

CHILD PROTECTION BEST PRACTICES BULLETIN

Innovative Strategies to Achieve Safety, Permanence, and Well-Being

FOSTER PARENT INVOLVEMENT

What is *Foster Parent Involvement*?

Foster parents have often been an underutilized resource in child welfare. Increasingly, the importance of *foster parent involvement* is being widely recognized. Under New Mexico's *Foster Parent Bill of Rights* (see page four), foster parents have the right to be treated as integral members of the treatment team and to provide input into the child's service plan.

As part of the treatment team, foster parents can provide information on the child's needs and the effectiveness of the services being provided to meet those needs. They can serve as educational advocates for the child, and advocate for the child with service providers and others. They can provide information to the caseworker on the child's reactions to visits with his or her parents including observations of the child's behavior before and after the visits. In some cases, they could serve as visit coaches. Foster parents often work with birth parents as mentors, working in partnership with them toward reunification. Foster parents are also critical to maintaining the safety of the children in their care.

Foster parents are increasingly seen as key to optimal judicial decision making. They are in a position to provide unique and important information to the Court. Foster parents' observations and factual reports regarding the child's needs, service provision, educational status, and relationships with family and others help the Judge and others reach critical decisions regarding what is best for the child. The importance of this role is recognized in federal and state law, which requires that foster parents be given notice of proceedings involving a child in their care AND that they be given the right to be heard.

What is *current practice*?

Foster parents are invited to participate in most staffings conducted by Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD) on behalf of children in their care, and they are invited to Citizen Review Board (CRB) review meetings. In accordance with the New Mexico Children's Code and CYFD policy, foster parents are notified of court proceedings involving children in their care and provided an opportunity to be heard. Although the state's child welfare system has sometimes incorporated foster parents as partners, there are many opportunities to enhance the involvement of foster parents.

Best Practice Bulletins

- ADVANCE CALENDARING
- BENCHMARK REVIEWS
- CONNECTING CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS
- EDUCATION ADVOCACY
- FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
- FOSTER PARENT INVOLVEMENT
- MAXIMIZING THE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE
- OPEN ADOPTION AND MEDIATED CONTACT AGREEMENTS
- PACING PERMANENCY
- PARENT-CHILD VISITATION
- PRESERVING CULTURAL CONNECTIONS
- SPECIAL CALENDARING
- TRANSITION HOME PLANS
- WELL-BEING CHECKLISTS
- WORKING WITH UNDOCUMENTED & MIXED STATUS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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Child Protection Best Practices Bulletin

What is *best practice*?

Best practice asks the participants in child abuse and neglect cases to recognize and include foster parents as integral members of the child welfare team and as important contributors to court hearings. Such recognition and a commitment to enhancing the involvement of foster parents would include:

- As early as possible after placement, foster parents are provided all the necessary information related to the child in their care, including any information which could impact their home or family life.
- Foster parents are provided services, including respite care and training, in order to support them in providing care to the child.
- Foster parents are included in the development of the child's treatment plan and receive a copy of the plan.
- Foster parents are included in the identification of therapeutic services for the child and their feedback is elicited regarding medication decisions.
- Foster parents receive notice of court proceedings related to the child in their care and have a right to be heard in these hearings. They are informed of the option of submitting a written statement to the court, with a copy to the Department for timely distribution to all counsel.
- Foster parents are invited to Citizen Review Board (CRB) reviews and receive a copy of the recommendations, strengths, and barriers identified in the case by CRB members at the review.
- Foster parents are encouraged to work as partners with the child's family to facilitate their reunification. Foster parents should be encouraged to serve as mentors or as visit coaches.
- Foster parents participate in the development of the child's Transition Home Plan and the youth's Transitional Living Plan.
- To foster the child's healthy development and social skills, foster parents are provided with financial support to enable the child's participation in extracurricular athletic and/or fine arts activities.

What is my *ROLE*...

As a **JUDGE**, you would ensure that foster parents receive timely notice of hearings and other proceedings regarding a child in their care. You would also ensure that foster parents have the right to be heard at permanency hearings and judicial reviews. If a foster parent submits a written report to the court, you would review the report and consider it in your judgments.

Foster Parent Involvement

What is my ROLE...

