



Confidentiality

Almost everyone has information they share within their families that they would not want other people to know about. When children and families become part of the child welfare system, an overwhelming amount of their private family information becomes known to people outside of their family. There are laws that protect a family's private information so that it may be shared only with those who need to know the information and have authorization to have access to it. This is the essence of what confidentiality means- keeping information private.

The social worker should share confidential information with the foster parents when it will assist them in:

- Deciding whether or not to accept a foster child into their home;
- Understanding the child and his/her behavior;
- Dealing effectively with problems as they arise, both in the early stages of placement and as the placement continues.

Information to be shared by the social worker might include:

- Any dangerous behaviors the child may have;
- Explanation of mental or physical handicaps;
- Information about behavior problems;
- Life experiences which may affect the child's behavior and about which the child might wish to discuss;
- Objective information about the child's birth family.

The foster parents should:

- NOT share confidential information about the child or his/her family or with anyone else without proper authorization;
- Assume responsibility for guarding confidential information provided to them;
- NOT elicit more information from the child and his/her family than they are willing to disclose;
- Help the child understand that information about him/her may be shared between the social worker and the foster parents.

Relatives, neighbors, and friends are curious about a foster child. It is not always easy to answer questions without revealing information about the child and his/her family that should be held in confidence. Sometimes, it is helpful to share general reasons about why children need foster care and some of the reasons you became interested in becoming a foster parent.

Photos of the foster child or information about the child are NOT to appear in the media or to be sent over the internet--this includes electronic greeting cards. The one exception to this rule is sharing information with the agency through e-mail. Please see the next section of this guide for further information on this topic.

E-mail Policy:

If you and the assigned social worker have come to an agreement that the best form of communication is through e-mail, you may use e-mail to send information about that child. You may also use e-mail to send your weekly reports to the EFH Coordinator and the assigned case-carrying social worker.

Here are the guidelines for using e-mail:

- Only use the initials of the child in the e-mail and any attachments to the e-mail.
- If you have more than one child in your home with the same initials, you should include the age of the child along with the initials (e.g., Joe Smith- Age 3 is JS3 and Joyce Smith- Age 5 is JS5)
- Adults identified in the e-mail and its attachments should only be referred to by their relationship to the child (e.g., foster parent, bio mother, maternal grandmother, social worker etc.) No names should be used.
- The EFH Coordinator and the foster parent will sign the e-mail confidentiality agreement at the beginning of each case. This agreement is located in the placement packets and should be sent in with the initial placement paperwork.

EFH Coordinator Signature

Foster Parent Signature