



Volunteers of America®

ILLINOIS

Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan 2017

In accordance with the Volunteers of America of Illinois philosophy, the Rights of Foster Parents will include:

1. The right to be treated with dignity, respect and consideration as a contributing member of the child welfare team.

All efforts and activities related to the foster care/child welfare delivery system treat all members of that team with respect, dignity and consideration. All employees are required to sign the Volunteers of America Code of Ethics upon employment. In addition Volunteers of America's philosophy of treatment is established on the basic belief that individuals deserve respect. Recognizing that each foster parent has a unique perspective and expertise regarding the child placed in their home they are considered a valuable member of the team and are invited to Child and Family Team Meetings quarterly and agency staffings around critical decision making points in the life of the child. The foster parent has the right to request and participate in clinical staffings of children placed in their home. Foster parents can request a staffing at any time by contacting the supervisor or caseworker.

Foster parents have a very important role within the child welfare team. They are encouraged to be a part of all scheduled staffings, Administrative Case Reviews, Child and Family Team Meetings, court hearings and school conferences. They are encouraged to maintain contact with appropriate court personnel and agency staff. When a foster parent cannot be present at a meeting concerning their foster child, the agency can share information with the foster parent.

Agency policy indicates that phone calls are returned to foster parents ideally within 24 hours, although no longer than 48 hours to ensure the foster parents are provided with timely service. In the event that a worker will not be available to return calls within 24 hours (such as vacation or extended time in the field), workers leave an outgoing message stating who to contact if the caller needs assistance prior to the workers ability to return the phone call. The Foster Parent Committee members all stated that they know who to contact if the worker is not available.

Meetings and trainings are arranged at the convenience of the foster parent in an effort to accommodate their work and family schedules. Throughout the year, the agency notifies foster parents of trainings held at varied times; evenings, weekdays and weekends in an effort to accommodate more foster parents. The agency will locate training opportunities in the community and notify foster parents of these as well when available.

The Quality Improvement Department conducts an annual satisfaction survey of the agency's foster parents. The survey is designed to allow foster parents to share their opinions and suggestions regarding agency services. The feedback from foster parents has identified areas for improvement, as well as current strengths. The feedback has been used to make procedural changes.

Foster Parents are encouraged to notify agency staff, such as the supervisor or Quality Improvement Coordinator, if they feel that they are not being heard as a contributing member of the team. All concerns raised by foster parents are staffed internally and result in a phone call or letter by the Supervisor or Quality

Improvement Coordinator within one week. Frequently these meetings include the foster parent and depending on the circumstances, the CEO or Clinical Director is present. Foster parents have the right to appeal any decision made, however, in most cases, the issues are resolved with all parties in agreement.

2. The right to be provided standardized pre-service training and appropriate ongoing training to meet mutually assessed needs and improve the foster parents' skills.

Pre-Service Training for Traditional Foster Parents

Pre-Service trainings are offered continuously during the year by the DCFS contracted PRIDE training providers. Prior to all Pre-Service trainings is an Informational Session for all prospective Foster Parents. This Informational Session provides an overview of the responsibilities, qualifications and process for licensure. This informational session typically occurs individually in the prospective foster parents home to ensure that it is most convenient for the prospective foster parent. This also gives the Foster Parent Coordinator the opportunity to see the home, meet family members and begin an assessment. It is at this time that a mutual assessment occurs, with the prospective foster parents and licensing worker each evaluating whether becoming a foster family is appropriate for this family. This is done by thoroughly explaining the expectations, completing a thorough home study and openly discussing a families strengths and weaknesses. Prospective foster parents are informed verbally and in writing of the many expectations the agency has of foster parents and are asked to sign a document detailing many of these expectations. If a prospective foster parent is unsure whether they can meet all of the expectations, we encourage them to become volunteers or contribute in some other way to the foster care program.

All foster parents applying for licensure to care for unrelated children are required to complete Pre-Service training. This Pre-service training utilizes the Foster Adopt Pride. The curriculum includes lectures, discussions, video, group interaction, and homework tasks. A panel of child welfare staff is utilized for questions and answers during the final session of the training series. This panel consists of employees from adoption, intake, licensing and case management. The panel members explain their agency role and function and then answer pertinent questions from the class members.

The Foster Adopt Pride curriculum is implemented with a foster parent co-trainer along with a PRIDE trainer. The foster parent co-trainer and the staff trainer have completed the Training of Trainers for Foster Adopt Pride, as well as the Foster Adopt Pride curriculum. The foster pride trainers attended enhancement training in relation to revisions to the Foster Pride curriculum.

Pre-Service Training for Relative Foster Parents

All relative foster parents caring for related foster children are required to complete Foster Adopt Pride training session #1 and #2. This standard requires completion of a six hour curriculum. The agency makes available the six hour training video or DVD to meet this training requirement for relative caregivers. Relatives can also attend sessions 1 and 2 in the classroom if preferred.

Upon intake, all relative homes are contacted by a licensing specialist to determine

their ability to be licensed and inform relative of the benefits of becoming licensed. The caseworker assigned to the case also assists the relative in becoming licensed by discussing obstacles during monthly home visits, assisting with transportation to get fingerprinted or medical exams and acting as a liaison between the foster parent and the licensing worker in order to facilitate licensure more quickly. Per DCFS rule and procedure, all relatives must become licensed within 90 days.

Ongoing Training for All Licensed Foster Parents

Foster parents, caseworkers and licensing workers collaborate on an ongoing basis to identify a foster parent's specific training needs. The following training opportunities are available throughout the year to all foster parents:

- The agency offers monthly training sessions in the office on various topics relating to fostering. The session topics are decided based on feedback from foster parents, caseworkers, supervisors as well as the trainers observations of issues that are raised during support groups. Several training sessions have focused on effective discipline techniques, as well as attachment and parenting older children. These trainings are held at various times throughout the day to ensure all foster parents have an opportunity to attend. Parking and childcare are all provided to ensure that more foster parents can attend.
- The Foster PRIDE modules are offered by DCFS Training multiple times throughout the year and cover topics ranging from cultural issues to discipline. These training modules are also available on CD-Rom and can be requested from the licensing representative or by contacting the DCFS training unit.
- Online training is available at no cost at adoptionlearningpartners.org.

If a training need is identified by a foster parent or staff person and the topic is not one being offered by one of the methods named above, the agency will locate a professional or knowledgeable person to conduct a training in the office. For example, this year we will again provide a self-care class for foster parents, which will be conducted by a local professional. Specific training needs are determined by licensing specialists, caseworkers, clinical staff, and foster parents and training referrals are then made for individual needs.

Additional training for foster parents to address their unique situation is also provided. During monitoring visits and casework visits, the foster parents and child welfare staff discuss ongoing training needs and collaborate to identify their specific training needs. Foster parents are encouraged to request specific training if needed. Licensing workers and caseworkers also assess the current situation in the home and may recommend a specific training for a foster parent. Training is located and provided in the community, by video/DVD, CD-Rom, online or a book and is arranged by the licensing worker. Licensing workers, in conjunction with the caseworkers who are working with the family, help to identify training needs based on the specific needs of the child placed in their home or areas identified to be a struggle for the foster parent.

