



Advancing the potential of our communities, customers and ourselves through exceptional service

Foster Care Handbook

Children & Family Services

EFFECTIVE October 1, 2019

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Foster Parents,

Service Alternatives is honored that you have chosen to partner with our agency to provide such a valuable service for foster children. Our vision is to make a difference by advancing the potential of our communities, customer, and ourselves through exceptional service. Together we can see this vision in the lives of the children and families you serve.

In this handbook you will find a variety of guidelines, rules, and fundamental procedures to ensure a safe and secure home, to assist you in adhering to the Minimum Licensing Requirements for Child Foster Homes, and several that are specific to our agency as we strive to advance the potential of foster children in our communities. We have organized the handbook in three distinct yet interrelated chapters – *becoming a licensed foster parent and maintaining your license; your rights and responsibilities as a foster parent; and the rights of children in foster care*. These chapters offer valuable information and insights on being a foster parent. They also remind you of the sacred task set before us when we foster children in out-of-home care.

Thank you again for your service and partnership, and for opening your home and family to children that need you. Let's get this journey started.

Sincerely,

Your Service Alternatives Team

Why Be a Foster Parent? By Dr. Karen Sullivan

It's the kind of question that I answer with ease and sometimes even eloquence when asked by others, despite internal doubts. Usually I find simple answers suit others' curiosity the best. Here are my favorites:

- It matters—every day you are making a real and often profound difference in the life of a child.
- If not me, then who?—I don't see any legions of more competent parents out there begging to do this work. If there was a surplus of great foster homes, I might stop this craziness; but as we know there are not. Which leads to the next response...
- I'm needed—Although the child welfare agency does not send me flowers when I renew my license, I do hear about the days when placement workers go half mad trying to place even moderately difficult kids and I want to help out.
- Children are so vulnerable—I can do a good job advocating, protecting, nurturing and guiding.
- It's challenging—Like getting a new job or gearing up for the big game, there is a bit of a rush of excitement about getting a new kid, wondering with a half-smile what you've gotten yourself into. It's rewarding to do a good job parenting kids who are usually not so bad as your worst nightmares.
- Why not?—this is my personal favorite and it's not so flip as it sounds. I actually believe that the most important work that we can do with our lives is to assist others. In the end, I think we should be judged by ourselves and by others, if not by some higher power, according to how much we did for those in need, whether family, friends or other people's children.

Excerpt of article from National Advocate, winter 1995

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Chapter 1

FOSTER HOME LICENSING AND MAINTAINING A LICENSE

Child Foster Home Licensing and Minimum Licensing Requirements

In order to become a licensed foster parent and provide 24-hour a day care to children who are in foster care, you must meet and maintain specific licensing requirements to provide a home that is safe, healthy, and protects children from all forms of abuse and neglect. The licensing process with Service Alternatives (SA) begins with the receipt of your completed application to provide foster care in your home; as well as criminal background authorization forms for all members of your home age 16 and over. It is anticipated that the entire process will take no longer than 90-days from receipt of the application and will include visits from your SA licenser. During these visits the licenser will interview you and all members of your family, present you with policies to aid in maintaining a safe and healthy home, and conduct inspections of your home to ensure compliance with all minimum licensing requirements (MLR).

The MLR's are the rules of Washington State for providing licensed foster care. By providing licensed foster care you are acknowledging that you have read, understood, and will comply with all requirements. Your SA licenser will review these with you, complete documentation to ensure compliance and answer any questions you may have about them. They can be found here: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=388-148>

The licenser will also provide you with trainings and a calendar of all trainings required for licensure and begin to orient you to SA procedures and personnel. Upon satisfactory completion, SA will recommend to the Licensing Division of DCYF (LD) that your home be licensed as a foster home. LD then reviews the recommendation and all supporting documentation completed by you and your licenser and issues a foster care license.

This chart is provided as a guide for the general responsibilities and documentation required of an applicant, the licensor, and LD to become a licensed foster parent.

Applicant(s) Completes/provides the...	SA foster care licensor Will...	LD Approves...
Application	Reviews and submits to LD	
References	Check references	
Background check	Submit to LD	Background check results
Fingerprints		Approves and works directly with applicant if information is found
Personal Information forms Including: marriage and divorce decrees, income verification, health report, TB test results, any applicable vaccine records (including pets), other evaluations, etc.	Reviews and uses for home study Interviews of applicant(s) and family members	
Any additional evaluations requested by SA or LD	Licensor review for home study	
SA Policy Documentation	Will refer to and assist with compliance	
Fire Evacuation Plan/Emergency Protocol	Is filed and referred to in emergencies	
Provide certificates for any relevant trainings completed: CPR/First Aid, TB test results, etc.	Files certificates, includes dates of completion/expiration, and verifies in the home study	
	Completes home study Including: Summary of personal information you have provided, recommendations from references, description of your home, recommendation from licensor	
	Licensing File Checklist	
	Foster Home Checklist	
	Other supporting documentation	
	Certification Card	
		Issue License, when approved

Maintaining your foster home license

Each license to provide foster care is valid for three years; and over the duration of your license SA is required to continually assess and monitor your license. Your participation and partnership with us during this time period will ensure successful and timely re-licensing should you continue to desire to maintain a foster home license. It also assists us to proactively support your home to diminish some of the stress associated with providing foster care. Everything listed below will serve to accomplish successful maintenance of your license.

90-day health and safety inspection: These inspections are to ensure that your home and family continues to meet all MLR/WACs as a licensed foster home. SA will complete health and safety inspections of your home every 90-days. These inspections may include interviewing the foster parents, the foster child(ren), and other people in the home; along with walking through the entire house and property for an overall safety check verifying compliance with WAC.

Health and Safety Inspections will usually be pre-arranged for a time that is convenient for you, the foster parent. On occasion, additional health and safety inspections may be completed on a drop-in basis due to various circumstances. It is the expectation that SA foster parents will participate in all scheduled inspections and will comply with suggested follow through. SA may also conduct unannounced drop-in visits that are not related to health and safety inspections.

Training: As a foster parent, a mindset of perpetual learning will be key to your success. As you may already understand, each child you encounter will challenge the dynamics of your home, require consistency and predictability from you as parent, and will present a variety of behaviors needing individualized interventions. Your licensor will work with you to develop a training plan specific to the children in your home and your level of experience providing out of home care to children. This will be completed upon initial license and at each licensing renewal. All parents in a multi-parent household are strongly encouraged to attend all trainings offered, AND all parents ARE required to attend CPR/First Aid and Blood Borne Pathogens.

Many trainings are available to you on-line to be completed at your leisure from your own home, and a few are offered only via in-person classroom trainings. You also have valuable resources in your local community through either community college courses, parent-teacher association sponsored activities and classes, mental health centers, and through the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence. Contact your licensor for the most efficient way to register for classes. Requests for exception to any required trainings must be submitted in writing to your SA

licenser. In some circumstances, you may be able to substitute trainings from other sources such as the Red Cross, or a college or university. Approved CPR and First Aid must be in accordance with a nationally recognized standard, must include an in-person exercise demonstrating that you are capable of performing CPR, and is required to be current for all caregivers in the home. Any lapse in CPR certification will jeopardize your foster care license and may result in SA making alternate arrangements to safely care for foster children (additional cost to be deducted from your reimbursement).

Families serving children in our Behavioral Rehabilitation Services contract (referred to as treatment foster families) are required to attend 30-hours of training per year, combined for two parent households; including RIGHT RESPONSE™. RIGHT RESPONSE™ is SA’s prevention, de-escalation, physical safety, and post-vention training. This training is valid for one year and requires a one-day recertification course annually. There is a 90-day grace period extension offered to foster families for this and a failure to recertify (one-day training) within 90-days of expiration (one year) requires a full re-take of the course (two-day training).

Families are to receive 36-hours of training for the duration of each license (every three years). Regardless of the required number of training hours each year, continuing education and training is essential to successful foster parenting.

