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## **PART 2 – PLACEMENT OF A FOSTER CHILD IN YOUR HOME**

### **A. SELECTING A PLACEMENT**

When placement outside of the child's family home is needed, the first decision made is whether there are relatives with whom the child may live; and if not, what type of placement will be most appropriate. In most situations, the progression of consideration in the selection begins with a non-custodial parent and relative resource and moves to family foster care. The foster child is to be placed in the least restrictive (most family-like), most appropriate setting available and in close proximity to the parent's home. Children 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 families.


The best interest and special needs of the child should be considered when selecting a placement. In selecting a home for a child, there are other areas to consider, such as the child's age, stage of development, any special needs or problems the child may have, health and schooling needs, as well as whether or not he has siblings who should or should not be placed in the same home. These factors are then compared with the available foster homes capable of meeting those specified needs. The final step is to determine which of the currently available foster homes are most appropriate for the child.

### **B. MEETING YOUR NEW FOSTER CHILDREN**

A child has a feeling of loss due to separation from birth parents, caretakers, relatives, friends 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.

You should have special things in mind to do when a foster child is placed in your home. There are a number of actions you can take to ease the child's placement in your home and to establish a framework for caring and helping the child. Meeting with your new foster child will probably be exciting for you and frightening for him. You are meeting this child during 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 your foster child's place. Making a foster child's first few days in your home as comfortable as possible for him may mean an easier adjustment to foster care and your family's ways. The child's previous life style may have been different. When a child is first placed in your home the following should be done immediately with follow-up because the child may not remember everything.

- Offer physical comfort to the child (if appropriate), talk little and accept the feelings that the child may have.
- Show a new child around your home immediately.
- Let the child know that he can come to you for help or to discuss anything, that if you cannot answer or help, you will help find someone who can. 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

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outside the foster family. The child may have been in an environment where he was required to maintain secrecy about their family.

- Have and point out nightlights in child's room and bathroom.
- Show the child where personal items are kept in the bathroom such as, the child's new toothbrush, toothpaste, towels, washcloths, toilet paper, etc.
- Show the child his bed, closet space and drawers; help child hang up clothes, put away clothes in drawers, if he needs and/or wants help.
- Point out child's play space.
- You should not celebrate his arrival by inviting interested friends and relatives over for a look at him. Remember, he is sad and hurting inside, and may be confused and self-conscious. The foster child does not want to be put on display or to see if he meets the approval of your friends or relatives.
- The foster child needs the security of a regularly scheduled day. Regular playtime, naptime and mealtime for young children are important. A regular schedule is necessary for all foster children.

### C. CHILD'S NAME


When a child is initially placed in your home, the following question may be on your mind: What name should the foster child use? For legal purposes and most importantly for his identity, it is necessary that the foster child be recognized by his own name. He should not assume the name of the foster parents. Sometimes children have a need to belong and to not be different; therefore, they ask about calling themselves by your 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 child's worker should be told of the child's desire to assume the foster parent'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 foster child enters your home, he should be provided with some basic information regarding the family's house rules. The following **basic rules** are important and should be discussed with each child:

**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. Don't assume the child knows basic personal or general safety rules; review and explain safety rules.

**Privacy:** Knock when a door is closed. Everyone has a right to privacy.

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**Clothing:** Unless in the privacy of your bedroom or the bathroom, no one in the family should be in underwear or pajamas without a robe.

**Touching:** No one touches another person without 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 limited.

**Bedrooms:** Children, over the age of six, of opposite sex are not to share a bedroom. Sexually abused children of any age should not be allowed to get in bed with the foster parents, other adults or other children. It may be over stimulating to them, and they may interpret cuddling as sexual advances. All foster children must have their own bed.


**Name:** Discuss with the child and help him decide what he would like to call you. Requiring the child to call you mom and dad may be stressful for the child due to his emotional attachment to his parents.

Remember, behaviors and actions expected of a child are best learned by you setting 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.):

- 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 don't yell.

There are usually understood and/or unspoken rules of the family; however, these rules need to be discussed with the foster child. 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 everyday;
- Is everyone expected to eat dinner together;
- When can he go outside;
- Who washes his clothes;
- Are clean bath towels and washcloths used everyday;
- Where does he put dirty clothes;

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- 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 foster child; and
- When can he use the computer and video games.


Your family may have some additional “understood rules” which need to be shared when a new child 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 foster child to determine if they are different from what he is accustomed to. In situations where the child(ren) repeatedly breaks certain rules, these rules can be put in writing as a contract. The contract should be age appropriate and signed by the foster child and the foster parent(s). The child’s signature on the bottom of the contract acknowledges that the rules have been discussed with the child, he understands the rules, he will follow the rules, and he will help other children in the family to follow these rules.

The suggested rules are as follow:

- 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.
- 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 foster parent(s) 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. Specific exceptions to this item are as follows: \_\_\_\_\_.
- I understand that everyone sleeps in his own bed.
- I understand that children do not sleep in the same bedroom with the foster parents.
- 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 or things like that.
- 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 case worker and foster parent(s).

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- 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 foster parents and my worker. Other people I can tell to get help 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 case worker and foster parent(s).
- I understand that any plans for me to baby sit in or outside the home must be discussed with and approved by my worker.
- 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.