As a *CASEWORKER*, you would facilitate the involvement of the foster parents in all staffings regarding the child in their care and seek their input in the development of the service plan. You would provide the foster parents with a copy of the child's plan. You would also provide the foster parents with all information essential to the child's care, including medical and educational records. You would ensure foster parents are included among the interested parties for CRB reviews. You would encourage a relationship between the child's birth and foster families and provide guidance to the foster family in their role as mentors or coaches to the birth family. You would inform the foster parents about the purpose of upcoming hearings, and if requested, facilitate their participation. You would ask the foster parents what contact they may want to have with the child when he or she leaves custody and, if it's in the child's best interest, you would work to facilitate that contact.

As a *PLACEMENT WORKER*, you would match the child to the best available foster family. You would support foster parents by offering guidance regarding the child's behavior and strategies to maintain the placement of the child. If needed, you would also help coordinate further training for the foster parents so that the child's needs are best met. You would also provide training and support on participating in court hearings. You would serve as a liaison between the foster parents and the child's caseworker. You would complete the necessary tasks to recertify the foster parents' licenses annually.

As a *CHILDREN'S COURT ATTORNEY*, you would ensure the foster parent is notified of hearings and other proceedings regarding a child in their care. You would receive a copy of the foster parent's statement and timely distribute it to all counsel and parties pro se. You would include foster parents as appropriate and allowable by law as recipients of all court reports in the case.

As a *RESPONDENT ATTORNEY, YOUTH ATTORNEY, or GAL*, you would include foster parents as appropriate and allowable as recipients of your reports to the court. In accordance with the wishes of your client or the best interests of the child, you would actively engage the foster parents in discussions regarding the child in their care and the services needed by, and provided to, the child and his/her family.

As a *CASA VOLUNTEER*, you would visit the child in his foster placement and interview the foster parents as to the child's needs, the services being provided, and the child's progress in foster care. You would report your observations and recommendations to the court.

As a *CRB MEMBER*, you would inquire of the foster parents as to the child's needs, the services being provided, and the child's progress in foster care. You would document observations and recommendations in the CRB report.

As a *PARENT*, you would work with your child's foster parents as partners in caring for your child. You would recognize foster parents as members of your child's service team, who can add valuable observations and recommendations to the service planning process.

As a *FOSTER PARENT*, you would participate in staffings and CRB reviews regarding the child in your care, providing input into the needs of the child and the family and the effectiveness of services being provided. You would also participate in court proceedings, providing observations and factual information about the child and his/her progress in care. You would contact the caseworker when necessary to report your concerns about the child, his/her family, schools, service providers, and others and to inform the caseworker about your needs in order to continue to be responsible for the child.

CYFD FOSTER PARENT BILL OF RIGHTS*

- Foster Parents have the right to be treated with dignity, respect and consideration as integral members of the child welfare team.
- Foster Parents have the right to be notified of scheduled meetings concerning a child in their care in order actively participate in the case planning and treatment process.
- Foster Parents have the right to provide input concerning the plan of services for the children and to have that input given full consideration, in the same manner as information presented by any other member of the team.
- Foster Parents have the right to communicate with professionals who work with the foster child including, but not limited to, therapists, physicians and school personnel.
- Foster Parents have the right to receive a written copy of the child's treatment plan and any subsequent revisions on a timely basis.
- Foster Parents have the right to a fair, timely and impartial investigation concerning referrals filed against them, and access to the appeal process, pursuant to Department policy and procedure.
- Foster Parents have the right to be free from acts of harassment and retaliation by CYFD staff.
- Foster Parents have the right to be notified of scheduled Citizen Review Board meetings concerning a child in their care.
- Foster Parents have the right to receive adequate prior written notice and an opportunity to be heard at court hearing regarding a child in their care, as provided by law.
- Foster Parents have the right to submit factually based written statements to court, as provided by law.
- Foster Parents have the right to be considered first as a placement option when a child formerly in their foster home reenters the foster care system.
- Foster Parents have the right to be given prior written notice of a plan to terminate the placement of the child with the foster family, as provided by law.
- Foster Parents have the right to intervene in abuse and neglect and termination of parental rights proceedings, as provided by law.
- Foster Parents have the right to full disclosure of all medical, psychological and behavioral issues of children in their care, as provided by Department policy and procedure.
- Foster Parents have the right to receive a traveling file for children placed in their care.
- In matters concerning licensing, Foster Parents have the right to be free from discrimination based on religion, race, color, creed, gender orientation, national origin, age, marital status or physical handicap.

**Full Version of the CYFD Foster Parent Bill of Rights Available at www.cyfd.org*

• This bulletin is jointly published by:



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