Foster parents are provided an opportunity to make recommendations for future training to ensure their needs are being met on an on-going basis. This input is based

upon feedback provided by foster parents via a yearly survey. Foster parents are also able to make suggestions or requests for training at agency staffings as well as directly to the caseworker. In addition, an annual focus group for foster parents with the Volunteers of America CEO and CQI Coordinator is held to provide a mechanism for foster parents to express concerns, issues and training needs to the agency's CEO.

When the agency becomes aware of training sessions in the community, this information is provided to foster parents in the newsletter or with their board check. This information is also found in the quarterly publication *Illinois Families Now and Forever*.

3. The right to be informed as to how to contact the appropriate child placement agency in order to receive information and assistance to access supportive services for children in their care.

Volunteers of America has staff that can be accessed in the event of an emergency 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (to include weeknights, weekends, and holidays). Each foster parent is provided with written information indicating the emergency number to access after-hours supportive service. The on-call phone number is also available by calling the main office number at any time. This emergency staff resource is contacted via a cell phone.

Every foster home receives a list of resources for support, information, and emergency numbers (with after-hours accessibility). This list is updated and disseminated to the foster parents by mail every October (See Attachment B)

- SASS (Screening, Assessment & Support Services)
- Medical Consent Hotline
- Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline
- Medical Card Hotline
- Illinois Board of Education
- Cook County Public Guardian's Office
- Illinois Department of Rehabilitation
- DCFS Advocacy Office (formerly known as the Ombuds Office)
- VOA After-hours emergency number

At the time of a new placement, the foster parent receives a letter from the supervisor welcoming the foster parent to the program, thanking them for accepting a new child into their home and providing them with the name and phone numbers of the assigned worker, supervisor and emergency on-call number.

It is the agency's policy that referrals for services are made within 10 days of request for the service if it is deemed appropriate by the caseworker and supervisor. In the event that the requested service is not available or appropriate, an alternative service will be offered or a staffing will be held with the relevant parties to discuss the needs and alternate services that may be available.

It is important that foster parents receive necessary documents to ensure that the children in their care are receiving appropriate medical care and services. Ensuring that necessary documents including the 906 placement form and medical card are

given to the foster parent as soon as possible when a child is placed with them, though it should be given to them at the time of placement whenever possible. There is a recent document created by DCFS that can be used if a medical card cannot be obtained immediately. Caseworkers can use this form to fill in the child(rens) medical card number and give to foster parents to use for medical visits while waiting to obtain the official card.

4. The right to receive timely financial reimbursement commensurate with the care needs of the child as specified in the service plan.

Volunteers of America works with the Department to develop a workable checklist/payment level system in order to standardize reimbursement and support levels as conceptualized in the Foster Care Model. Payment to the foster parent is made on the 8th working day of the month for services provided the month prior. Distribution and explanation of payment schedule is provided in writing during the licensing process and in the initial letter the foster parent receives at the time of placement. Additional reimbursement for special events, such as camp, graduation and extracurricular activities are processed as received and are included in the foster parent's monthly board check. Foster parents are encouraged to take advantage of direct deposit of the board payment, which is dispersed the 8th working day of the month. A calendar is distributed yearly which indicates payment dates.

At the time of licensure, foster parents are provided with the Board Payment Agreement, which they are asked to sign acknowledging an understanding of the board rate and payment schedule. A copy of this is provided to the foster parent. Payment reimbursement issues are resolved with the Vice President of Finance and caseworker within 48 hours of notification. The agency understands that foster parents are entitled to timely reimbursement and therefore takes a "pay now, research later" approach to foster parent payments. Foster parents who have questions or concerns regarding their payment are immediately referred to the Program Coordinator.

As the agency does not have a specialized contract, foster parents served by VOA do not care for children that have been determined to have an increased level of care. In the event that a child is identified as needing a higher level of care and an increased board payment, a CIPP is scheduled and if approved, the child is transferred to an agency that serves specialized children. Once the child's case is transferred, the increased board payment is put into effect by the specialized agency.

Respite is available to foster parents on an as needed basis after a staffing is convened and the reasons and benefits of respite are discussed and agreed upon. Payment for respite services is made to the respite provider on the 8th working day of the month by board check. The payment amount is typically the standard board rate but amounts do vary depending on the circumstances.

5. The right to be provided a clear, written understanding of a placement agency's plan concerning the placement of a child in their home. Inherent in this policy is the responsibility to support activities that will promote the child's right to relationships with his own family and cultural heritage.

Each foster parent is informed at the point of placement what the current permanency plan is for that child. This information includes any known mental health, behavioral, medical, educational or psychological needs. This information is provided verbally to the foster parent prior to placement. Following the placement of a child in a foster home the caseworker meets with the foster parent to discuss and identify needs of the child and family. Volunteers of America continues to work with the Integrated Assessment program to provide a thorough assessment of the child and family's needs. The foster parent is extensively interviewed as part of this assessment. The goal is to ensure any issues identified in the assessment are included in the case plan.

On an ongoing basis the caseworker discusses service needs with the foster parent to update and modify the service plan as necessary. Foster parents are informed of scheduled Administrative Case Reviews both verbally by the Caseworker and in writing by DCFS, and are encouraged to attend and participate in the planning for each child in their care. The portion of the service plan that pertains to the child is written in conjunction with the foster parent to ensure that decisions are made by the team, which includes the foster parent, who knows the child best. Foster parents are provided with the written portions of the service plan pertaining to planning for the child in their care as well as any subsequent revisions within 10 days of the updated service plan. This plan includes discussion of goals that promote maintaining relationships with birth and extended family and cultural heritage. The need for regular visitation between siblings and family is discussed during pre-service training and at the point of placement.

Foster parents are informed verbally and in writing of financial reimbursement, which is available for coordinating and conducting sibling visitation. Feedback from the foster parents is requested by the caseworker after sibling and or family visitation is held. Foster parents are consulted on behaviors and issues that may result or arise from visitation. In an effort to help foster parents support a child's relationship with his own family all efforts are made to schedule sibling and birth parent visitation at a mutually convenient time and location. When appropriate, the agency encourages foster parents to communicate directly with birth parents and foster parents of siblings in order to develop relationships and schedule visits at mutually agreed times and locations (within the parameters set by the agency). Discussion regarding the comfort level of all parties is done during routine home visits and as concerns are raised.

Prior to any placement moves, a clinical case staffing is held to ensure the needs of the child and foster parent are being met. The foster parent is invited to clinical staffings when consideration is being given to a change of placement, unless the move is being made due to imminent risk. All efforts are made to provide System of Care (SOC) services to stabilize a placement prior to any change. When it is determined a child must be moved from a placement, and there is no imminent risk, the foster parent is provided with a written fourteen-day notice of removal. In conjunction with the written notice, the foster parent is informed of their right to appeal the decision to move the child.

