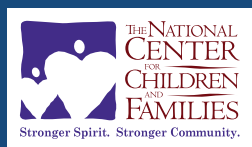




RIGHTS *and* RESPONSIBILITIES

**of Foster Parents Serving
District of Columbia Children in Care**



*** WE ARE WASHINGTON ***
GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR



When District children cannot be safe in their own homes, the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) must have alternatives where they can receive good care. Foster parents provide temporary safe havens where children going through a difficult time find safety, nurturing, and support in a family-like setting.

Opening your home to someone else's child is a significant responsibility, a most generous act of caring, and an invaluable community service. CFSA is deeply grateful to you for becoming licensed to foster and for your partnership in helping some of the most vulnerable District residents. This document summarizes your rights and responsibilities as a foster parent serving District of Columbia children in care.

Information in this document is based on the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations, Title 29, PUBLIC WELFARE, Chapter 60, FOSTER HOMES and the State of Maryland Social Services Administration, Department of Human Services, Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR), Title 7, Subtitle 05, Chapters 01 and 02 and Title 7, Subtitle 02, Chapter 21.

Foster Parent Rights

Fair Treatment

You are making a vital contribution to the care and safety of child victims, and those at risk of abuse and neglect, and you have the right to be treated with dignity, trust, and respect. You're a full member of the service team working to help each child or youth in your care. Others on the team should recognize that you are a valuable resource.

You fulfill your role as a foster parent free from any discrimination. No one may treat you differently based on your race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, or disability.

You have the right to speak up with questions or concerns and to get a prompt, unbiased response. Your licensing agency must make sure you know your rights and responsibilities as a foster parent. Your licensing agency should also ensure you know where to voice complaints and that you can do so without retaliation.

You have a right to communication in the language you speak and understand.

Information

The more you know about children/youth coming into your home, the better you can help them on their journey through foster care. You have a right to accurate information about children and youth in your care. Within three business days after placing a child in your home, your licensing agency must . . .

- Tell you why the child/youth is in care and
- Give you any unrestricted medical records for the child, including immunizations.

You have the right to know about the child's permanency plan and to provide input based on your knowledge of the child. The child's social worker should keep you informed about the child's progress toward permanence. As far as possible without violating confidentiality, the social worker should tell you about major decisions in the case.

When a decision is made that a child/youth will leave your home:

- CFSA must give District-based foster parents at least 10 days of advance notice except in an emergency (which may include court orders with short time frames). Oral notification is sufficient.
- Maryland placing agencies must give Maryland-based foster parents at least one week of advance notice in writing.



Teaming

Children in care are going through a difficult time. Teamwork among the adults working the case increases support for the children.

You have the right to accept or refuse a placement based on your home's capacity and the needs of the child, or to ask your licensing agency to move a child/youth out of your care. However, your licensing agency may reassess your status if there is a pattern of disruptions of children in your care and you are not working with your licensing agency to ensure stability for them. A Pattern of Disruptions is defined as two or more placement disruptions.

The social worker and service team include you in case planning, permanency planning, and decision making regarding children/youth in your care. They keep you informed when developing service agreements for the children/youth. You may communicate with others serving the child/youth in your care such as counselors, doctors, or teachers. You have a right to know your licensing agency's policy regarding contact with birth parents. When contact with birth parents is restricted, your licensing agency will hold you harmless for chance meetings. As local and federal laws require, you regularly receive notification of court hearings regarding children/youth in your care. You have an opportunity to be heard at most hearings.

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As appropriate based on individual circumstances, you have the right to be considered as a priority placement option when you . . .

- Have a significant relationship with the child,
- Cared for the child before, or
- Are caring for a child who becomes available for adoption.

Resources and Support

Fostering presents challenges as well as rewards. You have the right to comprehensive pre-service training that prepares you to foster. After licensing, you have the right to quality in-service training that continues to build your knowledge and skills.

Your licensing agency must provide timely payments for foster care services. Your licensing agency must ensure that you understand what the payment includes such as the base foster care board rate, youth clothing allowance, and any other sum to meet the child's needs.

When available, you are entitled to appropriate supportive services to help meet the unique needs of children/youth in your home. These may include . . .

- Services to help a child/youth adjust to care,
- Prompt response to crisis situations, and/or
- Assistance in preparing a child/youth to transition out of your home.



DC Rights and Responsibilities for Foster Parents



Concerns and Complaints

If you are unhappy about child welfare decisions or actions, you have the right to be heard.

Talk to the child's social worker first. Be clear about your concerns. If that discussion does not resolve your issue, talk to others in the social worker's chain of command. If you take these steps without success or do not feel comfortable approaching these people:

- District-based foster parents may contact the CFSA Ombudsman at 202-727-2111. The Ombudsman independently reviews situations, facilitates discussions, and helps parties resolve issues.
- Maryland-based foster parents licensed by The National Center for Children and Families (NCCF) may contact the Deputy Executive Director of Program Administration at 301-365-4480, x120. The Deputy Executive Director independently reviews situations, facilitates discussions, and helps parties resolve issues.

In some instances, you have a right to a hearing—for example, when you don't agree with removal of a child from your home, entry of your name into the Child Protection Register, or the amount of an adoption or guardianship subsidy.