Additionally, foster parent meetings are held monthly to provide ongoing training, sharing information for compliance standards, and as an opportunity to give and receive informal supports to and from fellow foster parents. Attendance at monthly foster parent meetings is mandatory for treatment foster parent(s).

Required training to receive a foster home license and to maintain your license:

Training	Number of hours	Expires
Caregiver Core	24 hours	n/a
SA Foster Parent Orientation	3 hours	n/a
Safe Practices	7 hours	n/a
CPR/ First Aid/BBP	7 hours	Date on card
CPS Mandatory Reporting	1 hour	1 year
RIGHT RESPONSE™ (treatment foster homes only)	14 hours initial certification 7 hour re-certification	1 year (90-day grace period)

* Other trainings may be required by WAC based on the age range you are seeking to provide care for.

Annual Evaluations: Your SA licenser will complete an annual evaluation collecting feedback from program staff supporting you, and social workers with children placed in your home. This evaluation is crucial to assessing your skills in providing and supporting children in care, and to identify plans to address any support needs for your home and license. They also decrease the

amount of time needed to re-license your home, and provide a level of quality assurance that you and your home are maintaining compliance with the MLRs.

Communication/Changes Notifications: On-going communication is necessary when providing foster care. Failure (or failing) to communicate with SA could most certainly jeopardize the safety of children and your status as foster parent. Foster parents must immediately report to their SA licenser any change in residence, telephone number, marital status, employment, significant changes in the household composition, a violent episode within the household, death or hospitalization of a member of the household, a member of the household getting arrested, structural home damage or planned remodeling. In addition, you must notify the licenser *prior* to another individual moving into the home, and of any change of your health (i.e., a change in prescribed medication either new or discontinued, or change in dosage prescribed). Please note that some of these changes may require a new license to reflect the changes.

Emergent/Immediate notifications to your licenser

Critical Incident: A critical incident can be a physical or psychological trauma or situation that severely threatens the health and safety of a foster child, foster family or SA staff. Serious injury and/or death/suicide of a foster child must be reported immediately to Child Protective Services (CPS) intake and/or Law Enforcement, as well as your SA primary contact and licenser. Child abuse and neglect must be called in to CPS and/or law enforcement within a 12-hour period, but as soon as possible. You must contact your SA primary contact and an incident report needs to document the incident and the contacts you made. If there is an arrest of a foster child, the SA primary contact must be notified as soon as possible. Another example of a critical incident that must be reported is a house fire or natural disaster that disrupts family life.

Runaway: When you are reasonably certain that a foster child has run away, you must:

- Call SA crisis response and law enforcement
- You must speak to a live crisis response person from SA and immediately file a run report with the nearest law enforcement agency
- Complete a SA Incident Report and document who you reported it to
- Notify the caseworker and if the caseworker is unavailable, refer to CPS intake

Reference guide for additional clarity on notifications

Circumstance:	Report to:	Timeframe/Order of precedence
Allegation of child abuse or neglect	Referral to CPS Intake	Immediately
	Call to SA primary contact	Following CPS Intake referral
	Licenser	Next business day
	Complete Incident Report	12-hours
Death or injury of child	911 when applicable	Immediately
	Referral to CPS Intake	Immediately
	SA primary contact	Following CPS Intake referral
	SA licenser	Immediately after notifying primary contact
	Complete Incident Report	12-hours
Child Missing from Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children in treatment foster care have individualized plans that will dictate how long a child may be missing before beginning notifications. 	Police and Missing Children Clearinghouse	Within timeline noted on child's individual plan; or Immediately for youth without individualized treatment plan
	SA primary contact	Immediately after calling police and missing from care clearinghouse
	CA Social Worker /CPS intake as directed by primary contact	Following notification to SA primary contact
	SA licenser	Next business day
Any serious physical or mental incapacity that may interfere with the care of children	SA licenser	12-hours
Non-emergent notifications		
Receipt of summons, subpoena, or other legal notice	Primary contact	Same day received
Someone moves in or out of house (including a child, adoption of a child, a new partner)	SA licenser	24-hours
Change of marital status	SA licenser	24-hours
Structural change of house or grounds	SA licenser	24-hours
Change of residence	SA licenser	Prior notice required
Change of employment	SA licenser	Within 24-hours of change
Change in medical condition including changes in prescription medications impact your ability to care for children	SA licenser	Within 24-hours of change

Chapter 2

FOSTER PARENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

What you do as a foster parent has the ability to change the trajectory of a child's life while in your care. While we have outlined in the chapter above: how to become a licensed foster parent, and how to maintain your license; we now would like to take the opportunity to share more rules related to your rights and responsibilities as a foster parent. Adherence to these will further advance your potential as a foster parent and ultimately the lives of children receiving care in your home.

You have the right to...
Accept or refuse the placement of a child

SA's primary goal is to serve children well and help find placements for all children in need, and we adhere to the following best practices to ensure successful placements. When determining potential placements, SA works in collaboration with foster families to determine the most appropriate placement option for you and the child. Determining factors may include the age, gender, needs of the child, and your ability to provide the best care based on your experience, family composition and skill level.

The process of receiving a referral for a child into your home can vary depending upon the urgency for placement. Each region for SA establishes a regional placement protocol that outlines how you will receive referrals and how to proceed with placement. Generally, your SA primary contact or licensor will contact you with referral information for you to consider. We will make all information we possess about a child available to you prior to a child being placed into your home. You will review the referral with your licensor or primary contact to determine if the child may be accepted for placement in your household. It is solely your right to decide whether you accept a child for placement

In the ideal process or a planned placement, you will have the opportunity to meet the child and review the child's history. However, referrals received as urgent or immediate, arrive on the same day the child needs placement leaving little time to arrange a meeting with a child prior to placement. As an agency, we value the opportunity to develop relationships with the children, to help with transition, and to make sure placements are the most appropriate. We make every good faith effort to contact families upon receipt of referrals to provide as much time to assess

the referral as possible. Remember, all information contained in the child's file is confidential and is not to be disclosed to unauthorized parties. Any concerns you have that may arise at the time of the referral review need to be addressed, and any questions unanswerable by the agency representative may be directed to another party involved in the child's team, such as the Department of Child Youth and Families (DCYF) caseworker.

Welcoming a child into your home and making him/her feel comfortable and safe is extremely important. However before proceeding with this step, it is very important that you follow all the documentation requirements before accepting the placement. It is mandated that you review all materials and that you sign the respite and placement documentation form prior to accepting a child for placement. There may be additional regional protocols for you to follow prior to accepting a child for placement.

Do not accept a child into your home for even a few hours without sufficient information to allow you to determine whether the child is likely to be an appropriate match for your skill level and for your household. Our only way to ascertain that you have received available information to make a well-informed decision is to have the respite and placement documentation form completed and signed prior to respite or placement.

On occasion, we do not have as much time as we would like to have a smooth and long transition, especially when the need for placement is emergent. Children may need emergency placement for a wide variety of reasons, and the children may or may not be known to our agency. When you have an extra bed available and your license allows, we may call you with a request for an emergency placement or respite. *You always have the right and responsibility to decline if you believe you are not able to take an additional child, even for a short period of time.*

If you accept a child into your home after normal business hours and with very short notice, make sure you have, at a minimum, the items in the respite section of the respite and placement documentation form. We will ask you to sign the form after reviewing the child's referral, but before accepting the child into your home for placement.

You are only permitted to take children who have been referred to you by SA. *If anyone, besides a representative of SA (including DCYF), contacts you regarding the placement of a child, immediately refer that person to your SA primary contact or Licensor.* There can be very serious consequences to accepting children from sources other than your licensing agency (SA). These can range anywhere from reimbursement issues to termination of your foster care license.

At SA, we operate under the philosophy of unconditional care, meaning we do not "give up" on children, nor do we deny services to them. We recognize that occasionally child placements may not always work and expect you to retain your right and responsibility to accept or decline a placement by anticipating any circumstance that may lead you to request a child leaving your home. When children struggle in foster homes, our first response is to assess the level of support provided to both the foster family and the child and adjust as necessary. Respite care may be a way to diffuse a crisis and with SA's support a child and family can often work through issues and re-unite after a short break. In addition, training and mental health professionals can also assist in working out issues when they arise instead of "giving notice" on a child as a way to resolve the problem.

