

fostering FUTURES

Rhode Island Foster Parents Association

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Preventing Allegations of Maltreatment or Neglect in Foster, Kinship and Adoptive Homes

Foster care providers are vulnerable to charges from both the children they care for and birth parents who have been denied custody. Here are some steps to protect families from allegations and the resulting bureaucratic nightmare.

The first step to preventing allegations is to prevent maltreatment from happening.

Prior to placement of a foster, adoptive or kinship child in your home:

Get as much information about the child as possible before you accept a placement, write it down or get it in writing. Keep a separate notebook for each child, a colored 25¢ pocket folder with a spiral notebook inserted in the pocket will do. A bound note book is good because pages cannot be torn out without upsetting the sequence of events. Don't use your computer because changes are too easy. Invest the time to handwrite.

- Behavioral issues?
- Emotional issues?
- Physical issues?
- Medical attention needed (current doctors/previous specialists)
- How many prior foster homes and placements has child had?

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The Association is grateful for the time, effort and creativity that Pawtucket-based graphic design firm, Gladworks, gave to develop our new design.

Inside this issue:

Dr. Daycare Addresses Bullies at Summer Camp

Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island Needs YOUR Help!

Free Child Care for Children in Foster Care

Dr. Daycare

Dear Dr. Day Care,
My son, who is in third grade, just started attending camp this summer. He comes home and says he hates going because of one individual student that is picking on him every day. He tells me that this kid is tripping him, laughing at him and dunking him in the pool. Now, he refuses to go back to camp. Camp is the only social connection that he will have with kids his own age for the summer because we live in a secluded area. I really want him to attend, what should I do?
Signed,

Camper's Mom

Dear Camper's Mom,
It sounds to me like your son could be being bullied at camp and is afraid to attend. Children who bully other kids are in every community. They exist in every city, town, and neighborhood where children gather. Bullies are boys and girls who hurt their peers socially, emotionally and physically. They sometimes harass their peers by calling them names, hitting, pushing, heckling, yelling, insulting and gossiping about them, just so they can feel superior and powerful to their peers.

I suggest that you have a conversation with your son and ask him if he is afraid to go to camp because of the behavior of this certain person. If he does not open up to you, explain to him that you feel that by talking with you about the camp, you and he will be able to devise some techniques that will help him deal with being bullied and help him feel safe.

One skill that may assist your son is to teach him how to deal with bullies and how to identify who is a bully. Some ways to teach him how to ward off bullies is to have your son make direct eye contact with the bully, stand up tall and to be around adults as much as he can. Adults, such as his camp counselor, can model how to stick up for themselves. Because bullies tend to be attracted to kids who appear quiet or shy and who tend to play by themselves, bullies feel that these kids are easy targets. Kids who can defend themselves do better in dealing with bullying behaviors.

Having your son observe his environment can help him in identifying a bully. Ask him to watch who is picking on other kids, calling them names and pulling their hair.

Explain to him that this type of person is a bully and the bully may do the same types of things to him. Have your son avoid this type of person and assert himself when he is around this type of person.

It is very important to make your son feel safe and secure at camp. His needs need to be top priority. Immediately go to the Director of the camp and explain your son's concerns. Most definitely if this is happening to your son it is also happening to other children.

The camp can arrange to teach all campers about bullying in their camp curriculum. Books on the subject can be read to campers, role-plays can include children who are being bullied and how to identify a bully. Role-plays give the campers a real live space to express their feelings and act out ways to cope.

Once this situation is brought out in the open, most bullies will recognize that they have been identified. Usually, the intervention of adults helps to minimize or diminish the bully's behavior. The camp staff can keep a look out for this alleged bully and can intervene when the bullying behavior resurfaces. The behavior of this type of child will always reappear!

If the camp staff has a heads up they can observe the bully's behavior and they can contact the parents and begin working on solutions with the family.

Long-term skills can include enrolling in a self-defense class teaching direct communication skills such as the use of "I messages" and, believe it or not, befriending bullies.

Time for a change?

The RIFPA has recently received donations of diapers and clothing through the RI Donation Exchange Program. Call the office at 401.781.1915 for more information and to schedule a pick-up.



