

Pennsylvania's Manual For Foster Parents

Prepared for the
Pa Department of Public Welfare
in Cooperation With
The Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association

Introduction

The Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association (PSFPA) with support from the Pennsylvania Department of Welfare has prepared this foster parent manual for Pennsylvania's foster parents. This manual supports the Child and Family Service Review, regulated by the Administration for Children and Families and facilitated by the Social Security Act Amendments of 1994, which are designed to support a stronger Federal-State partnership to improve outcomes of service to children and families. We hope this manual is an important source of support and information for foster parents as they care for Pennsylvania's children.

We suggest foster parents use this manual with materials provided from your individual foster care agency, which is the best source of information on local operating procedures, policies and practices.

This manual has been organized in sections that are outlined in the table of contents. Hopefully this will make it easy to access the information provided.

Your service to the families and children of the state of Pennsylvania is deeply valued and appreciated. If this manual assists you to serve more effectively and realize greater satisfaction in all you do as foster parents, PSFPA will have accomplished our goal and purpose: to better serve foster families.

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What Is Foster Care?

The Foster Care Program

Foster care is a program designed to provide substitute family life experience for a child at a time of crisis or need in their life. Foster care is provided to a child when the child's family is unable or unwilling to provide a home and care for them. Foster care is time limited, temporary care. Foster families provide parental care and supervision, working with the placing agency staff with the goal of achieving permanence for the child. Foster parents come from all walks of life. They are of all races, nationalities and economic situations. Foster care is not a lifetime commitment, but a commitment to be meaningful to a child during his/her time of need.

Why Are Children Placed in Foster Care?

Children placed in foster care are from birth to eighteen years of age. In some cases, children can remain in care until age 21. Children are placed for reasons of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, lack of housing, serious neglect, or severe family situations. Foster parents provide a temporary home for these children whose families are unwilling or unable to give the children the care they need. Children grow and develop best in a family setting and foster parents make a difference by sharing their home and family experience.

The Child's Family

Children placed in foster care will, in most cases, maintain contact with their families throughout placement. During this time of separation, families work toward the goals of returning their child(ren) back to their care. This is an extremely stressful time for all family members. As foster parents, one of the most important responsibilities is to help maintain a positive relationship between the child(ren) and their family during this separation.

Developing a relationship with the child's family is often difficult. You may feel the child's parents have hurt the child in some way. The child's family may feel you are taking their place and are often hostile and resentful toward you. Regardless of why the child was removed from their family, in most cases the family is the best resource for the child. By helping the child to accept his/her family in a realistic and constructive manner, you can help the child build a positive self-image.

Placement Procedure

Under State Law, the county children and youth agency can place a child for up to 72 hours without parental consent if it feels this is necessary for the child's safety and with the verbal approval of the court. Beyond that, a formal hearing must be conducted to show the need to continue a child in care.

The county children and youth agency selects the foster home it feels is best suited to meet the needs of the child, but the final decision to accept a child is left up to the foster parents. Best practice is for the placement agency to contact the foster parent and share available information about the child regarding but not limited to: child's general health and medical history, general behavior, likes and dislikes (including special interests), religious affiliation (if any), school, and reason for placement. Most placements are of an emergency nature and are needed for the same day as requested.

Take a moment to think...

In some instances, children can be prepared for foster care and being separated from their parents. Most placements are of a nature that provides little if no time at all to prepare a child for this impact on their life. Despite any preparation, the child may suffer ill effects. This is an emotional time as is to be expected, and the child's feelings may surface in the form of crying, sadness, refusing to talk, distrust, lying, anger, breaking things, stealing or even running away to name a few.

As foster parents be prepared to help the child understand these feelings and how they are connected to separation. When a child is placed in foster care adjustment can take a long period of time and go through several stages. Keeping in mind the many problems associated with placement can help minimize this adjustment. Children are greatly influenced by their surroundings, consistent, kind, firm foster parenting helps the child progress and adjust.

The Agency

The county children and youth agency is the public agency that works with dependent and abused children and their families. County agencies provide many services to families one of them being foster care. At times county agencies contract foster care through private foster care agencies.

Visitation

State Law requires foster children to be permitted to visit their parent(s) and/or family at least every two weeks if not more often. Regular and frequent visits assist the child in maintaining and strengthening their relationship with their birth family.

Visitation needs to be arranged to meet the needs of all parties involved. The relationship between the child and his/her family needs to be nurtured and promoted. As a foster parent you have the responsibility to be supportive and non-judgmental of these visitations.

General Foster Parent Responsibilities

Foster Care is the day-to-day attention to children's needs while they reside in a substitute family setting for a limited period of time. Foster parents provide basic necessities for growth and development, guidance and discipline for children while issues that developed in removal from their home are resolved. Foster care allows children to grow and develop in a safe and supportive environment until the goal of permanency is achieved.