We expect your first response to be a request for assistance and a willingness to try new and creative ways to better serve the child in your home. If it is clear that every reasonable attempt has not produced an environment which helps the child become more successful, and if you feel it is a safety issue, you may request the child be placed elsewhere. You must give SA a written 30-day notice for us to seek alternate placement for the child. Please consider very carefully your 30-day notice request before you put it in writing. Once the process has started it may be very difficult to stop. A pattern of 30-day notices, (asking a child be removed immediately without justifiable health and safety reasons or unreasonable 30-day notice requests) may cause us to re-evaluate your status with our agency.

You have the right to...
Be reimbursed for placements in a timely manner

Along with a license to provide foster care, foster parents with SA are contractors and as such receive a contract specific to the financial responsibilities of providing foster care. Your contract will specify the current reimbursement rates at your time of licensure. The rates determined are based on the contracted rate for the child in your home. Rates will be discussed with you at the time of referral and the reimbursement is to cover all expenses for the child's room and board, transportation, clothing, and personal incidentals (i.e., hygiene products, allowance, school supplies, and child care if in treatment foster care, extracurricular activities – sports, community activities, and etcetera).

The reimbursement is also to cover any incidental damage to your home caused by the foster child. We advise that you put some monies designated as "damage reimbursement funds" aside each month to cover future damages. If you endure excessive damage to your home or property

(greater than \$450.00 per child per year), we will work with you to reduce future damage and to explore ways to repair existing damages. Additionally, the most reliable insurance coverage for damage incurred by foster children is contained in your homeowner's insurance policy. It is your responsibility to obtain liability coverage. It is important that you establish that the policy covers acts of foster children that might result in property damage and other occurrences for which you may be held liable. If your homeowner's policy does not contain a specific provision covering foster children, we recommend you contact your insurance agent to obtain such coverage. If you are renting, it is your responsibility to obtain renter's insurance that would cover any damage incurred by foster children.

Foster parents are partially covered under the state's foster parent liability plan. Please note that this coverage is not guaranteed by SA and is limited by the guidelines of the plan. Please request a Foster Parent Claim Form, should this occur. Your licenser can provide you with the form and further information.

Finally, this reimbursement is intended for the care and provision of foster children in your home and is not to be considered a "paycheck".

You have the right to...

Have a clear understanding of your role (as a foster parent) and of SA's role.

In treatment foster care, the foster family home is viewed as the primary treatment setting, with the parent(s) trained and supported to implement the goals outlined in the child's Individual Service and Treatment Plan (ISTP). These goals include permanency outcomes, community integration, meeting the medical (including mental health) and dental needs of the children, reducing/eliminating inappropriate behaviors, and supporting the child's educational needs. These goals are carried out under the direction of the foster parents, coupled with SA case management and behavioral intervention specialist staff (BISS), and various community members working to provide support to the family unit.

All foster parents are to be active participants in the teams, and to work in a partnership with all family support persons. Foster parents are expected to frequently transport the child to academic, recreational, community activities, and medical appointments to help them develop community and social ties. Helping the child learn social and life skills will be one of the most enduring gifts you can give a foster child. Foster parent(s) are to provide consistency and structure to the children in their care and provide a scheduled daily routine that the child can easily follow. This may include chore time, homework time, and family activities.

Foster parents work with a child's established team which may include the child's biological family. Whenever possible, teams will include biological family members, and regardless of a situation between a child and their biological parents, foster parents are to be respectful and professional towards them. All of the children's relationships with parents, siblings, and other family members should be actively supported and enhanced throughout the period of placement *unless such efforts are expressly and legally forbidden*. The coordination of visits will be set up and managed by your primary contact or the child's DCYF caseworker, foster parents are not to initiate contact without prior consent; nor are foster parents to share contact information or home addresses.

Being in such an integral role necessitates the completion of essential paperwork to document progress and concerns. *The following depicts the responsibility of foster parents in paperwork:*

- Communication – document conversations and notifications in dedicated notebooks or journals.
- Paperwork (treatment foster homes)
 - Maintain weekly contact with foster child's SA case manager (written document, notification and incident reports, and medication)
 - Weekly: A weekly summary completed by the foster parents discussing the events of the previous week (appointments, visitations, and incidents).
 - Monthly (as requested by contract or primary contact): a monthly summary completed detailing the events of the previous month, any medical appointments, overview of visits, and noting any incidents.
 - Other: Allowance, inventory of child's belongings, medication administration, therapeutic visit forms, incident reports, and any child specific documentation.
- Medication
 - Medication: Foster parents shall document when and who administers medication. A copy of all prescriptions must be given to your SA primary contact when serving treatment foster children.
 - Foster parents shall administer all prescription medication only as prescribed by the child's physician. No changes to a child's medication shall be made without written consent from a physician, child's caseworker, and other designee (i.e., biological parent). "PRN" or "as-needed" medications may be dispensed according to the guidelines/prescription/standing orders of the child's physician.

- Non-prescription medication must be approved in writing by a physician before administering to a child, and administered only as directed by manufacturer's label and/or child's physician.
- All psychotropic medication (mind or mood altering medication) must have written approval by the child's biological parent(s), legal guardian, or child his or herself if 13 years of age or older. In some cases, the child's caseworker may give the written approval.
- No medication that is prescribed to one child can be given to another child.
- All medication shall be documented in writing each time it is administered. Documentation shall include the name of the prescribing physician, the name of medication, dosage, date and time it was administered, and initials of supervising adult. In addition, note reason and results for "PRN" or "as-needed" medications. A copy of the prescription must be made available to SA for initial prescriptions as well as any changes. This documentation shall be placed in the child's file.
- The foster parents and the child's health care provider will develop a clear outline of the procedures to be followed in the event of missed medication. The child's team, including the social worker, and health care provider, must approve the procedure. A specific procedure is to be developed for each medication for each foster child in the home. An incident report with the health care provider's response will be submitted within 12-hours of any instance of missed medication.
- Disposal of unused, expired, or discontinued medications shall be logged on the medication administration form, include date and reason discontinued as well as method of disposal. Dispose of medications by returning to the pharmacy for disposal, have the pharmacist give you a receipt for the medication, and attach it to the medication administration form.
- *Any instance in which a child took the wrong dosage, the wrong medication, or had unsupervised access to medications, shall be treated as a medical emergency.*

Your rights and responsibilities as it pertains to safety:
supervision of children, guns, other weapons, alcohol, smoking, marijuana, and bodies of water.

Supervision: Children in foster care will have age and developmentally appropriate supervision. A supervising adult must be authorized through a DCYF Background Authorization, and have approval from SA prior to providing supervision. Most children will have an individual supervision

plan that will need to be followed at all times. You, as an SA foster parent, will be given a copy of a child’s supervision plan to sign and date, and refer to when needed. A copy of this will be attached to the child’s service plan, and the child’s team must approve any changes. *No other children (biological or foster children) shall be placed under the care or supervision of a foster child at any time for any reason.*

If you find yourself in a situation where you are responsible for supervision of a child that is unfamiliar to you, we recommend the following best practices:

Circumstance	Supervision
Child is with other children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 minute visual check • Stay within ear shot as much as possible
In the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain arms-reach proximity of child • Allow restroom use by child only under direct supervision, OR; if opposite gender, make sure child is alone in restroom by finding single room or checking restroom beforehand. • If you need a break, find another authorized adult to supervise in your absence or separate child from other children and follow next set of guidelines.
If child is alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain ear shot supervision as often as possible. Under no circumstance may supervision lapse for more than 15 minutes while child is awake. • Preschool age children, under age six, and children with severe developmental disabilities must not be left physically unattended in a bathtub or shower.
If child is asleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If permitted by the caseworker, set door and window alarms (provided by SA) • Check on child as frequently as possible while meeting your own sleep needs. • Children under six years of age must sleep on the same floor of foster home as foster parents.