The **mission** of the Association is to **provide education** and other forms of **support** to families that provide substitute care, and to the community-at-large, in order to further the cause of **children** who cannot live with their **parents**.

continued from cover

- Ask to speak to previous foster family before child comes to your home.
- What respite is available? How are they related to the child?
- School issues?
- Parental visitation?

Understand normal child development. Avoid questionable situations with children.

Don't be afraid to say no to a placement that will put you at risk or a placement that you are concerned if you are capable of handling. Lay down your pride, you don't have the skills to care for every type of child.

Get all the information possible on details of caring for a child with specific special needs. (For example Fetal Alcohol Exposed children may have difficulty with cause and effect, regulatory issues, etc. Get as much information as you can.)

Write down the placing agency and ask for any history of physical or sexual abuse of the child to be documented in writing.

Ask if the child has ever made false abuse allegations and insist on a written response. If a child has a history of false abuse allegations, ask the child's worker to write a letter stating the allegations, circumstances, and how the allegations proved to be unfounded. Keep this letter in a safe place in case you ever have to show that the child has a pattern of disrupting placements through such allegations.

Foster parents and kinship caregivers should keep (birth, custodial, guardian) parents and social workers informed of positive progress their child is making and any interesting things they might like to know about their child's activities. View yourself as a part of a co-parenting team that is attempting to reunify a family, not as a competitor for their children's loyalty.

Seek outside resources and assistance immediately if behaviors or issues arise beyond your abilities or desires to deal with. Avoid blaming others if possible, and actively seek a solution to resolve the problem to the benefit of all concerned.

DOCUMENT! Don't trust your memory. Keep a journal of situations, reactions, behaviors.

Keep logs/notebooks on each child to document visitation, medical appointments, school progress/problems, medical needs, behavioral patterns, or changes and efforts to teach acceptable behavior.

Document any changes in behavior in children including severity and length of these changes, especially after visitation or any changes at school. Include any action taken to deal with inappropriate behavior.

Rhode Island Foster Parents Association

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Phone 401.781.1915

Fax 401.781.3130

Email rifpa@verizon.net

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Also document any unusual behavior the child has regarding social workers, police or medical personnel. Always document any serious conflicts with parents, children, social workers, licensors, teachers, etc., and keep these records in a file. Request that copies of these conflicts be kept with the licensing agency.

Identify conflicts that arise with parents, children, teachers, social workers, etc., because of value differences. Be respectful of individual's rights to their own point of view. Negotiate and work toward a compromise.

Have a visitor sign a page in the notebook. Many times a biological parent will claim a foster parent won't let them visit their child. A dated list with signature will do two things; protect you from false allegations of non-compliance and provide support for reunification of the family by proving the child and parent have been working on the relationship.

Invest in a Polaroid camera. If you have a child that visits mom and dad on weekends document before and after pictures. Make sure the camera has a date function. This is also handy for positive relations for the child to have pictures of parents coming to get them and visiting if things are progressing positively.

If you accept a special high risk child for placement in your home:

Tell the child that you plan to protect him or her and yourself.

Enlist the help of a competent professional experienced with abuse survivors and foster or adoptive family therapy. You and the child will need ongoing therapeutic support from a person who knows you well.


Pay careful attention to supervision and safety issues, especially for younger children. Make sure family members understand safety issues, seat belts fastened, medicine cabinets locked, and routinely do checks to assure the well-being of ALL members of the household.

- Closely supervise children at all times.
- It is unwise to allow children to play unattended at any time.
- Do not have too many places where children can hide.
- Leave nap room doors open and periodically check on children during these times.

Never use, or threaten to use, corporal punishment as a means of discipline. This form of discipline cannot be delegated to non-parent guardians, and is prohibited by licensing regulations. Do not use discipline prohibited by licensing. A foster parent is a model of appropriate behavior and a teacher of problem-solving and communication skills to the children they care for. If methods of discipline vary between birth children and foster children, discuss the variances with the social worker. With older adoptive children, we also recommend using foster care principles in discipline techniques.

Carefully screen all helpers/substitutes including relatives and friends; make sure they understand licensing regulations, house rules, and any specific restrictions about individual children because of court orders, etc.