Foster parents are invited to case staffings to discuss permanency planning issues when appropriate. They are advised that they are able to become a party to court proceedings and to inform the court of their willingness to provide permanency for a

child. Caseworkers assist foster parents in becoming knowledgeable about court proceedings when applicable. Caseworkers also routinely become a voice for foster parents who are unable to attend court.

- 6. The right to be provided a fair, timely, and impartial investigation of licensing complaint issues and be provided the opportunity to have a person of their choosing present during the investigation and due process; the right to be provided the opportunity to request and receive mediation and/or an administrative review of decisions which affect licensing parameters; and the right to have decisions concerning a licensing corrective action plan specifically explained and linked to the licensing standards violated.**

The licensing specialist, as part of their on-going employment receives training on foster parent's rights and responsibilities. Specific training is provided regarding a foster parent's right to a fair, timely and impartial investigation of licensing complaint issues.

When a complaint investigation comes to the attention of the agency the home is visited by the assigned worker within 2 days. If the allegation is related to safety, an unannounced visit occurs immediately. In most situations, a licensing investigation begins with the foster parent meeting with the supervisor, licensing worker, Quality Improvement Coordinator and President/CEO. As an agency, we feel it is important to include multiple members of the agency when making a determination as to the validity of allegations, especially when it could lead to the removal of the child.

A written statement is presented to the foster parent at the time of licensure, which details the procedure for completion of an investigation as well as the foster parent's rights in the process. This statement also informs the foster parent that they have the right to have a person of their choosing present as a witness or advocate. At the onset of an investigation, the investigation process is explained and foster parents are reminded of their right to have a person present for the investigation.

Foster parents are informed that the investigation will be completed within 30 days. If the investigation extends beyond 30 days, foster parents will receive a notice. Within 15 days of completion of an investigation, a formal determination of whether or not a licensing violation occurred is made. Five days following completion of the investigation the foster parent receives a certified letter detailing the findings, including any violations noted in the course of the investigation. The letter notes what corrections are needed in order to be in compliance with Rule 402. Within this letter is information on how to request a supervisory review (within 10 days of the postmarked date of the letter) should they disagree with the findings and or corrective action recommendations. Should a foster parent not be satisfied with the outcome of a supervisory review they are informed of how to request an informal review with DCFS. If they remain unsatisfied with the outcome of the informal review they can then proceed to a fair hearing.

- 7. The right, at any time during which a child is placed with the foster parent, to receive additional or necessary information that is relevant to the care of the child.**

All caseworkers receive core training, which includes specific training on what information can, and should be shared with foster parents. Caseworkers also receive training on confidentiality including confidentiality issues in the Illinois Mental Health Code. New information is shared with a foster parent as it becomes available but no later than 72 hours after the information is obtained. When the information is critical to the care of the child, it is shared immediately. Weekly supervision includes a review of new information and development of a plan to share the information with the foster parent. The agency utilizes the DCFS form regarding the sharing of information with the foster parents and foster parents are asked to sign this to acknowledge that they have received all necessary information. If all pertinent information is not available at the time of placement, the supervisor and worker discuss a plan to gain access to this information and it is included in the supervision notes.

8. The right to be given information concerning a child from the Department as required.

As each situation is unique with regards to information, the agency utilizes CFS600-4, Sharing Information with the Caregiver form for use with foster parents and caseworkers to determine what information needs to be shared verbally or in writing. This form is then signed by the foster parents to acknowledge that they have been provided with adequate information that will enable them to provide the best care of the children in their home. The following information is listed on the form to be shared with the foster parent:

- Medical history, including communicable diseases, immunizations and the medical card
- Educational history, including special education needs and copies of the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) and Individual Family Service Plan (AFSP) when applicable
- A copy of the child's portion of the Client Service Plan including visitation plans, the permanency goal and the reason the child came into care
- Other relevant background information including criminal history, information about behavior problems, substance abuse issues, likes and dislikes, etc.
- Other information as it pertains to the foster parents ability to provide adequate care for the child

This information is provided at the time of placement after review of the Sharing Information with the Caregiver form by the caseworker and supervisor. The supervisor assists the worker in determining what information is available and what can and should be provided to the foster parent. The worker is required to provide this information as soon as it becomes available. The foster parent is provided with information in writing when available or verbally when not available in writing. The foster parent is then asked to sign the form acknowledging the information that was provided.

When information is made available after placement occurs, the form is completed as an addendum to the original form and is resigned by all parties.

When information is not available at the time of placement (as is the situation with most children when Protective Custody has just been taken), the worker will provide as much information as possible and the supervisor and worker will diligently work

to get the information within 10 days.

Staff receive training regarding the sharing of confidential information on an ongoing basis. Workers receive instruction on how to share the information and what information is necessary and appropriate to share. This training is received during Foundation Training, during regular weekly supervision and the topic is covered during staff meetings twice yearly. Workers are reminded during this time of the importance of obtaining and sharing all information with foster parents which is pertinent to the care of the child. The confidentiality policy and the sharing of information is included in the program procedure manual.

- 9. The right to be notified of scheduled meetings and staffings concerning the foster child in order to actively participate in the case planning and decision making process regarding the child in their care, including individual service planning meetings, administrative case reviews, interdisciplinary staffings, and individual educational planning meetings; the right to be informed of decisions made by the courts or the agency concerning the child; the right to have their input on the plan of services for a child given full consideration in the same manner as information presented by any other professional on the team; and the right to communicate with other professionals who work with the foster child within the context of the team, including therapists, physicians, and teachers.**

Volunteers of America values the participation of foster parents in all meetings, staffings, and hearings concerning children placed in their home. Foster parents are routinely notified of all ACR, court, Child and Family Team Meetings and educational reviews concerning children in their care. Notification is done both through telephone, in person and written communication as soon as the worker learns of an upcoming meeting. For meetings that workers do not schedule themselves, such as court dates and ACR's, the worker notifies the foster parent as soon as the date is set. If the foster parent cannot attend on that date, the worker seeks out foster parent comments and presents those at the scheduled meeting. For meetings which are scheduled by the worker, the foster parent is consulted prior to finalizing a meeting in order to arrange a time that the foster parent can participate. Whenever possible, meetings that involve the child, foster parent and service providers to the child are held at the foster parents home to ensure that the child and foster parent can be in attendance. When this is not possible, the agency offers to allow foster parents to call in to participate by phone. Child and Family Team Meetings are held in a neutral location such as the office or courthouse keeping in mind the setting that will be comfortable for all parties, including foster parents.