Foster Parent Responsibilities To the Child:

- Provide a safe and comfortable environment for child to live with, a separate bed and a place for belongings.
- Provide for the child's basic physical and emotional needs as they would for their own child.
- Provide for school attendance.
- Provide appropriate clothing.
- Attend to regular medical and dental needs including regular check-ups.
- Assist the child through the grieving and adjustment process that accompanies the transition from their home to placement.
- Assist the child to maintain realistic relationship with his/her family through cooperation with visitation, understanding feelings and preparing for permanence.
- Provide recreational and enrichment activities that will promote the healthy development of the child.
- Maintain a record of developmental milestone, immunizations, photographs, and report cards for the child.
- Provide consistent and realistic discipline and guidance that is age appropriate and does not involve corporal punishment.
- Be ready to listen when the child speaks.
- Accept the fact that in almost all cases children ultimately love their parents and it is with them that their allegiance lies.
- Assist the child with the transition as the placement ends and the child prepares to leave foster care.

Foster Parent Responsibilities To the Birth Family

- Be open-minded.
- Be respectful of them at all times.
- Support their efforts toward reunification.
- Encourage the child to cooperate with reunification.
- Share with them the day-to-day activities which include their child with them.
- Support the visitation process
- Keep a positive attitude.
- Be honest, natural and friendly in contacts with them.
- Avoid criticism or disapproving attitudes of them.
- Help them abide by the family service plan and individual service plan.

Foster Parent Responsibilities to the Agency

- Must obtain Act 33 Clearances.
- Must complete all pre-service training and requirements of the foster care agency.
- Keep the agency informed of all progress, problems, medical treatment, and school issues regarding the child.
- Keep the agency informed of all changes in your home including: phone number, address, family composition or vacation plans.
- Be available for meetings with caseworker.
- Work as a true “team” member.
- Attend required number of hours and topics of foster parent training.
- Cooperate with the agency to implement the terms of family service plan, the child’s individual service plan and goals for family reunification or permanency.
- Comply with state regulation and agency policies.
- Provide transportation as requested and in accordance with the child’s individual service plan.

Foster Parent Responsibilities to their Own Family

- Be open-minded.
- Listen to all members of the family.
- Respect each persons ideas, feelings and needs.
- Take time out for your family as needed.
- Include your family in family decisions.
- Keep a positive attitude.

Foster Family Issues

Foster Family Vacations

Foster parents may take foster children on vacation with them, but this may be done only with written permission from the agency and birth parent. The birth parent/child visitation schedule must be taken into consideration. If visits are missed, it is the responsibility of all involved to see the visits are made up ahead of time or as soon after as possible.

Respite Care

Respite is care provided by short term substitute foster parents or care givers, where and when available. It allows the foster family a temporary relief from parenting responsibilities. Respite care can be a good prevention for burnout and should be a planned part of placement for some children.

Family Composition

Any time there is a change in family composition, the agency must be notified. Occasionally, foster families will offer to share their homes with children from other programs such as: fresh air children, foreign exchange students, or children of friends or family. The agency needs to know of these situations and also know if any other adults (anyone over the age of 18) are living in the home, as they would need Act 33 clearances.

State law allows no more than a combined total of 6 children (birth, foster, adopted) under the age of 18 in one foster home unless the Department of Public Welfare grants a waiver. This is to insure adequate care for all of the children. A waiver is applied for by the placing agency at their discretion. Additionally, new Panic and Fire Regulations under the Department of Labor and Industry requires a C-3 certificate of occupancy for foster families providing care for more than three foster children. For more information on these standards, contact your agency or PSFPA.

The Foster Family, the Family Service Plan, and the Individual Service Plan

By state regulations, a Family Service Plan (FSP) and an Individual Service Plan (ISP) must be in place for active clients. These plans outline the reason for agency involvement and what each party must do to remedy the situation for the case to be closed. When a child is placed in foster care, the Placement Amendment to the FSP is added and becomes the permanency plan. As a foster parent, you are an active participant in the FSP and ISP. You will often be asked to participate in meetings to develop or change these plans. You should always receive a copy of the most recent ISP for each child. It is very important for all foster parents to know the placement goal for foster children in their care and what needs to be accomplished in order for the child to achieve permanence. The FSP and ISP are time limited and are renewed by the court every six months.

When A Child Leaves

When the time arrives for your foster child to leave your home, it will be a time of many feelings for both the foster family and child alike - sadness, grief, loss, fear, accomplishment, relief pride; the list could go on and on, because the situation and feelings are different for every child and every foster parent. As the foster parent you have the primary responsibility to assist in this process and help the child to be prepared to make the move. Be supportive to the child during this time as much as they want to return home, they know leaving their foster parents will be sad, even if they are not letting you see how they feel. Sometimes it is easier for them to hide those feelings and not have to admit to some of those feelings.

Sometimes foster parents ask to have a child removed from their home. The reasons are varied. No matter what the reason, the foster parent needs to remember they have the responsibility to the child and agency to assist appropriately with this type separation also. Be as flexible as possible and work with the agency at this time. Remember that the agency will need to make a new plan for the child and this does take time. Try to give as much thought and respect at this time as possible.

All foster parents deal with separation differently. It can be an incredibly trying event. Foster parents care for children at a time in the child's life when the child needs so much. When it comes time for the child to leave, the loss can feel like such a heavy burden. There are also times when the placement has been difficult and very trying for the foster parent. As the time comes for the placement to be over, foster parents can be relieved that they have seen the placement to the end but also be glad it has reached the end. Remembering the good times and the progress that has been made will help with all separations. Remind yourself of why you became a foster parent and be comforted in the knowledge that you have succeeded!