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Phone: 401.781.1915 Fax: 401.781.3130
HelpLine: 401.781.0388
24 hour HelpLine: 1.800.655.7787
email: RIFPA.org@verizon.net
Website: www.RIFPA.org

Make the connection at RIFPA!

The Department of Children, Youth and Families

B · U · L · L · E · T · I · N

NEW and IMPROVED Foster Parent Referral Program

Recruit a new home for teenagers, receive \$500 in “bonus” payments!

Current foster or adoptive parents are the best source of inspiration to potential foster parents. By recruiting new foster parents you may be eligible to earn a bonus through the new and improved Foster Parent Referral Program!

If you refer an individual or couple for foster care, you will receive a “bonus” payment of \$25 when the prospective foster parent completes and submits an application for foster care to DCYF. A second “bonus” payment of \$75 will be made once the prospective foster parent completes all of the licensing steps and is licensed as a foster home. Finally, the referring foster parent will receive a final “bonus” payment of \$250 when the prospective foster parent(s) accept their first placement. And, if the first placement is a teenager, the “bonus” payment is \$400. The prospective foster parent will have to report the name of the referring foster / adoptive parent in order for the “bonus” payments to be processed.

For more information regarding this new referral incentive, please contact the Association at (401) 781-1915.

HIGHER EDUCATION GRANT

Money is available for youth in the custody of DCYF to attend Rhode Island College, the University of Rhode Island or the Community College of Rhode Island. This grant money can fund the gap between other financial aid and the full cost of tuition, room and board, books and related expenses. Youth are eligible to apply if they have:

- been in the custody of DCYF for a minimum of 24 months at the time of the recommendation;
- received a high school diploma or GED not more than 1 year prior to the date of recommendation;
- been accepted into either CCRI, RI College, or URI;
- applied for financial aid;

To qualify, applicants must also be under 21 years of age and enrolled as full time students.

Contact the Independent Living Coordinator, **John O’Riley**, at 401.528.3764 to apply or for more information.

Answers to your questions are a phone call away...

Keep this list of contacts on hand. Answers to your questions are just a phone call away.

LICENSING

Lee Sperduti	528.3605
Phil Steiner	528.3622
Lynne Boissel	528.3615
Linda Iacofano	528.3671
MaryAnn Jordan	528.3611
Zafar Khan	528.3617
Pat Logan	528.3619
Michael Motta	528.3609
Donna Pariseau	528.3673

PLACEMENT

Vicky Gartner	528.3775
Don Aldridge	528.3781
Rachel Arpin	528.3779
Michelle Berard	528.3782
Lisa Levesque	528.3778

RECRUITMENT

Robin Perez	528.3791
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Please update your files

If an opening becomes available in your home, please call the **Placement Unit: Vicky at 528.3775 or Don at 528.3781**



FOSTER PARENTS: NEIGHBORHOOD HEALTH PLAN OF RHODE ISLAND NEEDS YOUR HELP

As you may know, Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island contracts with the state to provide health insurance for children in the state's foster care system and is in the process of developing an Advisory Committee to guide us in providing the care management services our children and families need. The purpose of the Advisory Committee is to help NHPRI build the best program possible for the children and families involved in our program. The goal is to better integrate the medical and behavioral health care delivery systems and introduce all children in foster care to the concept of a "medical home" that is truly responsive to their unique health care needs. This Advisory Committee is intended to provide support and better coordinated health care services for those children in Foster Care who have health coverage through NHPRI.

The Advisory Committee will consist of foster parents, representatives from community agencies, health care providers and Neighborhood Health Plan staff. The Advisory Committee will meet the last Wednesday of every month at 6:00pm, at:

Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island
299 Promenade Street
Providence, RI 02908

Advisory Committee participants receive

- Dinner
- \$50.00 paid to foster parents for their participation
- Opportunity for Foster Parents to get involved

If you are interested in being on the Committee, please call Jacqueline Dowdy at 459-6172 or Dulce Lopes at 459-6654. Space is limited.

On behalf of NHPRI, thank you for your ongoing collaboration and efforts to help us better serve members. We greatly value your input, and very much hope you will join us.