Foster Parents are encouraged by caseworkers and supervisors to communicate with other members of the child team. For example, foster parents are contacted by the child's GAL at a minimum yearly and are asked to provide input as to a child's permanency goal and services being provided. Foster parents are encouraged to attend court hearings and Administrative Case Reviews in order to have their voice heard by the court personnel that make decisions for the child and his/her family. When agreed on by all parties, the agency provides address and phone numbers of foster parents of siblings and encourages foster parents providing care to a sibling group to communicate regularly and facilitate visitation. The agency also encourages foster parents to openly and regularly communicate with other service providers such

as System of Care (SOC) workers, individual therapists and school personnel.

When foster parents are not able to attend a scheduled meeting and it is not possible to reschedule the meeting for a more convenient time, caseworkers will communicate the outcome of the meeting to the foster parent when a change occurs. If the change is substantial, such as a goal change ordered by the court, foster parents will be notified within 24 hours. For all other changes, foster parents will be informed within 48 hours.

- 10. The right to be given, in a timely and consistent manner, any information a caseworker has regarding the child and the child's family which is pertinent to the care and needs of the child and to the making of a permanency plan for the child. In order to protect the rights of the child's family, disclosure of information concerning a child's family shall be limited to that information which is essential for understanding the needs of and providing care to the child. When a positive relationship exists between the foster parents and the child's family, the child's family may provide written consent for the disclosure of additional information.**

Volunteers of America ensures that workers and foster parents receive training in information that can and cannot be shared, and with whom in order to ensure the well being of the child. This training occurs at caseworker training and Foster Adopt Pride Training. In addition the licensing worker discusses confidentiality during pre-licensure home and regular monitoring visits.

The foster parent is verbally informed prior to placement of known mental health, behavioral, medical, or psychological information and other available pertinent information. When this information is not available prior to placement, every attempt is made to obtain this information immediately in order to assist the foster parent in the proper care for the child. In many instances, the foster parent becomes aware of new information before the agency does. When this occurs, the foster parent is expected to share the information with the worker, who can then review the information with the foster parent in order to make decision about services.

In addition to information shared by the caseworker, both verbal and written information is continuously disseminated at ACR, court, staffings, and home visits, although this is not used as a substitute for information shared with the foster parent by the caseworker as information is learned. Foster parents are routinely provided with the child's portion of the client service plan and are encouraged to attend Administrative Case Reviews, where the information is reviewed. Furthermore, in most instances, foster parents are included in Child and Family Team Meetings. When a foster parents cannot attend a Child and Family Team Meeting and a specific change to the case is decided (such as a goal change), the foster parent is informed verbally and in writing of the change. This change is reflected on the child's portion of the client service plan.

CFS600-4, Sharing Information with the Caregiver form is utilized to assist the worker, with the supervisor's assistance, in determining what information is available and should be shared with the foster parent. It also assists the worker and supervisor in determining what information is not available that will need to be obtained and provided to the foster parent. This form is reviewed and signed by the worker, supervisor and

foster parent at the time the information is shared as verification that the foster parent was provided with the necessary information.

11. The right to be given reasonable written notice of any change in a child's case plan or of plans to terminate the placement of the child with the foster parent and of the reasons for the change or termination in placement. Such notice should only be waived in cases of a court order or when the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm.

Volunteers of America provides foster parents with a written fourteen-day notice of removal prior to the termination of a placement, unless the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm. Prior to termination of a placement a clinical staffing with the foster parent is held to ensure removal of the child is the most appropriate option. At the time of the written fourteen-day notice, the foster parent is also informed in writing of their right to appeal the removal decision. All 14- day notices of removal given by the agency are also submitted to DCFS clinical per the Policy Guide 2003.01 to ensure placement changes are done in a planful manner. All 14 day notices to terminate a placement are documented on CFS 151B – Notice of Decision. This form provides the foster parent the reason for the change of placement as well as the procedure for appealing the decision.

In instances of a case plan change, the foster parent is provided with the child's portion of the client service plan. In addition, the caseworker communicates any changes to the foster parent and includes all pertinent information that is not protected by confidentiality. In most circumstances, the case plan is changed **after** discussions with the foster parent, as the foster parent is typically part of the decision making team.

12. The right to be notified in a timely and complete manner of all court hearings including the date and time of the court hearing, the name of the judge, or the hearing officer hearing the case, the location of the court proceeding, and the court docket number of the case and the right to intervene in court proceedings or to seek mandamus under the Juvenile Court Act of 1987.

It is the primary responsibility of Volunteers of America staff to have not only notified the foster parent of the upcoming court hearing, but to have discussed, in advance, the pending recommendations and plans or reports being presented to the court. Notification of court dates and discussion is done by the caseworker during in person home visits to the foster home. In addition, caseworkers are responsible for documenting discussion with the foster parent regarding upcoming court hearings and subsequent outcomes utilizing case notes. During regular supervision, the caseworker and supervisor discuss how and when a foster parent will be notified of an upcoming court hearing. Foster parents are notified of court dates as soon as a worker is aware of the date. Foster parents are told the courtroom number as well as the type of hearing.

Foster parents who are unfamiliar with the court system and may have reservations about attending can request a worker to meet them in front of the building to escort them to the courtroom. Foster parents are encouraged to ask any questions about the court process prior to or while at court.

To assist foster parents in understanding their rights and responsibilities in court, foster

parents are provided access to training in the following areas:

- a. Appropriate intervention strategies.
- b. Communication techniques.
- c. Their rights in court.

13. The right to be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parents is to be re-entered into foster care when such placement would be consistent with the best interest of the child and other children in the home.

In an effort to minimize stress and trauma to the child and to ensure as much continuity in the child's life as possible, it is expected that if a new placement occurs, the worker explores the child's case file and uses SACWIS (the placement tab) to identify any previous placement that may serve the child's best interests. The prior placement of the child is considered. If the child is old enough to be verbal, the caseworker makes an assessment of the child's attachment or feeling about the prior placement(s) and reviews Unusual Incident Reports, casenotes and speaks with the previous worker and/or supervisor, when possible. The Caseworker then reviews the child's needs in a staffing. Participants in the staffing at minimum include the worker and supervisor and at times the prospective foster parent, VOA Quality Improvement Coordinator, President/CEO and Clinical Director. The final decision rests with the supervisor (with support from the other agency staff), however it is hoped that the decision is a group consensus and every effort is made to come to a mutually agreed upon decision.

14. The right to have timely access to the existing appeals process with the child placement agency. The assertion of the right to appeal will be free from acts of harassment, and retaliation.

Volunteers of America participates in and advises Foster Parents of the internal mediation process which:

- a. Increases positive relationships and communications between staff and foster parents.
- b. Provides a quick, timely resolution to disputes.
- c. Reduces miscommunications by accessing policy and procedure interpretations.
- d. Has foster parent and staff representation to present a balanced viewpoint.

This does NOT waive right of further appeal. At all levels of mediation or appeal, an official interpretation of policy may be requested from the Office of Policy & Procedure. A copy of the Service Appeals Case Review shall be provided by the Case Review Administration.