Foster Parent Rewards

Foster Parents are rewarded by the knowledge they have provided a safe and stable home for a child during a time of crisis in his/her life. Foster parents see the smiles as the children begin to heal from whatever situation that made placement necessary. They witness the pride of a child who begins to make gains in school. A deep sense of accomplishment and peace is felt as foster parents help the children placed in their care. Foster parents may not always see the results of their labors, but they plant seeds that grow with the children and make a difference long after the children leave and have moved on to permanence. Foster parents are rewarded by the respect shown by their peers, the community, their agency, the children and many times by the parents and the families of the children they provided care for.

Foster Parent Appeal Rights

Foster parents have no legal right to any child in their care. Foster parents are part of a team working with the agency to provide temporary care for the child. Foster parents have the right to appeal certain circumstances.

You have the right to appeal when you feel that the removal of the child is not in the child's best interest and when none of the following conditions apply:

- The foster child has been in your home less than six months.
- The child is being placed in an adoptive home.
- The child is being returned to his/her birth parents.
- The court has ordered the child's removal.
- The child is being removed due to a report of alleged abuse against the foster parent(s).

To file an appeal you must notify, in writing, the agency with whom you contract within 15 days after you are informed of the child's removal. There are no appeal rights when the court initiates the removal of the child. Appeal rights apply only when the child's removal is planned and initiated by the agency.

When the agency with whom you contract with receives your notification, the agency will contact the Department of Welfare's Office of Hearings and Appeals, which will schedule a hearing on your behalf. You may be represented by anyone you feel could aid you in presenting your case. The Office of Hearings and Appeals will render a decision.

Annual Evaluation of Foster Homes

Each foster home will be visited and formally evaluated annually by a representative of the agency you contract with. The evaluation is used to determine continued compliance with state regulations for foster care. Foster families receive written notice from their agency regarding the results of this annual evaluation.

Any deficiencies found during the reevaluation will be noted and a correction plan will be established. The date by which the correction must be accomplished will be specified. If corrections are required, the foster home is considered out of compliance and will be placed on provisional status. While on provisional status, no additional children may be placed in the home. If, after one year, you have not made the necessary corrections, you may be excluded and your home closed.

You have the right to appeal any adverse regulatory action if you believe you have met necessary regulatory requirements. Appeals should be submitted in writing to the administrator of the agency with whom you are under contract within 15 days of the notice of the action. If the agency is unable to resolve the issues of disagreement the appeal will be forwarded to the Department of Public Welfare's Office of Hearings and Appeals for a hearing to be heard.

Policy Statements

In accordance with Pennsylvania State Regulations, all foster parents are requested to review, adhere to, and sign policy statements regarding child discipline, punishment and control, confidentiality, and furnishing and use of tobacco by minors. These policies will be reviewed and signed on an annual basis. These policies are explained below.

Child Discipline, Punishment And Control

Corporal punishment, which includes but is not limited to the following: whipping, spanking, slapping, or other forms of discipline which inflict pain is PROHIBITED according to state regulations. With foster children this can be seriously damaging to the child's emotional health and especially to the foster children who have been abused or neglected by their parents or caretakers. At no time is a child to be struck with a hand, stick, strap, or other instrument. As you well may know, there is a shifting and invisible line between constructive discipline and dehumanizing punishment.

There is a difference between discipline and punishment. Proper discipline can be a positive learning experience for the child. Discipline should not be used for venting one's own frustration for the child's shortcomings or some other source of aggravation. A child must be disciplined with understanding. Before disciplining a child, consider the child's age and level of social and emotional maturity. Talk to the child and consider what he has to say so you understand each other's thoughts and feelings. This will be helpful in setting realistic consequences

Confidentiality

All foster parents have the obligation to treat all information regarding foster children and their families in a strictly confidential manner. Foster parents must understand this strict need for confidentiality. Your agency will give you information regarding the child and his/her family. Foster children may also share other information with you. As foster parents you are prohibited from discussing this information with anyone who has no need to know this information. Discussing confidential information with your neighbors, friends or other relatives is inappropriate. Any violation of confidentiality, since state and federal law cover it, could result in legal action against the foster parent.

Furnishing And Use Of Tobacco By Minors (Foster Children)

Foster parents are prohibited at all times from furnishing or allowing any use of tobacco products by any child placed in their care.

Transportation of Foster Children

By Pennsylvania state law, all foster parents who provide transportation to foster children are required to have a current driver's license, automobile insurance coverage, and a vehicle with ample space, seatbelts and age - appropriate safety seats for each foster child. This insurance must remain current throughout the foster parent's career.

Insurance Protection

By state law, foster parents are required to have homeowner's insurance. Foster parents who rent are required to carry renter's insurance. This insurance coverage must remain in place throughout a foster parent's career.

Health Care Regulations For Foster Children

Medical and Dental Regulation Timeframes

Children who are placed in foster care must have a physical examination within 60 days of placement. Additionally, all children over the age of three must have a dental examination within sixty days of the date of placement. Children must have a physical examination on a yearly basis after the initial exam. Dental exams are required once every nine months after the initial examination.

