

How to Prevent or Minimize the Risk of an Allegation?

If you live your life in fear of an allegation, you will find yourself undermining your role of being a good parent to the child.

Even though you can never prevent an allegation from coming upon your family, you can look at the reasons parents often come under allegations in order to minimize the risk of allegation. You can also evaluate or seek more training on how to deal with these concerns.

Using appropriate and approved Child Rearing Techniques

- Never use or threaten to use spanking as a means of discipline. Spanking cannot be done by non-parent guardians and is prohibited by licensing regulations. A foster parent must be a model of appropriate behavior and a teacher of problem-solving and communication skills to the children.
- Discipline guidelines for foster children are very different than for our permanent children. Get all the training you can on how to use good behavior management techniques to keep your house under control.
- Never withhold a meal as a form of discipline. Withholding a meal or threatening to withhold a meal is not acceptable. The focus of foster care is teaching not punishment. Withholding food from children who have often been without is a form of negative punishment. For children-in-care, it reinforces negative examples of what can happen in their lives.
- Restraints are extremely dangerous. Work hard to learn other methods of behavior control. There is training available to learn how to properly restrain a child who is out of control, but many agencies do not teach physical restraint since that is not acceptable. However, sometimes you may need to separate children so **ASK YOUR AGENCY FOR THEIR APPROVED METHODS**. If a child has been restrained, notify the agency immediately.



Lack of Supervision

Lack of Supervision is the allegation that is most frequently substantiated. It may range from leaving a child at home unsupervised, one child abusing another child or a visitor being brought into the house. It might happen when the foster parent is asleep or elsewhere occupied.

Lack of Supervision may involve a child being:

- Left alone at home.
- Left alone in the community.
- Left alone with an unapproved caregiver.

Some things to help:

- Understand the agency's expected practices.
- Use the habit of staying in touch with what is happening with the kids at all times. While trust with a new child is being built, it is unwise to allow children to play unattended, or have too many places in the home where children can play. Leave doors open when children are napping & stay in touch with what is happening at that time.
- Make sure that anyone who has responsibility for your children-in-care has been approved by the placing agency. **GET THIS IN WRITING.**

- Security systems have helped many foster families. It may feel unnatural to family living to have a security system in place, but it can keep foster parents -- out of trouble.

Substance Use.

If you are planning on drinking or taking a medication that will impair your responses be sure to have a backup plan for care of the children in case you exceed your limit or find yourself not in a normal state. If you are outside the home, be sure that the designated driver knows how to put this plan in effect for you if are impaired and not able to make a good decision. If you keep alcohol in your home (including beer) have it secured if children are old enough to reach it.

Taking Children into Care that You Can't Handle.

Foster Parents have a hard time saying No. Practice it! Know our limits. Everyone has them. Don't accept a child that will be a challenge that you do not feel ready to accept at this time. Ask for a copy of the licensure study for your home and review your strengths and weaknesses as seen by the agency.

Children/Youth Out of the Foster Parent's Control

Check with your agency ahead of time for their preferred methods for you to use when a child-in-care gets out of control. Work to build support systems you can use before you need them. Calling the police to restore order in your home, while it may be effective, creates a negative relationship with the child that you will need to work hard to overcome.

A child-in-care getting out of control can happen to the best of us! Call in assistance immediately. Do not let the situation continue. If you can't regroup, notify the agency or another experienced foster parent and get assistance. It is important that you not put the blame on the child when you have over extended yourself and allowed things to get out of control. As stated above, check with your agency ahead of time for their preferred methods for you to use in situations when children-in-care get out of control and utilize the support systems that you have developed.



Emotional Abuse

Victims of abuse experience fear, anxiety, loneliness, and emotional lack of support. This happens by being ignored, degraded and humiliated. Being in care can create feelings of being unloved, unwanted, and powerless. This places children-in-care at high risk of being emotionally abused.

- Since children-in-care have already been displaced by their removal from their family, foster parents must be cautious not to create situations that increase the children-in-care's feelings of displacement. When something is given to a child-in-care, it should not be taken away to meet another's wants or needs. For example, if a relative comes to visit, a child-in-care should not be displaced from their bed by having them give up their bed to the relative who has come to visit.
- **More information on emotional abuse can be found at [CWIG.Emotional Abuse](#)**

Forgetting that the child comes out of a different experience

It is easy to forget that the child/youth comes to you from a very different life. You may have a child who is the same color as your family and yet comes from a completely different family and

cultural background. Take the time to learn the child's racial, cultural, and ethnic identity to assist in your response to him. Do not expect the child to "fit into your family routines" quickly.

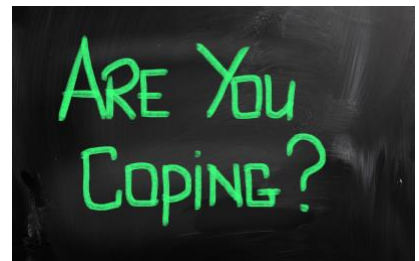
Insensitivity to Religious Issues

Work with the agency on the issue of religious sensitivity. The parents of the children-in-care have control over the religious practices of their children in our home. Learn about the parent's preferences and assist them in raising their children with their religious values. If we know we have conflicts with certain faith practices, screen these children out before agreeing to work with them and their family. While faith development is very important in foster care, the foster parent is not the final authority in this area.