- For information about when and how to ask for a **Fair Hearing**, District-based foster parents should visit the CFSA website at www.cfsa.dc.gov, click on the Families tab, and click on Be Heard! If the reason you want a Fair Hearing has to do with your foster care license, seek information from the CFSA Fair Hearing Coordinator, 202-442-6100.
- Maryland-based foster parents licensed by NCCF may request an **Administrative Hearing** by contacting the Executive Director at 301-365-4480, x104. If you take this step without success and want additional support to address your concern, contact the Maryland Department of Human Services, Office of Licensing and Monitoring at 410-767-7871.

Foster Parent Responsibilities

Home-like Experience

When children must enter foster care to be safe, they deserve to be placed in the least restrictive, most home-like setting that can meet their needs. The safe, family-like environment you provide for children and youth in your home can help them to thrive even while going through a difficult time in their lives.

At a minimum, you provide the daily essentials a child or youth needs for health, comfort, and good grooming. These include a nutritionally balanced diet that supports the child's growth and development, adequate shelter, and clothing suitable for the season.

As you temporarily raise someone else's child, you must provide parental supervision and guidance appropriate to the child's age and stage of development. You regularly involve the child/youth in household activities.

Discipline

Establish clear expectations for and limits on behavior. Reward good behavior and understand and address negative behavior in positive ways. The following actions are prohibited for children and youth in foster care:

- Physical, emotional, or verbal abuse; derogatory remarks about the child or his/her family members; and threats of removal from the foster home.
- Physical punishment in any form.
- Isolation.
- Physical restraint.
- Denial of food, clothing, or shelter.



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- Denial of visits, telephone calls, or mail contact with family members, social workers, or attorneys.
- Forced exercise or work that endangers the health of the child.
- Punishment for bed wetting or any action related to toilet training.

It's your responsibility to ensure that when approved substitute caregivers or babysitters care for children/youth placed with you, they also stay within these requirements regarding discipline.

Healthy Child Development and Well Being

A main focus of fostering is supporting the health and well being of children and youth in your care. You actively support their mental, physical, and dental health care. You ask for and maintain copies of records from each health care visit and add those records to the child's file within 72 hours.

You communicate regularly with the child's social worker regarding the child's development and adjustment to foster care. You help the child cope with the anxiety of being away from his/her family and promote his/her self-esteem and positive self-image. You are sensitive to and respect the individual tastes and values of children in your care. You support their religious beliefs and cultural customs.

You provide, arrange for or coordinate with your licensing agency to provide transportation to and from normal daily activities. These may include: school; family visits; appointments required in the case plan; sports; and social, religious, and cultural events.

You stay abreast of and support the child's academic progress. You encourage and support the child or youth in participating in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural and social activities at school and in other appropriate settings.

You immediately report any suspected incident of child abuse or neglect to the 24-hour hotline in your jurisdiction and to your licensing agency. To report child abuse or neglect:

- In the District, call 202-671-SAFE (7233).
- In Montgomery County, MD, call 240-777-4417.
- In Prince Georges County, MD, call 301-909-2200.





Safe Substitute Care

If you are employed outside the home or are regularly away from home for any reason, you must have an approved plan for substitute care and supervision of children and youth in your care. When you select a substitute caregiver or babysitter, you should be confident that the person is prepared to take good care of the children or youth. The only babysitters you use are age 16 or older, and you use them only for a reasonable amount of time, based on the child's age and stage of development.

Teaming

As a valued member of the service team, you participate in case planning, permanency planning, case reviews, and decision making for the child/youth in care. You coordinate regularly with the child's social worker to assess the child's strengths and needs and to aid in implementing his/her case plan. You team with service providers when appropriate to ensure that services are meeting the child's needs.

Within the guidelines of individual case plans, you partner with your licensing agency to ensure that children/youth in your care maintain a relationship with their birth family. You support family visits, which may include hosting some in your home. You maintain an attitude of respect and understanding toward the child's birth family. You share events in the child's life with his/her birth parents and serve as a role model for them.

Because entering foster care is an additional trauma for children who are already going through a difficult time, you make every effort to maintain a stable placement for children/youth in your home. You routinely assist in preparing children/youth in your care to achieve their permanency goals and, when the time comes, to make a smooth transition out of your home.

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Confidentiality, Communication and Licensure

At all times, you keep information about children/youth in your home and their families confidential. Generally, you confine sharing of information to people on the service team.

You notify your licensing agency immediately regarding any change in your:

- Employment
- Child care arrangements
- Household composition
- Finances
- Residence or telephone number
- Health status
- Marital status
- Circumstances that could affect the overall stability of your living situation or the placement of children/youth in your care.

You also notify your licensing agency immediately of any alleged or actual criminal charges, investigations, or findings concerning you or any member of your household.

You notify the social worker before taking a child/youth in your care on any proposed overnight trip of more than 100 miles from the District of Columbia.

When requesting removal of a child/youth from your home, you give your licensing agency advance notice of at least 10 business days. The only exception is circumstances that threaten the health and safety of the child/youth or members of your household.

You fulfill requirements regarding annual in-service training to maintain your license. At all times, you maintain standards of foster care in keeping with your licensing agency's requirements and the best interest of children/youth in your care.





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D.C. Child and Family Services Agency

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www.fosterdckids.org

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