These appointments must be documented with supporting information and placed in the child's foster care file.

Foster children are to be seen by their physician as needed for treatment. These appointments also must be documented in the child's foster care file with supporting information (diagnosis, treatment, medication prescribed).

Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT)

BPSDT is a specific medical assistance service, which provides for comprehensive health examinations as a means to establish a preventative health care agenda for children. The Pennsylvania Department of Welfare requires that each foster child in Pennsylvania receive EPSDT screening on the regular scheduled basis as set forth by the guidelines of the program. These guidelines can be provided by your agency.

Commonly Used Terms

Access Card

Access is government-funded health care insurance for low-income eligible families. It is also known as Medicaid.

Act 33 Clearance

The Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) (23 Pa. C.S., Chapter 63) at 6344 (relating to prospective child-care personnel) and the Protective Services Regulations at 3490.121 - 127 (relating to verification of the existence of child abuse and student abuse records for child care services) require prospective foster parents and adoptive parents to obtain a child abuse history clearance from the Department of Public Welfare (the Department) and a criminal history clearance from the Pennsylvania State Police. You may hear these clearances referred to as “Act 33” clearances. Act 33 of 1985 amended the Child Protective Services Law to require these clearances prior to approval as a foster or adoptive parent. Additionally, the Protective Services Regulations require foster and adoptive parents who are not residents of Pennsylvania to obtain a criminal history clearance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The CPSL and Protective Services Regulations prohibit a prospective foster parent or adoptive parent from being approved when any of the following circumstances exist:

- The prospective foster/adoptive parent has been named as a perpetrator of a founded report of child abuse committed within five years or less prior to the request for verification.
- The prospective foster/adoptive parent has been convicted of one of the following crimes or an equivalent out-of-state crime:

Chapter 25	(relating to criminal homicide).
Section 2702	(relating to aggravated assault).
Section 2709	(relating to harassment and stalking).
Section 2901	(relating to kidnapping).
Section 2902	(relating to unlawful restraint).
Section 3121	(relating to rape).
Section 3122.1	(relating to statutory sexual assault).
Section 3123	(relating to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse).
Section 3124.1	(relating to sexual assault).
Section 3125	(relating to aggravated indecent assault).
Section 3126	(relating to indecent assault).
Section 3127	(relating to indecent exposure).
Section 4302	(relating to incest).
Section 4303	(relating to concealing death of child).
Section 4304	(relating to endangering welfare of children).
Section 4305	(relating to dealing in infant children).
Section 5902(b)	(relating to prostitution and related offenses).

Section 5903(c)(d) (relating to obscene and other sexual materials and performances).
Section 6301 (relating to corruption of minors).
Section 6312 (relating to sexual abuse of children).

- A felony offense under Act 64-1972 (relating to the controlled substance, drug device and cosmetic act) committed within the past five years
- The attempt, solicitation or conspiracy to commit any of the offenses set forth above.
- The report of criminal history record information or the report of child abuse record information was obtained more than one year prior to the date of the application to the agency or commencement of the investigation.
- An agency licensed by the Department is cited for violation of these regulations, if they approve a foster or adoptive parent who has been convicted of the criminal offenses enumerated in the CPSL or is a founded perpetrator of child or student abuse within the past five years.
- Agencies may opt to conduct FBI clearances on prospective foster or adoptive parents who are Pennsylvania residents under federal legislation called the Volunteers for Children Act. These clearances are conducted at the request of an agency that has been deemed a qualified entity by the Department. See Office of Children, Youth and Families Bulletin number 3490-01-01 entitled “Federal Criminal History Clearances of Pennsylvania Residents” for more information on the Volunteers for Children Act and qualified entities.

Adjudication

Adjudication is a court decision. For a foster child, adjudication is a decision that he/she is either delinquent or dependent.

Adoption Assistance

Adoption Assistance is financial aid that is available to families who adopt children who are siblings, or children with special medical, physical or emotional needs. Your adoption worker can discuss this with you.

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

ASFA establishes unequivocally that the goals for children in the child welfare system are safety, permanence and well being. The law intends to make the child welfare system more responsive to the multiple, frequently complex, needs of children and their families. While affirming the need to forge linkages between the child welfare system, the courts and other support systems for families, the law affirms the need to assure the safety and well being of children and their families. The law provides renewed impetus to dismantling the barriers to permanence existing for children in placement and the need to achieve permanence for these children. ASFA has been incorporated into Pennsylvania’s overall policies for the child welfare program.

Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP)

The Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP) is a national initiative from the Office of Mental Health. CASSP addresses the needs of adolescents and children with serious emotional disturbances who are involved with two or more child-serving agencies. CASSP coordinates services among these agencies, pooling resources to serve the child most appropriately.

Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment is physical punishment such as spanking. It is strictly prohibited for foster parents to use corporal punishment.

CASA (Volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates)

Volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) are everyday people who are appointed by judges to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children. A CASA volunteer stays with each child until he or she is placed in a safe, permanent nurturing home.