The use of recording devices and baby monitors is strictly prohibited unless they are approved by the child’s DCYF caseworker for therapeutic purposes.

Guns and weapons: You have the right to own guns and other weapons. And, you have the responsibility to keep them safely locked in approved safes away from the reach and access of children. Ammunition is to be locked in approved safes. Your licenser will note the types of guns and other weapons your family possesses during the licensing process and during each 90-day health and safety inspection.

Alcohol, smoking/nicotine products, and marijuana: Smoking or using nicotine (vaping) in the presence of foster children is strictly prohibited by the MLRs. It is prohibited in your home, attached garages, and vehicles. As with nicotine, marijuana use is also prohibited in all forms in the presence of children in foster care. Alcohol is to be inaccessible to children, but you may

consume alcohol while maintaining cognitive function to appropriately supervise and care for children. It is important to be aware that if you decide to consume alcohol in your home that it may be a trigger for some children due to their past experiences and we may require you to lock up your alcohol.

Bodies of water: Foster parents must ensure age and developmentally appropriate supervision of any child using hot tubs, swimming pools, spas, and around man-made and natural bodies of water. Adults providing supervision in foster homes must know how and be able to use rescue equipment or have current life-saving certification (CPR) while children are in pools.

Body of water	Precautions
Portable wading pools	Must be emptied daily and supervise use continuously
Hot tubs and spas	Locked cover
Swimming pools	Fence designed to discourage climbing AND a locked gate to ensure inaccessibility. Written safety and supervision plan for use for each child in placement. CPR or lifeguard on duty required
Rivers/Lakes/Ocean	Swim in designated swimming areas only Use US Coast Guard approved flotation devices if child is under 13 years old. Children age 4 and younger must be within touching distance of a supervising adult or the child's parent. CPR or lifeguard on duty required

Most children's individual safety and supervision plan includes a statement that a certified life guard must be on duty for a child to be in or around bodies of water. Please refer to this document or contact your primary contact to ascertain the specific requirements for the child in your home around bodies of water.

You have the right to...

Continue your own family patterns, routines, and values so long as these do not infringe on a foster child's rights.

Opening up your home and your heart to foster a child is very rewarding. However, your family needs to be prepared for the impact having a foster child in your home will have on your family. Every child in foster care comes with unique circumstances that brought them to foster care. These circumstances always include a history of some sort of trauma or a child would not be in foster care. Children dealing with trauma often have behaviors that are more extreme than children that are not dealing with abuse, neglect, grief, and loss. As a result of trauma, children placed in foster care have more appointments than the average child. Children in the foster care system often have weekly mental health appointments, as well as visits to physicians and other specialists. A family needs to be prepared to complete paperwork and have a locked filing

cabinet to keep the child's file confidential. Foster families need to be prepared to open their home to caseworkers, SA licensers and staff, and be willing to work as a team. Travel must be pre-approved, so trips must be planned in advanced and in a timely manner. A family must be ready to have their home meet MLR's at all times to assure the health and safety of the child placed in your home. Discipline must be appropriate and "spanking" a foster child is against state regulations. And, obviously having a foster child in your home will increase the need for more food and increase the loads of laundry done each week. Incorporating a foster child and all that they bring will challenge your family patterns and routines; but, they don't have to change or suspend all of them. We will get to the foster child's rights in the next chapter and always remember to ask for help when you find yourself in a balancing tug-of-war.

You have the right to...

Have all information concerning the foster child that will have a direct bearing on your daily living patterns, as well as any potential danger from a foster child.

SA is committed to sharing all of the information and paperwork in regards to the child's history, current needs, and long-term planning with foster families. In discussing appropriate fit with your family SA will assess, with you, any potential danger and anticipated disruptions to your daily living pattern.

You have the right to...

Have visitations between child and family which are pre-approved and reasonable.

Visits with family members and friends are strongly encouraged by SA and all means possible to support such visits are taken. SA foster parents are responsible to ensure that children attend court ordered visits when scheduled. The child's team, including the court, determines who the child may have visits with including whether or not visits need to be supervised by another adult. Neither SA personnel nor foster parents independently make decisions on who children may visit. However, SA will advocate that scheduled visits are pre-approved and reasonably accommodate your family's schedule.

You have the right to...

***Have access to the grievance process in case of disagreement with SA.
And, to understand the investigative process.***

Investigations: Disagreements and the use of the grievance process are most often encountered during investigations when someone makes an allegation or concern against a foster parent.

The Licensing Division (LD) and Child Protective Services (CPS), as well as SA has a responsibility to look into these concerns.

As stressful as it is, during investigations, you are expected to professionally and promptly respond to all requests from LD, CPS and SA in order to complete the investigation. Failure to do so forfeits ongoing reimbursements if your foster children are still under your care and may effect supervision of your license by SA. Any follow up and notification of findings of the investigation will be provided to you in writing. **Most** investigations do not result in a “finding” of abuse or neglect against a foster parent. However, these investigations are stressful on a foster family and there are several agencies that your licenser can refer you to for help and support. Specifically these agencies can explain the investigation process, the difference between a licensing complaint and an abuse and neglect referral, assist you with communicating your thoughts and concerns, and lend a supportive ear.

Investigation process: When complaints about foster homes are registered with DCYF Intake they will either be investigated by the Licensing Division’s Child Protective Services (LD-CPS) or screened to your SA foster home licenser to investigate, depending on the type of complaint.

If LD-CPS determines the complaint should be investigated, based on its criteria, the LD-CPS worker will:

- Notify you of the allegations as early as possible without jeopardizing the investigation and get your side of the story.
- Conduct a thorough and unbiased investigation of the facts including interviews with alleged victims, witnesses, and others with relevant information.
- Determine whether or not the alleged incident occurred as described and if so, is considered to be Abuse or Neglect of a child according to state law (RCW 26-44.)

During any investigation involving you and/or children placed in your home, it is important you do not talk with or ask questions of the child or others involved until the investigation is fully completed.

It is important you understand that even if LD-CPS staff determine you did not abuse or neglect a child in your care, it may be necessary for your SA licenser to continue working with you about licensing violations which may have become apparent during the investigation. If the complaint involves allegations of licensing violations, your SA licenser and/or LD may take the following steps if deemed appropriate:

- Interview children
- Interview foster parents
- Visit the home either announced or unannounced
- Observe the child
- Interview witnesses
- Review child's individual supervision plan, if applicable
- Contact collateral sources for information
- Continually assess the safety of the children as additional information becomes available.

A stop placement may be imposed on your home by SA and/or LD, restricting future placements and respites and/or requiring current placement to be removed. If the foster child(ren) needs to be removed from your home due to the allegations, SA will be notified by DLR and arrangements will be made immediately.

Resolving conflict with other professionals: To ensure effective professional relationships, it is important that such matters are resolved before serious problems develop. Most incidents resolve themselves naturally. You should first try to resolve conflicts or issues directly with all parties involved.

It is imperative that all involved in a disagreement or misunderstanding conduct themselves in a professional manner. It is our expectation that all SA employees and our contracted foster parents communicate in a manner that does not portray hostility, disrespect, name-calling and/or abusive language. This type of behavior is counterproductive to any situation and must be avoided.

Any time you have a problem with an SA employee that seriously effects yourself or the child for whom you are providing care, and you are unable to resolve the issue by working directly with them, we have developed a grievance procedure for your use. All avenues to address conflict directly with the individual(s) need to be exhausted prior to initiating a formal grievance.

You may take the following steps if a conflict arises that is not resolved and/or a decision is made which is believed to adversely affect your ability to carry out your contractual responsibilities as a foster parent. Your failure to meet any of the time limitations shall constitute your withdrawal of the grievance.

- Submit a signed and dated letter to the administrator within 10 calendar days of the aggrieved action or decision

- If the administrator does not resolve the grievance to your satisfaction within 10 business days of having received the grievance, you may request a review by the SA Foster Care Licensing Administrator and the Director. The finding of the Director will be final.

You have the right to...

Be involved with the child's team in the ongoing planning for the foster child, especially in those areas which will affect your foster home.