Losing It!

Yes, we are all very human and "losing it" can happen in the pressure cooker of foster care. It happens to both experienced and new families. The risk of "losing it" increases when you are:

1. Putting yourselves under too much pressure: too many appointments, too many children, not having time with your nuclear family, stresses at work, car problems, child care not available, etc.
2. Not looking carefully at what types of children are good in your family and sticking to that decision. You must also assess when you are open and ready for the challenge of working with a child and family situation that you had previously ruled out. Always limit the number of high-risk children you take in at one time, unless you have a full-time support system that can help at a moment's notice.



Some solutions that families have found helpful:

1. Take advantage of relief and respite plans. Get to know solid respite providers that you can trade care with so that your children will feel like they are going to visit a friend rather than going off to a stranger's home.
2. Ask for support from other foster parents, family, and the agency ahead of time. Our current foster care practice of placing a child in a nuclear family rather than in a full community of care means that foster parents have to work to develop these resource people who will join them in caring for children.
3. Be sure to get as much information on the child as possible. When the child is placed the information may not be available. Persist and follow up to gather the information you need to provide a high level of care.
4. Don't ignore, but attend to, any changes in your family that can cause stress.

Putting Kids in Unsafe/Inappropriate Positions

- Be sure to room children inappropriately.
- Be sure to travel safely by car. There should always be proper seat restraints, with one seatbelt per child. Always! Our kids may not like to use the seat belts, but a few minor "battles" or getting some place late while we wait for them to comply is really worth it.
- Be aware of safety features in the home:
 - Are smoke detectors working?

- If there are guns/Weapons in the home, are they locked up?
- Are cleaning supplies secured?
- Do windows open? (In the case of an emergency exit).
- Are fire exits clear at all times?
- Keep all alcohol and medication in a locked and secure place within the household. Do daily safety checks and make sure all hazardous materials are put away. Safety guidelines can never be compromised.
- Make sure there are no areas a child can be locked in or lock themselves into, or lock you out.
- Plan with the agency where youth will sleep prior to their coming. If a child must share a room, be sure to know the issues both children present before agreeing to this plan. Children coming from disturbed environments will carry the patterns they have learned with them into our environments. They will need to be nurtured into different patterns of behavior. Check with the agency frequently if something does not appear right.

Lack of Follow-through with Prescribed Treatment or Insufficient Documentation of Treatment

- Be sure that doctors and nurses put prescribed treatment into writing and that you follow exactly what they have said. If the prescribed medical treatment plan doesn't sound correct, question the instruction. If it sounds at all questionable, check with the agency.
 - Record ! Record ! Record! Write everything down and keep it in a secure place (under lock with key). Know what records have to be given to the agency and what records you will need to have for backup information.



Not Communicating with Service Providers or the Agency.

Keep everybody who needs to know informed about everything. It is better to send too many emails or make too many phone calls rather than too few.

Sexual Abuse or Exploitation

Allegations of sexual abuse are one of the most difficult to handle in the home. An allegation of sexual abuse can include a large range of allegations such as inappropriate touching, fondling, intercourse, exposure, or use in prostitution or pornographic materials. When an allegation of sexual abuse is made, children will be removed or the alleged perpetrator will be asked to leave the home while the investigation is being handled.

It is important to watch and be aware of all the children and adults in the home. Also, monitor what video games are being played and what is being watched on television and internet sites. If the child comes out of a sexual abuse situation, do not leave the child alone with anyone of the same gender as the abuser. It is a good policy to exercise caution and not leave any child with only one adult until you know the child well. Be observant of other children in the home and set limits on inappropriate or suspicious behavior (for instance-hanging around the bathroom when other children are taking a shower.)

Regular Neglect

Sometimes, foster parents find themselves inadvertently doing something that would be considered neglect. Other issues that have brought allegations on foster parents include:

- Not providing necessary food or clothing to children
- Misusing the allocated per diem funds
- Failing to get necessary medical attention for children-in-care

- Giving the child's medication incorrectly
- Leaving the medication in an unlocked storage area
- Locking a child out of the house

Licensure Misconduct

Breaking any of the “thousands of rules” of foster care can lead to an allegation and may, at least, lead to a conversation and putting in place a correction action plan. Sharing confidential Information with unauthorized persons is often a problem for new foster parents. You must learn how to deal appropriately with the curiosity of your neighbors and how to curb your natural interest in sharing your life with friends and others. It takes some work. Ask experienced foster parents for their advice on issues that you experience. Here, again, having access to a network of support is key to effective foster parenting. It helps to minimize the risk of allegations and it provides you with necessary support if allegations are made against you.