County Children and Youth Agency (C&Y)

The county children and youth agency is the public agency that works with dependent neglected and abused children and their families. The mission of the agency is to help the family to avoid abuse and neglect and to protect children from further abuse.

ChildLine

ChildLine is Pennsylvania's toll-free telephone hotline to report suspected child abuse and neglect. The telephone Number is 1-800-932-0313.

Child Protective Services (CPS)

County children and youth agencies provide CPS services to abused and neglected children and their families. These services are designed to protect children from further abuse while working to rehabilitate families.

Dependent Child

A dependent child is a child placed in agency custody by a court because a family is unable or unwilling to provide adequate care.

Delinquent Child

A delinquent child, is a child who has committed a delinquent act as determined by the court, and found by the court to require supervision or rehabilitation.

Department of Public Welfare (DPW)

The Department of Public Welfare is the state agency that regulates and monitors child welfare services in Pennsylvania. The department also provides a wide range of programs for children and adults.

Disposition

A disposition is the part of a court hearing in which the court specifies the type of social service the child will receive.

Early Intervention Services

County mental health/mental retardation agencies use this term to describe services to young children designed to help them avoid or overcome physical or emotional development disabilities. Early intervention services provide the help children need to keep pace with other children their age, both socially and academically. Some foster children may need these services.

Family Reunification

This includes all efforts by the service delivery team to reunite children with their families. Foster parents can be a significant part of this team to work with and mentor birth families. Foster families working with birth families can have an extremely positive impact on the children.

Family Service Plan (FSP)

This is a plan that is a part of each family case record. It is prepared by the county agency and includes information about the family; the family's needs; the agency's goals for the family; and the kinds of services that will be provided to meet those goals.

Family Service Plan Amendment

This is an amendment to the FSP describing the circumstances that make placement of the child necessary.

Foster Family

A foster family is a family providing temporary care and supervision for a child placed in their home. The foster family provides parental care and supervision, and works with the agency staff to help achieve permanence for the child.

Guardian Ad Litem

Guardians Ad Litem are citizens who become part of a court program to represent the best interests of an assigned child. The Guardian Ad Litem is a representative for the child before the court, social service agencies and the community. He/she also protects the child during crisis, court proceedings and follows the child's progress after the court disposes of the case.

General Protective Services (GPS)

These are activities and services to protect the health and safety of children who are without the proper parental supervision or have been neglected or exploited but not to an extent sufficient to be considered child abuse.

Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)

An IEP is developed to meet the special education needs of the child. The IEP sets specific academic goals for the child.

Individual Service Plan (ISP)

An individual service plan describes the daily care and treatment to be provided to individuals within the context of the family service plan. The plan is developed by the agency serving the individuals.

Independent Living Program (IL)

Independent Living Programs teach children 16 years of age or older, the life skills they will need to live on their own. Services are often provided to older dependent or delinquent youths who are unable to return to their families. The goals of the program - independence and productivity - are defined by the conditions of self-supporting employment, enrollment in educational or vocational training, and a stable place of residence after they complete the program.

Judicial Review

A judicial review is a child welfare case review done every six months in juvenile court by either a judge or court master. At this review, the judge will hear from all parties. Progress will be noted and disposition will be made.

Mental Health/Mental Retardation (MH/MR)

This refers to agencies that provide services to people with mental illnesses or mental retardation.

Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF)

OCYF is the office within the Pennsylvania Department of Welfare that is responsible for funding and regulating public and private services for dependent and delinquent youth.

Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association (PSFPA)

PSFPA is an organization comprised of foster/adoptive parents, professionals, and other interested parties. The goal of the association is to enhance the lives of families and children in Pennsylvania.

Petition

A petition is a request for court action filed by the county children and youth agency stating the facts of the case. A petition is filed stating the facts of the case at the time of initial placement and at each review hearing during a child's foster care placement.

Placement Amendment

Changes made to the placement service plan are done with a placement amendment prepared by the agency. It identifies any changes in the original placement service plan. For example, additional services may be identified or the family may make significant progress or complete the goals identified in the family service plan. Copies of the amendments are furnished to the child and the parents.

Placement Service Plan

The placement service plan is a part of the family service plan that is completed when a child is placed in foster or other substitute care. The plan includes a statement of goals that the agency, the foster family and the child agree to work on while the child is in the foster home.

Respite Care

Respite care is care provided by short-term substitute caregivers where available. It allows a foster family a temporary relief from parenting responsibility. Respite care is a good prevention for burn-out, and can also be used during foster parent illness, times of other stresses and necessity.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

This is a Social Security Administration program, which provides federal funds for eligible adults, and children who have disabilities that prevent adults from finding employment and children from performing age appropriate tasks.

Special Needs Child

A special needs child is a child, who is over the age of 5, or is a member of a minority or sibling group, or has a disability. Special needs children require a special commitment from their foster or adoptive parents. Many special needs children are available for financial adoption assistance.

State Wide Adoption Network (SWAN)

SWAN is a partnership among public and private agencies, judges and the legal community, foster and adoptive parents. The Department of Public Welfare through a prime contractor administers the network. SWAN's purpose is to build a better collaborative adoption process in Pennsylvania.

