his name is different.

D. HOUSE RULES

When a child, in foster care, enters your home, he should be provided with some basic information regarding the family's house rules. Be sure NOT to overwhelm him with a long list of DO's and DONT's. Those items can be learned on a day-to-day basis. Remember to give the child some grace as this is a new home, and he is unfamiliar with the established rules and will need some time to learn them.

The following **basic rules** are important and should be discussed with each child, in foster care, early on in the placement:

Safety: Inform the child that while he is in your home, you will keep him safe. Tell the child that in your home if he is afraid or feels anxious about something, he needs to tell you so together you can discuss his feelings and decide what can make him feel better and safe. Do not assume the child knows basic personal or general safety rules; review

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and explain safety rules, such as locking the doors, not getting in a car with strangers, playing in the “safe zone” around your house, etc.

Privacy: Everyone has a right to privacy. Everyone in the home should knock when a door is closed and wait to be invited in. This includes all bedrooms, bathrooms and other private areas of the home. Children, in foster care, should have privacy when bathing, dressing, and using the bathroom unless he is too young, or injured, and cannot do these things on his own.

Clothing: Unless in the privacy of your bedroom or the bathroom, no one in the family should be in the nude or in their underwear when around others.

Touching: No one touches another person without that person’s permission.

Wrestling and Tickling: These are normal childhood behaviors, which can take on sexual and abusive overtones. They are often painful, uncomfortable or humiliating for the weaker person, and should be extremely limited or eliminated.

Bedrooms: Children in foster care and over the age of six, of the opposite sex, are not to share a bedroom. There are exceptions that can be provided to children placed with relative/kin caregivers. Sexually abused children, of any age, should not be allowed to get in bed with foster caregivers, other adults or other children. It may be over stimulating to them, and they may interpret cuddling as sexual advances. All children, in foster care, must have their own bed.

What to Call You?: Discuss with the child, in foster care, and help him decide what he would like to call you. Requiring him to call you mom and dad may be stressful due to his emotional attachment to his parents. Some foster caregivers have been referred to as “aunt and uncle”; “grandma and grandpa”, or by their first names.

Remember, behaviors and actions expected of a child are best learned when you a good example. The following are examples of **house rules** that should be discussed with the child and then posted in a central area (e.g., refrigerator, door, etc.). Be sure to remind the child that the house rules apply to EVERYONE living in the home.

- I am here to protect and keep you safe.
- We are polite to one another.
- We clean up our messes.
- We don’t hit or throw things.
- We are honest.
- We talk out our problems.
- We do not yell or use foul language.

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There are usually understood and/or unspoken rules of the family; however, these rules need to be discussed, individually, with the child, in foster care. For example:

- Should he need you during the night, just call and you will come to him?
- When and if he can have snacks and drinks?
- Can he eat in any room or just the kitchen or dining area?
- When can he watch television?
- When is bed time?
- When is bath time?
- Is he expected to bath every day?
- Is everyone expected to eat dinner together?
- When can he go outside and what distance from the home he is permitted to go?
- Who washes his clothes?
- Are clean bath towels and washcloths used every day?
- Where does he put dirty clothes?
- When/if a room is off limits and why? (e.g., parent(s) bedroom, formal living room)
- When are allowances given – each board payment includes an allowance for the child, in foster care?
- When can he use the computer, tablet, or cell phone; and/or play video games?

Your family may have some additional “understood rules” which need to be shared when a new child, in foster care, is placed in your home.

E. FAMILY SAFETY RULES

The following is a list of suggested rules designed to keep everyone safe in this family. Included are rules for living together safely, respecting the rights of others, and ensuring the personal safety of everyone. The rules should first be discussed with the child in foster care to determine if they are different from what he is accustomed to. In situations where the child repeatedly breaks certain rules, these rules can be put in writing as a contract. The contract should be age appropriate and signed by the child, in foster care, and the caregiver. The child’s signature, on the bottom of the contract, acknowledges that the rules have been discussed, and he understands the rules, will follow the rules, and will help other children, in the home, to follow these rules.

The suggested rules are:

- I understand that before I go into another person’s bedroom, I must get permission first.
- I understand that if no one is home to give me permission, I am not to go into another person’s bedroom.

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- I understand that when visiting another person’s bedroom, the door must be open.
- I understand that if someone is visiting my bedroom, the door must be open.
- I understand that if my caregivers talk with me in my bedroom, the door must be open.
- I understand that undressing is allowed only in my bedroom and in the bathroom with the door closed.
- If the door is closed, I understand that there is to be only one person in the bathroom
- I understand that everyone sleeps in his or her own bed.
- I understand that children do not sleep in the same bedroom with the caregivers.
- I understand that if I am six years of age or older, I will not share a bedroom with a person of the opposite sex.
- I understand there is to be no sexual play or sexual touching and that includes playing doctor, nurse, etc.
- I understand that all inappropriate sexualized language and/or behaviors (references to body parts, sexual activity, back rubs, foot tickling, wrestling, “horseplay”, etc.) will not be permitted.
- I understand that I will not have access to or bring into the home any inappropriate sexually oriented materials (books, pictures, magazines, videos, internet access, etc.) other than that which is used for the purpose of appropriate sex education as agreed to by my caseworker and caregiver.
- I understand there is to be no masturbation in front of other people.
- I understand that if someone sexually touches me inappropriately, I will tell the caregiver and my caseworker. Other people I can tell are my doctor, teacher, therapist or minister. I will continue to tell until someone believes me and helps stop the sexual touching.
- I will obey these rules of privacy (not touching another’s private parts, purses, notebooks, private notes, diaries, mail, etc.).
- I understand that if someone disciplines me in a physical manner, such as hitting or spanking, I will tell my caseworker and foster caregiver.
- I understand that any plans for me to baby sit in or outside the home must be discussed with and approved by my caseworker.
- I understand that I am responsible for obeying these rules.
- I understand that I am responsible if I break these rules.
- I understand these rules clearly.