Foster parents are expected to be active participants in the teams that develop the goals for the child and to work in a partnership with all family support persons. Foster parents are expected to frequently transport the youth to academic, recreational, community activities, and medical appointments in order to help them develop community and social ties. Helping the child learn social and life skills will be one of the most enduring gifts you can give a foster child. Foster parent(s) are to provide consistency and structure to the children in their care, and provide a scheduled daily routine that the child can easily follow. This may include chore time, homework time, and family activities.

As a foster parent, you have the right to be consulted by DCYF regarding a foster child's case plan. If it is appropriate and desired, you have the right to help develop a child's service plan and assist with family visitation. Foster parents will be provided with and asked to submit a "caregiver's report to the court" before each court hearing. This is one of the ways you will be asked to communicate and share your perspective as the child's caregiver. Foster parents are expected to attend Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) Meetings with the department as well as other meetings as requested by DCYF or Service Alternatives in order to maintain a unified team for the child.

You have the right to...

Have the support of SA and to be treated with dignity and respect.

As a partner with SA in serving children in out-of-home care, it is important you and your family are treated with dignity and respect. We accomplish this through a variety of methods. One of which is that your licensing file is kept in strict confidence and access is limited to your licenser, their direct supervisor, and will be viewed by LD personnel for compliance purposes.

Additionally, you are offered a variety of supports from our team members for the purpose of providing your family opportunities to engage in treatment planning, learn from others, and

attend to your family's routines. While some of these are dependent on the type of contract SA holds with the child in your home; they often include:

Case Management: Case managers create and maintain the treatment plans for children in your home and work in conjunction with you on individualized plans including behavioral interventions, specific goals for the child and how to achieve them, and the supervision guidelines for which you must follow. Our case managers receive professional consultation to create these plans and it is imperative that communication with them is consistent, honest, and timely.

In most cases, the SA case manager will be the person directly responsible for supporting you in providing care. The SA case manager may or may not be your primary contact, however. As each program is structured differently, it is important to maintain open and clear communication with the person identified as your primary contact. Your primary contact may be your SA case manager, licenser, support staff or other delegated personnel. Always attempt to communicate with your primary contact before calling anyone else. With that, since your primary contact will have a caseload of up to eight other children, please allow adequate time for responses before calling others. This will decrease the amount of confusion in the response you may receive and ultimately support your foster parenting outcomes.

Staff Support: Children and teens placed in treatment foster care will be provided weekly staff support by a SA Behavioral Intervention Support Specialist (BISS). The amount of staff time each week will depend on the needs of the child or teen placed in your home. The objective of staff time is to work directly with the child on behavioral goals, life skills, independent living skills, social skills, community integration, or academic support. Staff time will be coordinated with SA and will sometimes be in the home or in the community depending on the goal(s) the staff is working on with the child or teen.

24-hour crisis response: SA provides 24-hour crisis response to all of our foster parents in the event that there is an emergency situation. The number for your programs crisis response will be provided to you by the SA case manager assigned to the child placed in your home. Please allow up to 20-minutes for a response during a crisis before calling other members of your program's team.

Emergency Response: In addition to the 24-hour crisis response, there are individuals available to your family to talk you through, or respond in person when warranted, to any emergency situations. As a rule, foster parents will treat all medical issues and incidents as serious and will

seek professional medical attention as necessary in a responsible and timely manner. When professional medical attention is needed, foster parents shall inform the licenser and primary contact immediately; then submit a written incident report within 12-hours. The incident report shall include a copy of the medical statement and requires a report to CPS/Intake.

In addition, all homes are required to post a list of emergency numbers for quick access. This list shall include: all emergency phone numbers; the name and phone number of the nearest hospital, with directions; and a phone number for poison control. The Emergency Protocol sheet, provided to you by your primary contact, has all of these numbers, as well as CPS/Intake (for abuse and neglect calls), Missing Children's Clearinghouse (required for youth who run away), and program manager and licenser numbers. This list shall be reviewed on a regular basis with all children placed in the home.

Respite Services: Foster parents are eligible for respite based on what is specified in each individual child's service contract and upon availability. Typically, foster parents are eligible for two days of out-of-home respite per month, a day is defined as an 8-hour period of time in the BRS contract. If a child goes to their biological family for a visit, it is considered respite for your family. To meet the high level of respite needs for all SA foster families, it is expected that you also provide respite for other SA foster parents. In addition, foster parents may be responsible for arranging their respite coverage. The SA primary contact will educate foster parents on how to arrange and coordinate their respite based on their eligibility. *Unused respite care cannot be accumulated and can only be used during the month of eligibility for children served in treatment foster care (refer to your contract for eligibility and rates).*

Monthly Foster Parent Support Meetings: Foster parent meetings are held monthly to provide ongoing training as well as for sharing pertinent information and informal support. *Attendance at monthly foster parent meetings is mandatory for treatment foster parent.*

To have the opportunity to...
Grow professionally by participating in training courses sponsored by SA.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, training is an essential component to foster parenting. Having an open mind and willingness to learn will assist you in strengthening your skills as parents. In addition to the regular updates for training certifications, the on-going training requirements to address the concerns of children placed in your home, and training received during foster parent support meetings you, as a foster parent with SA are able to attend trainings offered to staff

teams. Your licenser has the training calendar available to them to share any relevant trainings and assist with registering you for them.

You have the right to...

Make decisions around the daily living situations of your foster child, such as permission to attend recreational activities, staying home from school with a sore throat, etcetera

Foster families are encouraged to provide an enriching home environment for the children placed in their care. Extracurricular, enrichment, and normal social activities are important for the child's growth and development. The prudent parenting law authorizes caregivers to allow, without prior approval of the DCYF caseworker, a child in their care to participate in normal childhood activities based on a reasonable and prudent standard. This standard is characterized by careful and thoughtful parental decisions intended to maintain a child's health, safety, and best interest which encourage the child's emotional growth and development.

A "normal childhood activity" includes age or developmentally appropriate "extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities, and may include overnight activities outside the direct supervision of the caregiver for a period of over twenty-four hours and up to seventy-two hours. Normal childhood activities within the described time frames, including being babysat do not require background checks or prior DCYF approval. Licensed foster parents must still follow the minimum licensing requirements for child foster homes and the supervision needs of the specific child placed in your home.

A youth in Extended Foster Care is a "child" for the purposes of the dependency and must comply with responsibilities stated in WAC; otherwise the youth has the legal status and legal rights of an adult and is responsible for their actions.

There are exceptions to this for children in care with SA and not all activities can be approved due to their unique needs. Your case manager can assist you in approving activities. If you would like to further review please refer to the following:

- Prudent Parenting Guidelines – caregiver guidelines for foster childhood activities to assist in caregiver decision making
- "Know" before you say "No" – clarifies existing myths relating to normal life activities for children and youth in care

You have the right to...

Receive help from SA in locating and using appropriate resources to meet the child's needs.

Foster parents must give SA a written outline of the plan for supervision of the foster child(ren) placed in their home while the caregiver is at work. The plan must include an accurate schedule of times the foster parent will be at work or at other regularly scheduled events. This is to ensure adequate and appropriate supervision for times when you may be absent from your home. Approval of the proposed daycare provider, when applicable, is based on the needs of the child in care and the needs of the family. An adult with a cleared background authorization, who is approved by the child's legal guardian and team, may provide daycare in your home. If you choose to use a daycare facility, the facility must be licensed and provided with information regarding the child's behavioral concerns and development. You must confirm the daycare arrangements with your primary contact (again, your homes primary contact will be assigned to you and the child's team prior to a child being placed in your home).

If you are having trouble finding appropriate childcare you may ask SA for assistance in locating a provider, however, it is ultimately the foster parent's responsibility to locate and arrange daycare. Your contract with SA (when "regular care") will specify if children in your home are eligible for day care expenses paid for by DCYF. If eligible, and you use daycare and are not working, any expenses associated with daycare are your responsibility. In turn, for foster parents serving treatment level care (as noted in the contract), daycare support is not a provided or a reimbursed service. As a reminder, foster parents are to be the primary caregivers of the children in their care. *No foster child should be in out-of-home care for more than 10 hours per day.* This guideline includes time spent at school, daycare, after school programs, and other day programs.