The SWAN program serves children in the custody of county children and youth agencies with the goal of adoption. The design of the network is to support the work of the county agencies in expediting the adoption process.

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)

After all interventions have been exhausted by the agency to reunite a family, a TPR hearing is held before the court for decision and determination. Once a court has granted TPR, the biological parents no longer have any parental rights to the child, legal or otherwise. A TPR can be a voluntary request agreed to by the parent or can be involuntary and presented to the court without the consent and agreement of the parent(s) for the court's decision.

Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC)

WIC is a supplemental food program for low-income pregnant woman, mothers of infants and children up to age five. WIC is administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Health. The program provides vouchers for certain kinds of nutritious food

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse is a serious physical, mental, or sexual injury* or serious physical neglect* which is not explained by the available history as being accidental, but rather as a result of acts of omission by a parent, paramour of a parent, person residing in the same house as the child or person responsible for the child's welfare, to a person under the age of 18 years.

Serious Physical Injury An injury that:

- 43. Causes severe pain
- 44. Significantly impairs the child's physical functioning either temporarily or permanently

Serious Mental Injury A psychological condition as diagnosed by a physician or licensed psychologist, including refusal of appropriate treatment:

- 45 Renders the child chronically and severely anxious, agitated, depressed, and socially withdrawn, psychotic, or in reasonable fear that his life or safety is threatened
- 46 Seriously interferes with the child's ability to accomplish age appropriate developmental and social tasks.

Sexual Abuse or Exploitation: - The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of any child to engage in or assist any other person to engage in any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of any sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction, including photographing, videotaping, computer depicting or filming, of any sexually explicit conduct or the rape, sexual assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, molestation, incest, indecent exposure, prostitution, statutory sexual assault or other form of sexual exploitation of children.

Serious Physical Neglect - prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide the essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's functioning.

Imminent Risk - Any recent act, failure to act or series of such acts or failures to act by a perpetrator which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child

Physical abuse and imminent risk of abuse must be a recent act which is defined as being committed within two years of the date of report. No child shall be deemed to be physically or mentally abused based on injuries that result solely from environmental factors that are beyond the control of the parent or person responsible for the child's welfare, such as inadequate housing, furnishings, income, clothing and medical care.

Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse

Persons who, in the course of their employment, occupation, or practice of their profession, come into contact with children and have reasonable cause to suspect on the basis of their medical, professional, or other training or experience, that a child coming before them in their official or professional capacity is an abused child must make or cause to be made a report of suspected child abuse. Such persons include, but are not limited to:

Foster parents
Any licensed physician
Osteopath
Chiropractor
Intern
Coroner
Dentist
Optometrist
Podiatrist
Nurse
Teacher
Caseworker
Social worker
Mental Health Professionals
Drug~Acohol Therapists
Medical Examiner
Law Enforcement Officials

All reported cases of suspected child abuse are required to be investigated. Normally this is done by the county children and youth agency. When the report of suspected child abuse involves a foster parent, it is investigated by the Department of Public Welfare through the appropriate Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) Regional office. It should be noted that under Pennsylvania law, foster parents are also mandated reporters. Any person may make a report of suspected child abuse if he/she has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused. A report can be made by contacting ChildLine ~ 1-800-932-0313. This line operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The name of the person making the report will be kept confidential.

Child Abuse Investigations

Upon receiving a report of suspected child abuse, the county children and youth/region staff must immediately assure the safety of the child and other children in the home. Within 30 days of the report, the CPS staff must complete an investigation and determine whether the report is founded, indicated, or unfounded.

A report is:

Founded when there is judicial adjudication that the child was abused;

Indicated when the CPS staff finds abuse has occurred based on medical evidence, the CPS investigation, or an admission by the perpetrator;

Unfounded when there is a lack of evidence that the child was abused.

One of the goals of OCYF and the county children and youth agency is to preserve the family whenever possible. The children and youth agency requests protective custody of the child if the immediate safety and well being of the child requires removal from the home. Through counseling, training, and other support services, families learn to break the pattern of abuse and to establish a parent/child relationship that will be free of physical, mental, sexual and emotional violence and neglect.

Student Abuse

Amendments to the CPSL known as Act 15 1 of 1994 gave county children and youth agencies jurisdiction to investigate reports of suspected student abuse. Student abuse is committed when a school employee inflicts serious bodily injury or sexual abuse or exploitation on a student. The CPSL defines serious bodily injury as an injury that creates a substantial risk of death or causes serious permanent disfigurement or protracted loss or impairment of function of any bodily member or organ.

Suspected student abuse is reported differently than suspected child abuse. When a school employee becomes aware of a suspected student abuse, the school employee immediately informs the administrator. The administrator is mandated to immediately report the incident to law enforcement officials and the appropriate district attorney. If local law enforcement officials have reasonable cause to suspect, on the basis of an initial interview, that evidence of suspected student abuse exists, the local law enforcement officials shall notify the county children and youth agency.

The county children and youth agency has 60 days to complete its investigation and to determine the status of the report. The status determinations are the same as those of child abuse. The status determination of the report could be founded, indicated or unfounded. (Please see Section entitled 'What Happens After A Report Is Made' for explanation of status determination.) To the fullest extent possible, the county agency is required to coordinate its investigation with law enforcement officials. The student must be interviewed jointly by law enforcement officials.