In addition to actively and definitively prohibiting staff from retaliation to foster parent complaints or grievances, we ensure that this does not happen by having formal complaints handled outside the context of the case management team. As a result, when information should be withheld from a worker, it can be in the process of assessing and ensuring the complaint or grievance. All grievances are documented

and shared with upper management who can then evaluate whether additional steps need to be taken (ie case transfer, disciplinary action, etc.).

Volunteers of America informs foster parents of both the Volunteers of America and DCFS service appeal system through an annual letter to foster parents. Grievance and service appeal brochures are mailed to foster parents once per year and are always available on our website, by contacting the office or in the agency lobby.

15. The right to be informed of Foster Parent Hotline established under this Act and all of the rights accorded to employees, service providers, or contractors, confidential handling of those reports, and investigation by the Inspector General.

Foster Parents are provided with newsletters, trainings, as well as having pertinent brochures available at the Volunteers of America program location. The Office of the Inspector General's brochure is available at the VOA program office as well. The Foster Parent Hotline phone number is included on the "Important Phone Numbers" list, which is distributed to foster parents annually in October and at the time of licensure.

II. FOSTER PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

In recognition of the above Rights, Foster Parents will also have the following Responsibilities:

1. The responsibility to openly communicate and share information about the child with other members of the child welfare team.

Foster parents are considered one of the most critical members of the child and family team and are encouraged and expected to exchange information with the team during Child and Family Team Meetings, court hearing and regular monthly home visits. Caseworkers aid foster parents in sharing information by asking detailed questions during home visits in an attempt to ensure that all information is included. Foster parents learn during regular trainings that there is no such thing as sharing too much information with the caseworker, as sometimes information believed by the foster parent not to be important is significant in the case planning. Foster parents learn the roles of the all members of the child and family team during PRIDE training and which members should be included when there is information regarding the child that needs to be shared. Foster parents are reminded of this role during ongoing visits with their caseworker and licensing representative. This information is also included in the Foster Parent handbook, which is provided to each foster parent when they become licensed.

2. The responsibility to respect the confidentiality of information concerning foster children and their families and act appropriately within applicable confidentiality laws and regulations.

Each foster parent is provided with training concerning confidentiality as part of the

Foster Adopt Pride curriculum. This training covers laws and regulations related to confidentiality. In addition the agency provides a yearly training on confidentiality in October. Section 8 on confidentiality in the Foster Parent handbook is discussed and distributed. This section summarizes the confidentiality act. Confidentiality is also discussed twice yearly during routine license monitoring visits and is also discussed as needed by caseworkers of children placed in the home.

3. The responsibility to advocate for children in their care.

Foster parents are encouraged to work closely with other persons responsible for advocating for the children such as CASA, the GAL, and the child welfare staff. For this reason, the agency makes the following trainings available:

Educational Advocacy Training: Foster parents are now required, as part of the PRIDE training, to complete Educational Advocacy Training. Foster parents are encouraged to attend this training soon after becoming licensed.

Court Training: Training focused on court processes and the types of hearings is done during PRIDE training and with the licensing worker during in-home sessions. The caseworker for a child placed in the home is also responsible for assisting foster parents in understanding the purpose of the court hearings as they occur for each particular child. Foster parents are expected to understand their rights in court as it relates to advocating for children in their care. Foster parents are invited to attend all court hearings and to express their opinions as it relates to permanency goals and services provided to a child in their home. At any time, foster parents can contact agency personnel to receive additional information either verbally or in written form.

The Service Appeal Process: The service appeal processes and procedures are incorporated into Foster Adopt Pride training as a part of pre-service training for those being licensed. Foster parents are encouraged to first attempt to address concerns with the caseworker and supervisor in order to get a resolution quickly. If the issue is not resolved, foster parents can file a service appeal. The Service Appeal brochure is available in the agency office.

Foster parents are encouraged to seek training and to participate in staffings, ACR's, and court hearings in order to secure needed services for children in their care. The agency makes foster parents aware of meetings related to the child and welcomes the foster parent to play an active role to advocate for their child during these meetings.

4. The responsibility to treat children in their care and their families with dignity, respect & consideration.

Introducing the practice of respect and dignity for children and families begins with the ways in which agency staff interact with foster parents. Caseworkers and licensing workers treat foster parents with dignity and respect by valuing their place on the child and family team, including foster parents in critical decisions and respecting their time by returning phone calls as soon as possible and being on time for appointments.

In addition to modeling dignity and respect for children and families, licensing and caseworkers also discuss these issues at length during the licensing process as well as during home visits after a placement occurs. Foster parents are encouraged to

acknowledge any struggles they believe they have, or may have, treating biological families with dignity and respect. When possible and appropriate, the agency will facilitate a meeting between the foster and biological parents and attempt to establish a co-parenting arrangement.

As part of the Foster Adopt Pride Pre-service training, foster parents are trained on incorporating foster children into their families which includes treating the children and their families with dignity and respect. At the time of licensure, after a thorough discussion of dignity and respect for children and their families, foster parents are required to sign a Foster Parent Agreement which indicates they are willing to accept children as members of the family, recognizing and respecting their rights. In addition, on-going foster parent training incorporates issues related to visitation and as a part of this there is discussion regarding supporting and respecting children and their families. Caseworkers routinely discuss with foster parents how children are adjusting to the family and how the foster family is adjusting to the addition of a child. It is during this time that the worker or foster parent may see an opportunity for additional training or discussion on this topic.

When difficulties arise a staffing is held to include the worker, supervisor and foster parent to ensure issues are resolved and to identify further training if necessary.

5. The responsibility to recognize their own individual and familial strengths and limitations when deciding whether to accept a child into care, recognize their own support needs, and utilize appropriate supports in providing care for foster children.

During the Pre-Service Foster Adopt Pride training and ongoing Foster Parent Core training, foster parents are encouraged to identify and build upon their individual strengths and weaknesses and to consider these strengths and weaknesses when assessing their ability to accept a new placement. The licensing worker also assists the foster parent in completing a self-assessment to address their motivation for fostering and how this impacts their ability to successfully foster certain children. This information is also included in the home study and is referred to when the agency is deciding whether to pursue a placement with a foster parent. A foster parents strengths and challenges are discussed by the worker and supervisor and this assessment is included in the home study, which is considered when deciding if a foster parent is a good match for a particular child.

Foster parents are encouraged to inform the agency of ongoing training needs via calls to the licensing worker or through the annual Foster Parent Survey. Future foster parent trainings are developed in response to assessments made by individual foster parents. The licensing specialists and caseworkers also identify training needs. Prior to making a placement the foster parent discusses with the intake staff and/or caseworker the specific needs of the identified child. The foster parent is then able to make an informed decision regarding placement based upon their own strengths and challenges.

Whenever possible, prior to placement a staffing is held with the foster parent to identify family strengths and resources for needed supports (i.e. day care, respite, training, counseling) to assist the foster parent.