Foster parents may, with SA authorization, allow a friend or relative (over the age of 18) to provide care to a foster child in their home for up to 24-hours. Anyone providing care for a foster child placed by SA on a regular, consistent basis must have a cleared background authorization and fingerprints check, clearly understand the requirements in individual supervision guidelines, have current CPR/First Aid, and adhere to the tenants of confidentiality (sign an Oath of Confidentiality). The childcare provider must provide a copy of their driver's license and auto insurance to SA if they will be transporting the child.

Foster parents must assure SA that they are familiar and comfortable with the individual who will be caring for the foster child. The foster parents must review with the substitute caregiver

expectations regarding supervision and discipline of the foster child. The foster parents must also give the substitute caregiver and SA information on how they can be contacted while away from home. The foster parents must give the substitute caregiver all the necessary medical and crisis response information needed for the child including the on-call crisis response number. The substitute caregiver must also provide SA with information as to how they can be contacted in an emergency.

You have the right to...

Be considered as a possible permanent placement for children that are legally free.

The amount of time a child will stay in your home depends on the particular child and their parent's situation. The overall goal of foster care is to assist the child in developing the skills necessary to live in a permanent, family setting. Many of the services are tailored and intended to be short-term "rehabilitative" placements to stabilize the child and prepare him/her for more permanent options which can include reunification with their biological family. A child could reside in your home for as short as one night, as long as a year, or longer. Long-term options for a child are explored upon initial placement and throughout the time the child is in your home.

If you would like to be considered as a permanent option for children who will come to your home or for a child in your home, there are several types of care you may be able to provide:

Guardianship: You could potentially obtain legal authority to supervise the dependency of the child in your care until the child turns 18. This means you will be obligated to provide care for the child and you will be able to give consent for medical, social, and school activities. If you are willing and able to continue to provide care to the child consistent with our agency's contractual obligations, then our agency may be able to continue working with you as one of our foster families.

Adoption: When adopting a child, you legally establish a parent and child relationship. In some cases, adoption support services may be available. It is unlikely that our agency will continue to provide you with services for your child once adopted.

If you are interested in any of these options, consult with both your SA primary contact and your SA licensor. Do not, under any circumstances, enter into direct negotiations with the child's DCYF caseworker without the knowledge and approval of SA. The most successful plans have been well thought out and provide for contingency planning. Items that need to be addressed directly include legal status of the child, continuity of reimbursement, case planning, service provision,

and supervision of your foster care license. Failure to address each one of these areas may jeopardize your license and our agency's ability to continue working with your family.

Chapter 3

THE FOSTER CHILD

RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

The foster family home is viewed as the primary treatment setting with the parents trained and supported to implement the goals outlined in the child's service plan. These goals include permanency outcomes, community integration, meeting the medical (including mental health) and dental needs of the children, reducing/eliminating inappropriate behaviors, and supporting the child's educational needs. These goals are carried out under the direction of the foster parents, coupled with qualified family support staff and various community members working to provide support to the family unit.

As we have mentioned previously, foster parents are expected to be active participants in the teams that develop the goals for the child, and to work in a partnership with all family support persons. Foster parents are expected to frequently transport the youth to academic, recreational, community activities, and medical appointments in order to help them develop community and social ties. Helping the child learn social and life skills will be one of the most enduring gifts you can give a foster child. Foster parent(s) are to provide consistency and structure to the children in their care, and provide a scheduled daily routine that the child can easily follow. This may include chore time, homework time, and family activities.

As a foster parent you have an enormous responsibility in meeting the rights of children in foster care as it is your responsibility to protect, care, supervise and nurture children placed with you. Their safety and well-being is at the forefront of each decision made. It is imperative that a foster child moving into your home knows that they are welcome. The initial impact of what you say and do during the families' first contact with the child will set the stage for your future relationship with the child. In an ideal placement, you and your family will have time to plan for their arrival. A sincere greeting and welcome into your home is what is needed as soon as they enter your home. The SA case manager will review the foster child's rights and responsibilities immediately when the child is placed. The SA case manager and staff are here to assist in making the transition smooth and welcoming. If developmentally ready, a foster child will be part of their team meetings and case planning. Help them understand the household routine, responsibilities and expectations, and ensure their rights as children are addressed. This chapter expresses their rights as our responsibility – in partnership, this is what we can achieve.

Children have the right to...
Be protected from abuse and neglect.

All children need love, stability, and security. Like every child, children in the foster care system have the same needs as other children. However, all children in the foster care system have been affected by separation from their biological family and the trauma that surrounded the separation. Due to their history of loss, separation, abuse, and neglect children and youth in foster care will sometimes exhibit a wide range of behaviors as ways to “express” the pain they have experienced in their lives. Sometimes children will tell stories, brag, lie, steal, refuse to eat, wet the bed, bully other kids, or be withdrawn and shy.

These behaviors can be a sign of the child having emotional problems and dealing with their emotions of grief and loss. With the child who has these emotional issues, the foster parent will need to respond with patience and understanding. The foster family should welcome the child into their home and find ways to make him or her feel part of your family. With consistency and unconditional care given on a daily basis, a foster family can help the child adjust and heal from the fear and mistrust they have developed from their past. In addition, the child placed in your home has most likely had inconsistent and sporadic discipline and routine in their lives and it may take many weeks or even months of routine, discipline, and structure for the child to make progress.

Often foster children are not only dealing with separation from their biological family but are dealing with a history of abuse and neglect. A history of abuse and neglect will make it even more difficult for a child to build a trusting relationship with foster parents. Simple things like sitting down to a family meal may be something they have never experienced. In addition, simple hygiene activities such as bathing, showering, and combing hair may have to be taught as it was not part of their daily lives in their biological home.

Many of these children will have a hard time developing attachments. They do not want to feel or get close to a foster parent due to the fear of loss or even hurting their biological family. Often times when the foster child first moves in there is a period of “honeymooning” where few behaviors are demonstrated. Once this “honeymoon” period is over, behaviors begin to show up and foster parents wonder what they did wrong. At this time, extra patience and understanding will be needed. In addition, SA staff will be there for your support and will help you work through these issues with the child.

In time, the scars that children in foster care experience can be overcome with consistency, patience, and support. The change will take time, but with hard work and perseverance the child can slowly learn to trust again. The goal is for all children placed in a SA foster home to learn that there are people who are kind and caring. All children deserve a “forever family”, and we believe if we all work together for the good of the child this is an achievable goal. Our reliance on and attention to mitigating a history of neglect is achieved through your assurance that you are meeting all of the child’s basic needs – shelter, food, clothing, personal items, emotional support, medical attention, and the like – see basic rights section. Your families specific discipline practices ensure alignment with current laws and acceptable practices.

Children have the right to...

Live in a safe, healthy, and comfortable home where they are treated with respect.

Foster parents must provide a safe, clean, and pleasant home with a comfortable place to sleep and adequate storage for the child’s belongings. All living space for the foster child must be the same as every other family member within the same level of comfort, cleanliness, and repair as is provided for the rest of the family. The 90-day health and safety inspections will ensure your home is consistently safe, healthy, and comfortable. Many of the next sections speak to the rights of children in foster care which ensures that they are treated with respect.

Children have the right to...

Have their basic needs met (food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education).

As we have already discussed, in addition to providing a home, it is your responsibility as foster parents to provide foster children with a well-balanced diet including three nutritional meals a day and snacks. All meals available to the household must be equal for all children in the home. We encourage family meals to be eaten together in order to learn appropriate social behavior.

You will also find yourself as a foster parent teaching basic hygiene as part of a daily routine for foster children. This includes clean hair, teeth, and body. A portion of your monthly reimbursement must be used to purchase items such as: shampoo, tooth paste and body wash, soap, sanitary napkins, etcetera.