When A Foster Parent Is Accused of Abuse

Child abuse reports are sometimes filed naming the foster parent(s) as alleged perpetrators of child abuse. These allegations are not be investigated by the county children and youth agency when the alleged perpetrator is an agent of the county children and youth agency. An agent of the county agency would include foster parents approved by a private foster care agency that contracts with the county children and youth agency where the abuse occurred.

The Office of Children, Youth and Families Regional staff will conduct the investigation in accordance to regulations. This is so that there can be no alleged conflict of interest for the county agency.

An investigation will begin immediately and the child will see immediately if the county children and youth agency determines emergency protective custody are required or if the agency cannot determine from the report whether emergency protective custody is needed. Otherwise, the agency begins an investigation and sees the child within 24 hours of the receipt of the report. The subjects of the report will receive a letter informing them of the investigation. The child involved in the investigation may be removed from the foster home. Other children in the home, including birth children, may also be removed if they are at risk.

All investigations must be completed within 30 days from the date of the report, unless there are extenuating circumstances to be resolved. Then the investigation must be completed within 60 days.

There may be a police investigation of the allegation at the same time.

Some types of reports are required by law to be referred to law enforcement officials. Referrals are made if the initial report to or initial review by the county children and youth agency gives evidence that the alleged abuse is one of the following:

- Crimes that prohibit approval as a foster parent or adoptive parent.
- The alleged perpetrator is not a family member of the child.
- Serious physical injury or an injury that significantly impairs the child's functioning, either temporarily or permanently.

The county children and youth investigation and the law enforcement investigation are separate and require different levels of evidence.

The subjects of the report will receive a letter stating the results of the investigation. Services may be provided to the child and the perpetrator. The agency must also submit a plan to assure the safety of that child and the other children in the home.

Universal Precautions

WHAT ARE THEY?

'Universal Precautions' is the term for infection control measures all health care workers and childcare providers should follow to protect themselves from infectious disease.

WHAT DO THEY CONSIST OF?

Hand washing:

- after diapering or toilet children after handling body fluids of any kind
- before and after giving first aid (such as cleaning cuts and scratches or bloody noses)
- after cleaning up spills or objects contaminated with body fluids
- after taking off your disposable gloves

All people should wear latex gloves:

- when they come into contact with blood or body fluids, which contain blood (such as vomit or feces that contain blood you can see)
- when individuals have cuts, scratches, or rashes which cause breaks in the skin of their hands

Remember: wearing gloves does not mean that you don't have to wash your hands!

Environmental Disinfecting should be done regularly and as needed. In the childcare setting this means cleaning toys, surfaces, and diapering areas with a bleach solution (1 tablespoon of bleach per quart of water made fresh daily). Blood spills or objects with blood on them need a stronger solution of 1/2 cup bleach to 2 1/2 cups water. Wear gloves when handling blood.

Proper Disposal of Materials that are soaked in or caked with blood requires double bagging in plastic bags that are securely tied. Items used for procedures on children with special needs (such as lancets for finger sticks, or syringes for injections given by parents or children) may require a special container to dispose of safely. Parents can provide what is called a 'sharps container' for items used away from home, which safely stores the lancets or needles until the parent can take them home and dispose of them in accordance with standard practices.

WHY ARE THEY NEEDED? Germs that are spread through blood and body fluids can come at any time from any person. You may not know **if someone** is infected **with a bacteria or virus** such as hepatitis or HIV; the infected person himself may not even know. This is why you must behave as if every individual might be infected with any germ in all situations that place you in contact with blood or body fluids. Following the steps listed above will result in practicing Universal Precautions, and will help protect you from getting 'blood borne pathogens' (disease carried by blood and other body fluids) in the child care setting.

Miscellaneous

Consent for Driving, Marriage, Entering the Armed Services, Surgery and Religious Preference

The placing agency may have voluntary custody or legal custody of a child, but the birth parent(s) retain legal rights unless terminated by the court. Therefore, in most cases, the placing agency must get permission of the birth parent(s) for the child to get a driver's license, purchase a car, get married, enter the armed services, have surgery, determine the religious preference of the child, or have a child baptized. Such an arrangement enhances the overall team effort and continuity of care that is so important to a child's sense of well being. It is hoped that such decisions can be arrived at in a mutually agreed upon manner for the child. In the absence of a birth parent, the court may so order.

School Information

Biological parents retain the right to sign for educational and legal documents. Only the agency, in cooperation with the biological parents, has the right to sign for the child to drop out of school. If the biological parents are not available to sign an IEP for Special Educational Services, the school district is required to assign a surrogate parent to assume this responsibility. This may not be the foster parent or the caseworker.

Federal Taxes and Foster Care

If you receive qualified foster care payments for caring for a foster child, do not include these payments in your income when preparing your tax return. Also, if you receive such payments, you may not claim the foster child as a dependant.

Of special interest to foster parents is the section on: Relationship Test - Eligible Foster Child For the purposes of earned income credit, a person is your eligible foster child if:

- ◆ The child lived with you and was a member of your household for the whole year,
- ◆ You cared for the child as you would for your own child.