Foster parents have the difficult task of being asked to love a child as if he/she is their own but then also be supportive of children returning to a biological parent or other relative. The agency recognizes this as a conflict not easily balanced. At the request of the foster parents, the agency conducts a yearly self-care/dealing with separation and loss training with expert in the area of separation and loss. This training assists foster parents in learning coping techniques to deal with this issue.

6. The responsibility to be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations in improving the quality of care and service to children and families.

During Pre-Service and on-going core training, foster parents are informed of the existence of support groups, including Foster Parent Associations, and special events that promote their affiliation with other foster parents. The agency stresses the importance of affiliating with other foster parents to become aware of additional supports, as well as to use these relationships to assist in coping with the struggles that foster parents sometimes have. The agency believes that other foster parents are the best source of support for foster parents, and therefore, we continue to encourage an informal mentoring program. This program serves to link new, inexperienced foster parents with foster parents who have the expertise and knowledge in a plethora of issues foster parents face. In addition, the agency supports an informal respite program, where foster parents seek out their peers when assistance is needed.

Foster parents have the responsibility to recognize what types of support they would find beneficial and to inform the agency if a particular service is needed. Foster parents are encouraged to take advantage of all opportunities to participate in groups both sponsored by the agency and DCFS, as well as community resources.

The agency hosts monthly training and support groups which are designed to encourage and support an informal network of foster parents willing to provide assistance to one another in the form of respite, mentoring or support. This group has proven to be beneficial for many foster parents, especially those having difficulties with a specific child. After the monthly formal training sessions, foster parents are encouraged to stay to discuss issues they are facing and to seek assistance from the group. The agency encourages this group to help solve respite issues for one another as well as illicit assistance from others that a fellow foster parent may have specific knowledge about.

7. The responsibility to assess their ongoing individual training needs and take action to meet those needs.

Volunteers of America encourages foster parents to freely seek the training needed to serve the specific needs of children in their home. Flyers are sent out to the foster parents informing them of upcoming training dates. Whenever possible, training topics will be arranged far in advance so foster parents can be aware of the topic prior to deciding whether to attend the training. At the request of the Foster Parent Committee, the agency will arrange for additional professional trainers.

The licensing department provides referrals for training events and lending libraries for training outside of the agency. When the agency is aware of training or support groups in the community, a notice is put in the board payment check to inform foster parents of the opportunity. In addition, the quarterly edition of Illinois Families Now and Forever has a list of training opportunities. All foster parents receive this publication however the agency often provides foster parents a copy of the training page in their monthly board payment check

Licensing workers, caseworkers and foster parents, continually assess foster parent's strengths and weaknesses and work with the foster parent to come to an agreement about how to address any challenges that a foster parent is having. Due to the small number of cases that the agency serves, the Foster Parent Coordinator (Licensing Worker) is able to be intimately involved in almost every case and is made aware, through frequent contact with the caseworkers, of any issues that might warrant a referral for a specific training. Once identified, the caseworker and Foster Parent Coordinator hold a meeting with the foster parent to address a need and develop an action plan, which would include additional training. Foster parents have the responsibility to follow through with any agreed upon training.

Foster parents also have the responsibility to notify the licensing worker when they identify a training need that the licensing worker or caseworker has not identified. This can be done at any time throughout the year in addition to the annual foster parent survey. During routine license monitoring visits, the licensing worker provides an opportunity for the foster parent to identify any needs. Caseworkers are also encouraged to provide input regarding foster parent training needs, whether it be a general need that should be provided to all foster parents or a training need specific to an individual foster parent. The licensing worker will assist the foster parent in locating an inperson training, video or book that will meet the foster parents' training needs.

- 8. The responsibility to develop and assist in the implementation of strategies to prevent placement disruptions recognizing the traumatic impact of placement disruptions on a foster child and all members of the foster family and to provide emotional support for the foster children and members of the foster family should preventative strategies fail and placement disruption occur.**

Strategies to Prevent Placement Disruptions

The agency assists foster parents in developing and accessing adequate supports and alternatives to assist in maintaining a placement, recognizing that all children in foster care have experienced trauma which may result in difficult or challenging issues and behavior. This behavior can be taxing for even the most experienced foster parent.

Prior to licensure and during ongoing caseworker visits, a foster parent's personal support system is discussed. Family, friends and neighbors who can be a nearby support are identified. In addition, a foster parent's manner of handling stress and identifying new ways to unwind are developed, if needed. Foster parents receive training through the licensing process, as well as are offered and encouraged to attend a *Self Care* training at the agency after licensure, to address how to avoid burnout and continue to foster even during stressful times.

When a Placement Disruption is Imminent

All foster parents are provided with emergency phone numbers for after hours staff. Staff can be consulted around crisis situations which may result in placement disruption. On-call staff can make emergency referrals for services or plan for a short-term respite until the assigned worker can access appropriate services in order to stabilize the placement. Services are put in place or increased as soon as the worker learns that a placement disruption is imminent. Services that can be implemented include System of Care (SOC), referral for individual therapy (or an increase in therapy services that are already in place), family therapy, respite services, extracurricular activities or increased caseworker contact. SOC services often include mentoring and referrals for extracurricular activities, as well. Foster parents are provided training on SOC services yearly in October.

Training is provided to supervisors and caseworkers on identification of behaviors that often lead to or create a future disruption in families. The agency provides crisis consultation for caseworkers in an effort to prevent disruptions. Upon receipt of a notice of disruption an emergency clinical staffing is scheduled which typically includes the worker and supervisor and often includes the Quality Improvement Coordinator as well as the President/CEO. A Child and Family Team Meeting is also scheduled at that time, which includes all service providers, the foster parent, the child (when age appropriate) and the agency staff named above. The team is often able to identify services that can be implemented to preserve the placement. In addition, a referral for System of Care services is made. This is done in an effort to stabilize the placement and ensure appropriate services and supports are in place to maintain the placement. If a placement does disrupt, the agency makes an assessment in conjunction with the foster parent, to determine what services, if any, could have prevented the placement from disrupting. These services are then put in place for the foster parent at the time of the next placement.

Each year and upon new placement, foster parents are provided a listing of critical phone numbers for resources including stabilization services, although it is expected that caseworkers will be aware of these impending issues prior to that. Foster parents are encouraged to communicate any issues to the caseworker before crisis/stabilization services are necessary. The caseworker is also expected to continually assess the stabilization of the placement at every foster home visit to prevent an unplanned disruption. The stability of each child's placement is discussed during supervision with the worker and supervisor and supports are put in place as soon as an issue is identified. When the stability of the placement is in question, the supervisor and caseworker discuss additional support, including SOC, counseling, mentoring and respite, and these services are offered to the foster parent.

In the event that preventative strategies fail and a child is removed from the home, services are put in place on an individualized basis. At times, visitation between the child and previous foster parent is arranged if it is in the best interest of the child. In other cases, family therapy is provided to help prior to and during the child's transition to a new home.