Just as you would with any other child living as part of your family, you are expected to provide transportation for the child to most regular functions such as educational activities, visits to health professionals, recreational activities, and other activities appropriate to the age and needs

of the foster child. If your foster child is approved to use public transportation, you will be expected to provide the fare necessary to access the transportation.

We acknowledge that there may be situations where the transportation needs of a child are too great to expect you to bear the entire cost. In such instances, we can grant exceptions to pay mileage only when you have received advanced approval from the administrator. In yet other situations, SA will request exceptions from DCYF to reimburse mileage. Please remember that our agency cannot be expected to reimburse travel expenses that were incurred without our knowledge and approval.

Children have the right to...

Be treated fairly and equally, whatever their gender, gender identity, race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, disability, medical problems, or sexual orientation and be addressed by the gender pronouns they prefer.

All children and youth, regardless of race, religion, culture, national origin, disability, medical problems, sexual orientation or gender identity deserve to have a safe place where they are accepted and respected as the individual they are. Therefore, foster parents are expected to provide safe and appropriate care in a manner that meets these diverse needs of foster children. It will be important to learn if a child has a favorite or special foods they wish to eat, a faith practice or church they wish to attend or a desire to be addressed in a specific or gender-neutral pronoun. Learning these details will help the child feel included in the family and will foster an opportunity for the child to share with their foster family information about themselves, their past, and their culture.

Foster parents are encouraged to celebrate diversity in all forms such as books, movies, celebrations, etcetera, and by supporting the self-expression of children in care which may be an extension of their race, culture, and/or gender identity. It is important that foster children are given the same respect, rights and dignity that we would want for ourselves as well as be included in all family activities. It will be valuable to ask the child what is important to him or her. Ask broad questions about how they see themselves and more specific questions, such as traditions they want to continue, the food they like, dress they feel comfortable wearing, and how they like to wear their hair. Take the child's responses and do some research on your own, always checking with the child as the expert on their own life. If you are caring for a transgender child, it is important to identify the youth as the gender they tell you they are, whether they are transitioning or not. It is not our place to tell a child who they are. We allow all children to have

the right to express own identity. Welcoming a child into your home who is different than yourself is a great way for your family to learn more about the world and celebrate diversity.

Children have the right to...

Attend school, and participate in extracurricular, cultural and personal enrichment activities, consistent with the child's age and developmental level with minimal disruptions to school attendance and education.

Foster parents are expected to actively participate in helping meet the child's academic goals. Just as you would with your own child, foster parents may need to help the child with homework, allow specific study times, attend parent-teacher conferences, and attend Individualized Education Plan or other meetings. It is also strongly encouraged to explore extracurricular school activities such as after school sports or clubs. A foster parent's involvement and encouragement to a child in their academic pursuits, helps to minimize disruptions in the home, at school, and in the community as well as strengthen the child's ability to achieve responsibility, independence, and movement towards performance.

Children have the right to...

Have space for storing their clothing and belongings.

Clothing and belongings are important to children. These items can often make them feel better about themselves by increasing self-esteem and self-awareness. This is especially important for children in the adolescent years. Having designated space to store them is also important. Your home and family may be one of a long list of prior placements and with each move, something is lost. The attachment to their clothing and belongings can be immense – so keep them in a designated space where the child always knows they can be accessed. Unless, of course, they have items that pose a risk to themselves or your family.

It is very important that you inventory all of a child's possessions when the child arrives in your home. Whenever there are occasions that the child receives a large number of gifts we recommend that you inventory the gifts. Under normal circumstances we recommend you inventory everything at least annually and when new items are received, gifted, or purchased. SA may request an updated inventory every 90-days to comply with contract requirements. It is always important to keep a record of personal items of importance. If there are special circumstances, such as a fear that the child is stealing or selling their possessions, it may be necessary to inventory more frequently.

If you are aware of possessions missing or broken, document what happened to the item. You can be held financially responsible for undocumented missing items, *including gifts and purchases you have made on the child's behalf*. Gifts children receive while in your care are to remain theirs even after departing your home. It is recommended that the child's belongings not be sold, traded, or discarded without a child's knowledge and consent.

Your reimbursement rate includes expenses for appropriate clothing for foster children. You are not to charge SA, DCYF caseworkers, biological parents/guardians, or foster children for clothing and/or personal incidentals provided to foster children. This provision does not preclude voluntary contributions of clothing by parent(s) and other individuals. It is your responsibility to provide appropriate clothing for children placed in your home (an average of \$40 per month is suggested for children in treatment foster care).

This includes appropriate clothing for all seasons, and clothing that is comparable to the standard of clothing provided for other children in your home. Special requests may be made to the SA primary contact and caseworker prior to placement for reimbursement of exceptional clothing costs. Please note that the program manager and administrator must approve exceptional cost reimbursements. Additionally, your primary contact can help you identify local resources to assist with clothing needs.

Children have the right to...

***Have their case file and personal information kept confidential and kept in a secure place.
Discussions of their information should only occur with people who are involved in their case.***

SA recognizes that foster parents will be asked many questions by friends, neighbors, natural supports and other foster parents about the children in their home. General information, such as the child's name, age, and grade in school are appropriate, but SA requires that foster parents not violate the confidence of the child regarding the personal information they have learned about the child or their family. The child's privacy and the family's privacy is extremely important. Additionally, you may not disclose information or post pictures of foster children on social media sites; including but not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

You are expected to provide a secure area for information about any child placed in your home. Information in this area is to be inaccessible to other children in the home as well as to all unauthorized parties.

Children have the right to...
Be free from cruel, frightening or unsafe discipline

The use of discipline tactics that belittle a child, frighten them, or harm them are prohibited. You have learned through trainings, your experience with children, and in writing out the discipline practices of your home that any form of physical discipline is not allowed. Connecting the principles behind these practices with an understanding of how many of these children came to be in foster care will serve you. Other examples of cruel discipline include withholding food/meals, taking away personal belongings that represent a connection to family, and using language that reinforces their status as a foster child.

Children have the right to...
Practice their own religion or not at all

Participation in religious activities or church attendance must be the decision of the foster child and/or their parents. Every effort must be made to ensure that a child who has a religious preference is able to attend the religious service of their choice. You may not attempt to influence the religious affiliation of the child, and religious service attendance must be on a voluntary basis. If the child does not want to attend a religious activity with the family, discuss options with your primary contact so your family can participate in this activity and so the child's rights can be observed.

Children have the right to...
Report abuse, neglect, exploitation of any violation of their personal rights without fear of punishment, interference, or coercion

It is likely and common for children in care to make reports to CPS intake, or make statements that require a call to CPS intake, regarding the care they receive. We have discussed the importance of documentation and frequent communication with your primary contact. Documentation and communication will aid you in navigating the process of allegations and investigations. During investigations, we may place a child, or respite them, in another foster home until the investigation is concluded. SA is available, post investigation, to facilitate conversations with the children in care and with you in ensuring there is no fear of punishment, interference, or coercion.

Children have the right to...

Have someone appointed to represent their best interests in their case, such as a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) or a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).

Children in foster care often feel that their legal rights are not represented well or at all. They commonly have a sense that they have no control over what is happening in their own life and have no say in the decisions made on their behalf. Having a person identified to advocate for them, is necessary and empowering. As a foster parent, you may not always agree with decisions made on behalf of the child in your home, but we practice respect and support regardless. The child can request attorneys to represent them, request to have a Guardian Ad Litem appointed to them, or a court appointed special advocate. These individuals are intentionally neutral and specifically trained to help advocate for the child in understanding and accessing the following:

- Why they are in foster care
- How the foster care system works
- The expectations of my foster caregiver/parent
- The purpose of a case plan and the contents of their case plan
- The efforts to reunify them with my family
- The right to have their case reviewed in court every six months.
- The right, if 12 or older, to be notified of and participate in hearings
- The right, if 12 or older, to have an attorney represent what they want
- The right to have an attorney appointed six months after parents' parental rights are terminated
- The right to have an attorney when in extended foster care
- The right to review their case plan
- The right, if 14 or older to be consulted about the permanent plan
- The right to have their rights explained in age-appropriate ways and to ask questions
- The right to ask for help if they feel they are not being protected
- The right to an education including; attending school, remaining in the same school when it is possible and in their best interest
- The right to enter school within three days of placement or a placement change
- The right to an educational liaison at court hearings under certain circumstances
- The right to be placed where they are safe, have needs met, and are provided privacy

- The right to be placed with siblings whenever possible
- The right to be placed with a suitable relative or adult they know and are comfortable with whenever possible and appropriate
- The right to have regular contact and visits with parents unless otherwise ordered by the court
- The right to visit parents and siblings not being limited as punishment for behavior
- The right to maintain contact with siblings when separated unless otherwise ordered by the court
- The right to ask the court to move back home even if my parents' parental rights have been terminated and three years have passed since termination (and to have an attorney appointed to help me with the request).