The entire process and qualifying information are too lengthy to include and they change from time to time, please consult with your tax consultant with any questions and for complete details.

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Children and Youth Agency _____

Agency Emergency Number _____

Child's Guardian Ad Litem _____

Doctor _____

Dentist _____

Foster Parent Buddy _____

Local Hospital _____

Behavior Health _____

Poison Control _____

Police

Local _____

State _____

School _____

Respite Care Provider _____

Other _____

All About PSFPA

History

The Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association (PSFPA) is a statewide association dedicated to addressing the needs and concerns of all foster and adoptive parents, foster and adopted children, and child placement agencies in Pennsylvania. Founded in 1974, the PSFPA members include foster and adoptive parents, professionals and other interested parties who work in the field of foster care or adoption throughout the commonwealth or who are otherwise connected with or interested in the welfare of families and children.

An executive director who is overseen by the PSFPA Board of Directors manages the association.

PSFPA Board of Directors

The Board of directors is comprised of diverse PSFPA members who broadly represent the child welfare system and all regions of the state both professionally and geographically. The majority of the board is and must remain foster parents Board members serve a three-year term and may not serve more than two consecutive three-year terms. Elected officers, who must be foster or adoptive parents, govern the PSFPA Board of Directors. Officers serve two-year terms and may serve no more than two consecutive two-year terms.

PSFPA Mission Statement

PSFPA's mission is to be a catalyst to help all those who care about children and their families. PSFPA will work directly with local foster parent associations and the agencies that refer children to care. Additionally, PSFPA will seek to involve all parts of the community to improve the quality of family life in Pennsylvania.

PSFPA Funding

PSFPA has been fortunate to receive funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare's Office of Children Youth and Families. This grant allocates funds to enhance and improve services to foster and adoptive families as well as to improve the image of foster parenting to the general public through education and awareness.

PSFPA Board of Director's Responsibilities

- Interpret and enforce the provisions of the By Laws;
- Promote constructive social action needed to bring about changes and improvements in child placement systems and in legislation pertaining to all children and families;
- Act as an information center and as a research body regarding legislative action, constitutional matters, finances, education and to disseminate such information;
- Provide a vehicle for communication among foster parents, local foster parent associations and child placing agencies;
- Cooperate with other organizations that have similar objectives as those of PSEPA;

PSFPA Board Member's Duties

Attend and participate in Board meetings;

Assist with PSFPA conferences as requested by the president and/or Executive Director;

- Actively serve on standing Board committees;
- Represent PSFPA across Pennsylvania;
- Actively recruit members;
- Assist with PSFPA fund raising in accordance with procedures and events as authorized by the Board and directed by the Executive Director.

PSFPA Member Services

Education and Training - PSFPA sponsors educational and networking opportunities for foster and adoptive parents and child welfare professionals. Board meetings and training conferences are held throughout the regions of the Commonwealth to enable membership participation.

Awards - An annual awards program recognizes the accomplishments of foster and adoptive families, professionals and other individuals who have touched the lives of and have made outstanding contributions to families and children in Pennsylvania. PSFPA is also available to assist local foster parent member agencies and member associations in honoring their families during their individual recognition events.

Newsletter A newsletter is published quarterly and distributed to PSFPA members, state and local government, child welfare authorities and others interested in child welfare. The newsletter contains valuable and timely information regarding legislation, training opportunities, PSFPA's programs and activities, and details about foster care in Pennsylvania. Nearly 1,700 copies of the Newsletter are distributed quarterly.

Scholarships - PSFPA funds one of the most successful scholarship programs of its kind. Academic scholarships are awarded to graduating foster/adoptive and birth children of PSFPA members through an application process. PSFPA is a member of the PHFAA PATH Program that then matches scholarships dollar for dollar to all PSFPA's qualified scholarship recipients. All contributions to the scholarship fund are earned by PSFPA board members or directly contributed by organizations and others interested in the education of our children.

Support Services - PSFPA operates and monitors a 24-hour a day support line *1-800-951-5151*. This line is staffed by people who are available to provide PSFPA members with information and resources including contacts useful in all aspects of need for foster families as they provide substitute care to Pennsylvania's children.

Local Foster Parent Association Interaction and Support- PSFPA works most directly to provide services and opportunities to local foster parent associations who are responsible to inform and bring these services and opportunities to local foster parents.

Web Page - PSFPA maintains this web page to assist with providing information to board members, PSFPA members and the general public regarding foster care issues. Included on this web page are related links, on-line training, and other opportunities for training. The web page also hosts a bulletin board where other web page readers present issues and questions for comments.

For more information on any PSFPA service or for membership information, please call 1-800-951-5151 in PA or 717-671-0102.

A Word of Thanks

*PSFPA wishes to thank all that helped to make this manual a success.
PSEPA requested in put and information from many sources,
we did this to be positive we had a true picture of all aspects of Foster Care
and related programs for the state of Pennsylvania.
We are especially thankful and grateful to the
Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare,
for without their ongoing support and encouragement
this manual would still be a dream.*

Thank you.