9. **The responsibility to know the impact foster parenting has on individuals and family relationships, and endeavor to minimize, as much as possible, any stress that results from foster parenting.**

Foster parents receive training during PRIDE sessions in recognizing signs of stress and how to minimize the stress associated with fostering. Foster parents are expected to be open and honest with the licensing worker during the initial home study process about their own limitations, understanding that this acknowledgement will not be held against them, but rather assists the agency in making responsible placement decisions. Agency staff and foster parents are expected to keep the lines of communication open after the license is issued as well in order to prevent unnecessary moves due to a foster parents burn out. Foster parents who desire training to cope with the stress associated with fostering are encouraged to contact the licensing worker for referrals to training or to receive materials from the Lending Library. The licensing worker and assigned caseworker use home visits as an opportunity to evaluate how the family is managing by observation and interviewing the foster parent and child. The workers assigned to the family help the foster parents identify areas that are most challenging and together make decisions about additional supports.

Foster parents are expected to take advantage of respite during trying times. This can be done either informally through a foster parents own network of supports, or by contacting the agency for arrangements to be made.

The “Non-active status” process is discussed during the Foster Pride Pre-Service training. Foster parents have the opportunity to place themselves on hold until the foster parent and licensing worker feel that the issues that led to the hold have been resolved. Foster parents are informed that the agency views a voluntary hold as a responsible action to take in times of stress and the agency does not hold this decision against foster parents.

The agency provides necessary supports as they are identified. Counseling services are made available to foster parents when deemed necessary and appropriate. Other non-traditional supports are provided when identified and justified and are tailored to each unique situation.

10. **The responsibility to know the rewards and benefits to children, parents, and society that come from foster parenting and promote the foster parenting experience in a positive way.**

Foster parents are made aware of and are expected to participate in events, such as trainings, support groups, recognition events and committees, which promote foster parenting in a positive way.

When the agency is aware of an event, this information is provided in the monthly board check. Examples of these annual events include the Back to School Fair, Holiday Party, Foster Parent Appreciation Lunch, Annual Focus Group with the CEO and monthly training and support groups.

Foster parents are encouraged to share their positive experiences with friends, family, and co-workers. The Finder’s Fee has been put on hold due to budgetary constraints, however, foster parents who demonstrate an ongoing commitment to recruitment and portraying fostering in a positive light will be rewarded on a case by case basis.

Volunteers of America celebrates and recognized its foster parents with an

appreciation event (typically during the month of May).

Foster parents are also encouraged to lobby on legislative issues impacting foster parenting. When an issue is raised that directly impacts foster parents, the agency makes foster parents aware of their rights to make their voice heard.

Foster parents receive training on the importance of portraying foster parenting in a positive light during monthly trainings and one on one with their licensing worker. Last year, special attention went into this topic during the annual Focus Group with the CEO. Participants were asked to provide feedback to agency staff about what “the public” thinks about fostering and ways in which foster parents and child welfare agencies can dispel myths that exist. In addition to incorporating this into monthly trainings, the agency plans to utilize foster parents to speak at events and sit at booths aimed at recruiting foster parents. The foster parents who volunteer for these types of events receive training on the importance of emphasizing the benefits of being a foster parent and dispelling myths that exist that deter the public from exploring foster care.

At the request of the Foster Parent Committee, the agency began awarding a “foster parent of the year” for foster parents who exemplify extraordinary skills and the ability to juggle the many responsibilities given to foster parents. Nominations will be sought from caseworkers to reward extraordinary foster parents.

11. The responsibility to know the role, rights and responsibilities of foster parents, other professionals in the child welfare system, the child, and the child’s own family.

During PRIDE training, foster parents receive information, both verbally and in writing, on the various team members and the roles they will play in a foster child’s case. Foster parents are supported in becoming familiar with the role of the GAL, the therapist, and agency staff such as the difference between the role of the caseworker and the licensing worker. As part of PRIDE training there is a panel, which includes staff members, who discuss their individual roles within the agency. Foster parents are given the opportunity to ask questions of each panel participant.

At the time of licensure and then during on-going contact with the licensing worker, the contents of the Foster Parent Agreement, Foster Parent Job Description and Foster Parent and Caseworker Roles are reviewed, which outlines the expectations that the agency has for Foster Parents. Caseworkers, during regular foster home visits, discuss roles and responsibilities and provide feedback to foster parents regarding their fulfillment of the agencies expectations. .

The role of the birth family is discussed at length during PRIDE training and during in-home sessions with the licensing worker. Foster parents are encouraged to explore their feelings regarding birth parents and their ability to recognize the birth family’s important role in the life of the child. Foster parents are informed that in many cases, the goal is for the child to be reunified with a family member and that the child will have ongoing contact with the biological family. Depending on the dynamics of the family and the foster parents comfort level, this contact may or may not be managed by the caseworker, although the caseworker will observe minimally

one visit per month between children and biological parents. Foster parents facilitating contact with the child's extended family members is also encouraged, after approval from the worker.

Child and Family Team Meetings are held on each case and foster parents are invited and encouraged to attend these meetings. Foster parents have the responsibility to meet with team members, which include service providers, casework staff and when appropriate, the parent and GAL. When foster parents cannot attend team meetings, the agency will receive a verbal report from the foster parent and these comments and/or suggestions will be incorporated into the team meeting. In addition to the Child and Family Team Meetings, foster parents are encouraged to participate in ACR's, clinical staffing and placement reviews (when applicable).

The agency continues to support a Foster Parent Advisory Committee. This committee, made up of four experienced foster parents, continues to provide valuable feedback to the agency with regards to foster parent's rights and responsibilities. This committee also reviews all Foster Parent Grievances and assists in coordinating new efforts to provide exceptional services to foster parents. This committee is part of the development of the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan each year.

The agency holds an annual focus group, which consists of a team of foster parents, the CEO, Assistant Director, Foster Care/Licensing Supervisor and Quality Improvement Coordinator in order to allow foster parents a recognized voice within the agencies management organization and allow foster parents the opportunity to provide candid feedback regarding the performance of the agency overall and to make suggestions for improvement. Foster parents are encouraged to contact any of these team members throughout the year if they have any additional feedback.

Each year, the agency hosts a cultural sensitivity training for foster parents. This is in addition to the training already offered as part of PRIDE training and the DCFS Module. Cultural competency is also discussed during the licensing process and ongoing, as needed, with the assigned caseworker. Additional resources, such as books and online tools, are also provided as needed.