It is recommended that questions related to these rights be directed and answered by SA case managers, DCYF caseworkers, or the appointed advocates (attorneys, GAL, CASA). There are additional items where the foster parents actively work to support children in maintaining some sense of control for their lives. This next section provides clarity for those rights.

Children have the right to...

Initiate and receive private phone calls and letters, unless otherwise determined by the court

Phone contact with friends and family is an important part of maintaining relationships. For some children, it is the primary method of keeping in touch. Because of this, SA strongly supports frequent phone contact with friends, family and professionals involved in their life. The child's support team establishes a list of who the child may and may not contact. Phone contact will only be restricted when it is determined by the team to have an adverse effect on the therapeutic functioning of the child. The phone list shall be kept in a location in your home that is easily accessible to family members, the child, and staff working in your home. Phone calls will not be monitored unless monitoring is part of the child's supervision or safety plan.

Mail: Children are allowed to send and receive mail, unless otherwise determined by the child's team. If it is suspected that a piece of mail may contain illegal contents, it should be given directly to the caregiver/parent, or other adult supervising the child. Please consult with your primary contact surrounding the next steps to be taken. A supervising adult should retrieve the mail from the mailbox to prevent mail theft or tampering.

Social Media and internet usage: If a child's team has approved the use of internet and social media, SA requests specific parameters be outlined by the child's legal guardian/parent(s).

These plans should include length of time, sites approved, and approval for educational purposes. As foster parents and primary caregivers it is your responsibility and duty to ensure that children who have team approval to participate in internet and social networking activities are monitored and supervised.

Privacy and searching a child's room and belongings: It is important that children's rights to privacy be respected even though they are living in your home. If you suspect that a child has something in their possession that is not theirs or that poses a risk to themselves or others, you cannot search their room or their person without prior authorization. If you believe they possess an item that poses an immediate risk to health and safety for the child or others, you can contact the local police department to search the child. *Under no circumstances* are you to search a child yourself. SA Staff also cannot provide this search. Only law enforcement can perform a search of the child. It is possible to have permission to search the child's room, coat, and/or bag written into their Individualized Behavior Management Plan (IBMP) and ISTP. If you believe this is necessary, please contact your child's SA case manager to request this be discussed. The permission must come from the child's team. *SA cannot authorize any search of a child or their belongings.*

Children have the right to...

Be informed of my health needs, medications, and medical history.

For foster parents meeting the rights of children regarding their health, your case manager assists you by tracking dates, helping with communication, and identifying providers. The list here is intended to help you understand why there might be so many releases and appointments for children in care. This is written in first-person to assist you in speaking to and advocating for the health needs of children.

- I have the right to have annual well-check exams.
- I have the right to have dental exams every six months through age 18 and annually thereafter until age 26.
- I have the right to be informed of the benefits and risks of any and all medicines, vitamins, or herbs that are prescribed or recommended to me.
- I have the right to agree or disagree taking any or all medicines, vitamins or herbs unless the court says I must take them.

- I have the right to obtain or refuse reproductive health care, including birth control and/or counseling regarding birth control, without consent or knowledge of a parent or guardian.
- I have the right to receive outpatient mental health treatment without consent or knowledge of a parent or guardian if I am over the age of 13.
- I have the right to receive outpatient substance abuse treatment without consent of a parent or guardian if I am over the age of 13.
- I have the right to obtain tests and treatment for sexually transmitted infections without consent of a parent or guardian if I am age 14 or older.
- I have the right to know DCYF's duties and responsibilities if I am pregnant or a parenting foster youth and that my needs will be addressed and services will be provided.

Children have the right to...

Develop a transition plan for moving out of foster care

It can be very difficult to transition a foster child out of care who has been part of your family. Foster children may be returning home, going into a relative placement, aging out of foster care, or moving to an adoptive home. It is possible to have mixed emotions around the child's move. It is important to be aware of your emotions and discuss your feelings with the SA case manager as the process can be a difficult one. Your understanding of your own emotions and feelings around the child's move will help your foster child understand and deal with his or her own feelings about saying goodbye to you and your family. Every time a foster child is removed from a home and placed in a new situation he or she may experience trauma, loss and grief and stress. It is imperative that the foster child's team help minimize the impact of each move by dealing with it in an open, honest, and positive way.

We begin proactively preparing for this transition years before a child turns 18. Provided we have them in care, the planning begins as young as 14 but always by the time they reach 17 and a half. Active engagement in this process is not solely your responsibility as foster parent, the case manager and the DCYF caseworker will take the lead in much of these discussions and each child in care should be referred to a contracted Independent Living Skills (ILS) provider and an ILS plan will be developed. As a foster parent of a teenager you have the opportunity, along with the ILS provider, to provide enrichment opportunities preparing them for when they turn 18. Children in care turning 18 should be self-sufficient in the areas of education, income

maintenance, housing, vocational goals, daily living skills and interpersonal skills. It is also important to reinforce that they have the following rights:

- To begin getting credit reports at age 14
- To know in advance what options there are on their 18th birthday if they are still in foster care
- To know and understand the components of extended foster care
- To be appointed an attorney if enrolled in extended foster care
- The right to enter and re-enter extended foster care one time prior to their 19th birthday
- The right to refuse or opt out of extended foster care at any point
- The right to be provided their vital documents when needed and upon leaving foster care; including birth certificate, social security card, state ID, medical insurance information, and a copy of their health and education records.
- The right to receive medical coverage through state health insurance until age 26 if they were a dependent of the state on their 18th birthday.
- The right to know how to request case records once they turn 18
- The right for their rights to be explained in an age-appropriate way and ask questions

Definition of terms

BRS CONTRACT: Behavior Rehabilitation Services Contract, the contract under which SA serves children that need more intensive services and structure than children typically served in the regular foster care system. CA determines which children qualify to be served under the BRS contract.

CHILD: An individual under the age of 18 receiving contracted services through Service Alternatives.

CHILD'S TEAM: Each child in care will have a team of individuals that consists of, but is not limited to, the child's Parent(s), (biological, foster, adopt,) CA Social Worker, Guardian ad Litem, therapist, school teacher, coach, probation officer, etc.

CPS INTAKE: Child Protective Services - responsible for investigating allegations of abuse or neglect.

DCYF: Department of Children, Youth and Families

LD: Licensing Division of DCYF

FOSTER PARENTS: For the purpose of these policies, foster parent(s) means a person or persons with a licensed foster home that is under the supervision of SA

MLR's: Minimum Licensing Requirements. A copy of the MLR's is given to foster parents prior to receiving a foster care license. Foster parents are required to read and comply with all requirements listed. MLR's are extracts from the WAC's. The MLR's are an outline of the minimum standards for which the foster parents and foster home are responsible for maintaining.

PRIMARY CONTACT (with SA): Each foster family will be given the name and number of their primary contact person within SA. This person may be a program manager, a case manager, or BISS supervisor. The primary contact will be identified, and their role defined, prior to a child being placed into your home.

RCW's: Revised Code of Washington.

SA: Service Alternatives

WAC's: Washington Administrative Code. A booklet of the WAC's relating to foster homes is given to foster parent(s) in the form of MLR's.

WE/US: Service Alternatives (SA)