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Safety with sexually active, reactive and provocative children

Do not be alone with a child who is sexually reactive, acts out sexually, or has provocative behavior. Advise adults and older children in the household to have another adult nearby or in the same room for the protection of the parent and the child.

Sexually abused children can be more likely to become victims again. Even if a child has a history of making false allegations, always take new allegations seriously. The child may become a victim of sexual abuse again. It is the duty of the foster or adoptive parent, working with professionals, to protect the child and give her or him functional boundaries and self-protective strategies.

Steps a licensed provider family can take to prevent maltreatment:

Understand and follow all licensing regulations. When a provider is accused of neglect or abuse and has not been in compliance with regulations, the likelihood of a negative licensing action is increased.

Know and follow all state and agency regulations as they apply to foster care providers. A foster care provider needs to have and understand current regulations.

Maintain a positive relationship with the licensing worker and child's case worker. Make sure any predetermined variance from regulation is approved IN WRITING beforehand. Call the child's worker when positive things happen with the child. Don't make all your calls to the agency sound like problems or complaints. Let them enjoy the good days you have along with you, they also need a smile in their days.

- Be a team member. Work for the best interest of the child in your care. Build a support system. Foster parenting cannot be done in isolation.
- Get involved with the child's professional support team-- therapist, counselor, teachers, and medical professionals.
- Get all the education and training you can. Share the information with the support team.
- Always report suspected child abuse to local child-protection authorities or the social worker assigned to the case, especially after parental visits.

Join and become an active member in your local, state, or national care provider association. Read the information

they send you.

- Call your local, state, or national care provider association if you have a question you do not dare ask your worker. Even if you are not a member of the organization it is more important to get help than to worry about non-membership. Once you have made contact with the association, you can decide to join and become active. The association is available to help you!

KEEP YOURSELF HEALTHY

No one can be a perfect parent every day and under every circumstance. There is no way to completely avoid allegations. Understanding your own personal needs and the needs of family members is crucial in being able to develop a supportive and strong foster family.

- Be the best parent you can be.
- Avoid being stretched. Know and respect limits. Don't overload your home. Establish appropriate boundaries. If the child is not a good family fit, ask for help before any negative situation can develop.
- Take breaks from the children and the situation. Make sure to get away alone with your support team or significant other.
- Say no to an inappropriate placement.. Children need as much continuity of care as possible, and saying yes to a potentially unhealthy placement could damage your family and harm the child.
- Don't use kids to meet your own needs for affection. Foster kids usually can't give affection for a long time or possibly forever.

Because of the complex, isolated, and personal nature of foster care, it is important that providers develop strong communication and documentation skills to protect themselves, their families, and the children for whom they are caring. There is no guarantee your family will NOT face allegations. No one is protected from this reality in the high risk profession of caring for other people's children. Take the time to minimize your risk. Be the best you can be. Think of your own family first. Protect and keep your core family (spouse, bio and adopted children) healthy. Then you can bless other families and children by extending your hearts and hands in healing hurt and brokenness.

This article was written by Jodee Kulp and Judy Howell. Jodee Kulp is author of Families at Risk.



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FREE CHILD CARE for Children in Foster Care

Comprehensive Services is a grant funded project that provides FREE preschool services to foster children ages 3, 4, and 5.

For placement in a preschool near your home, based on availability, contact **Rita Boie**, Program Manager, 401.475.7707.

Foster Parent HelpLine

The Foster Parent HelpLine is a peer support service that is available statewide. It is staffed by foster parents who understand the issues and situations you face on a daily basis. Foster parents are encouraged to call the helpline with their questions or when they simply need someone to talk to.

Call the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association's HelpLine:

1.800.655.7787

24 Hours

Your call will be confidential.

A service of the Mentor Program.
RIFPA STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS ARE MANDATED
REPORTERS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT LAWS.



Fostering Futures is published monthly by Rhode Island Foster Parents Association, funded through DCYF, to keep foster parents and others informed and aware of the issues and activities that affect them. Please send your ideas, suggestions, tips and input via e-mail to: rifpa.org@verizon.net, entering "Newsletter" in subject line, or mail to:

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