12. **The responsibility to know and, as necessary, to fulfill their responsibility to serve as mandated reporters of suspected child abuse/neglect under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act; and to know the child welfare agency's policy regarding allegations that foster parents have committed child abuse or neglect and applicable administrative rule and procedures governing investigations of such allegations.**

At the time of licensure, foster parents receive training through the PRIDE curriculum and during meetings with the licensing worker on the foster parent's new role as a Mandated Reporter. At the time of licensure and every four years during renewal, the foster parents sign the Acknowledgement of Mandated Reporter Status. The form is thoroughly explained to them before signing and is reviewed during the license renewal process. In addition, this topic is covered yearly during foster parent training. The agency encourages foster parents to contact the caseworker or supervisor prior to calling the hotline on a situation involving their foster child or if

they are unsure whether a situation warrants a hotline call. The agency offers assistance in making hotline calls when requested. Included in the initial PRIDE training are the reporting requirements for children displaying unusual sexual behaviors. Agency staff (including workers assigned to children placed in the home), discuss the reporting requirements as it relates to incidents with specific children in the home.

Training regarding investigations involving foster parents and applicable rules and regulations is done during the review of the Licensing Investigation Notification Form, which occurs during the licensing process. Foster parents learn what to expect during a licensing investigation and are provided helpful information about the process and how foster parents can help to resolve any issues when an allegation is made. Foster parents learn that the agency has a responsibility to contact the hotline when abuse or neglect is suspected and that the agency will conduct a concurrent licensing investigation. All foster parents receive a copy of Rule 402, which includes all foster home licensing rules, which foster parents are expected to be familiar with. Foster parents sign an acknowledgement that they are aware of licensing rules and further understand that a hotline call and/or licensing investigation can be initiated if a foster parent fails to comply with Rule 402.

13. **The responsibility to know and receive training regarding the purpose of Administrative Case Reviews, clients service plans, and court processes, as well as any filing or time requirements associated with these proceedings, and actively participate in their designated role in these proceedings.**

During PRIDE training, foster parents are informed of the many meetings which will occur for every child. Foster parents are provided with written information on what to expect at an Administrative Case Review and the many court hearings that will occur over the course of a child's placement. Volunteers of America encourages the foster parent to attend and actively participate in ACR planning sessions and court hearings. Since each child's case is different, foster parents are expected and encouraged to work with the caseworker to learn what ways the foster parent can participate and how they can influence decisions made at court. Foster parents are provided with dates and times of upcoming court hearings and ACR's during home visits or via phone when there are time constraints. Foster parents are encouraged to participate in the multiple meeting for their child as they have the most valuable information related to the child and his or her needs.

At agency staffings foster parents are advised on how to become a party to court proceedings for permanency planning. Caseworkers can also assist the foster parent in contacting the child's GAL for assistance. Foster parents are consistently informed of their right to be a party to the case.

14. **The responsibility to know the child welfare agency's appeal procedure for foster parents and the rights of foster parents under the procedure.**

The agency assists foster parents in learning and understanding the appeal process as a tool that ensures that foster parent rights, the best interest of the child, and other matters relevant to any decision are properly reviewed, examined, and possibly

altered. The agency encourages foster parents to familiarize themselves with the appeal process. A brochure regarding the DCFS Appeal Procedure is available at every Volunteers of America program office. The agency has an internal grievance and appeal system. Foster parents are provided the brochures yearly by mail. At the time of licensure, foster parent are provided a document which outlines the foster parent role and are also offered a copy of the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan in order to become familiar with the agency's strategies for ensuring the rights and responsibilities of foster parents are being met.

15. The responsibility to know and understand the importance of maintaining accurate and relevant records regarding the child's history and progress and be aware of and follow the procedures and regulations of the child welfare agency with which they are licensed or affiliated.

Foster parents receive training at various times about the importance of keeping records on children and what information must be included in a child's folder. This information is included during initial PRIDE training, during ongoing meetings with the caseworker and is provided, in writing, in various publications such as the Foster Parent Agreement (provided and signed during the licensing process and at renewal) and in the Foster Parent Handbook.

Foster parents are required to have an organization system to keep children's records in one location. If a child moves from one home to another, the records are transferred to the new home with the child. In the event a foster parent does not have a system in place to organize a child's records, the agency will provide a folder, binder or any other organization system of the foster parent's choosing and can assist in obtaining any needed documents

16. The responsibility to share information through the child welfare team regarding the child's adjustment in their home with the subsequent care giver, whether the child's parent or another substitute care giver.

All foster parents receive training during the PRIDE sessions on maintaining records on a child that includes medical, educational and personal documents. The caseworker and foster parent will discuss the contents of the file prior to case reviews in order to ensure that the agency has the most recent information. This information is passed on if a child is placed with another caregiver or if the child returns home to a biological parent.

When appropriate, moves that are planned often involve a staffing with the current foster parent and the prospective foster parent in order for information to be shared amongst all parties. When this is not possible, the agency can facilitate phone calls between the two foster parents in order for the new foster parents to have all of the information about the child. The agency does, however, discuss with prospective foster parents that a child's experience in one home does not always dictate that same experience in the next foster home.

The agency strongly believes that each child should have a Life Book which documents each child's history. This is often done with the agency therapist when

the child is likely to be adopted. The agency makes available a Life Book for foster parents to complete with the child. A specific workshop is held yearly for foster parents to learn about Life Books and learn the importance of maintaining Life Books for all children. The agency provided all foster parents in attendance with a Lifebook kit for each child in their home.

17. The responsibility to provide care and services which are respectful of and responsive to the child's cultural needs and are supportive of the relationship between the child and his/her own family; recognize the increased importance of maintaining a child's cultural identity when the race or culture of the foster family differs from that of the foster child and take action to address these issues.

The Foster PRIDE pre-service training, as well as individual meetings with the licensing worker, address issues related to cultural needs and cultural identity. These sessions focus on the foster parent's ability to be sensitive to a child's culture and ties to his family. The agency encourages open and honest information from the foster parents concerning their ability to support a child's personal and cultural identity. When this information is available, the agency can then make appropriate placement decisions which will result in the least amount of disruption for children.

The agency also stresses the need for children to continue any religious affiliation that they previously had. Foster parents are encouraged to address their ability to support a child's faith when it may differ from their own. When this information is known prior to any placements being made, the agency will make placements in accordance with a foster parents wishes.

Foster parents and caseworkers are expected to follow visitation schedules as ordered by the court or decided on by the agency. Foster parents and workers must work together to ensure the visits are done in the least disruptive way and are as positive for the child as possible. The agency asks that foster parents provide ample notice when a visit cannot occur. Otherwise, the foster parent is asked to have the child ready for all scheduled visits. In turn, the caseworker will notify foster parent's of visits as early as possible and will keep foster parents informed of any information they are entitled to have regarding the visits.

Specific cultural needs are addressed on an individual basis through the agencies clinical staffings. When necessary other resources are then identified. Cultural Competency is also offered as a PRIDE module. Referrals for the module are made as needed. Cultural competency training will also be offered to staff in 2014 as a supplement to the training they currently receive one on one in supervision. Staff will continue to make referrals for the PRIDE module dealing with cultural competency for foster parents as needed.