

Providing Appropriate Supervision - Whatever That Means

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Supervision of foster children is such a basic and critical component of providing foster care. It can seem so common sense and, for the most part, it is about common sense. Because foster parents are taking care of someone else's child there can be a tendency to raise the level of what is expected for what constitutes "appropriate supervision".

Let's start with the rules for foster parents in Colorado regarding the supervision of foster children. This won't take long.

7.708.31 Care of Foster Children [Rev. eff. 4/1/05]

Foster parents shall provide supervision and care appropriate to each child's age, level of development and ability to accept independence and responsibility".

There you have it - that is pretty much it.

There are not a lot of rules or guidelines available to describe or define "appropriate supervision". That is because it is such an individualized concept. That is also why Kids Crossing has created this training component for our foster parents.

Kids Crossing Supervision Policy

At least one foster parent is to be responsible for the child or adolescent at all times. At any time when foster parents are unable for any reason (including, but not limited to, illness or temporary absence from the home) to provide supervision and care, they shall arrange for a qualified substitute who is familiar with these rules and with foster children in care to provide temporary supervision and care to foster children in the foster family care home. If in care for up to 6 hours, it is preferable that the provider of substitute care be at least sixteen years old. Exceptions based on maturity can be made with concurrence of the foster parent and the certifying authority, but in no case should the provider of substitute care be less than 14 years of age. If care is provided for more than 6 hours including overnight and respite care, the substitute care provider must be at least 18 years of age, trained in first aid and CPR, and must have completed Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Central Registry for Child Protection background checks.

Biological children, as well as adopted children, under the age of eighteen may not be left in charge of foster children without the written consent of the child's caseworker and the foster home supervisor. Moreover, foster children are never to be left in charge of other children in the foster care home.

Foster children, no matter what the age, shall not be left unsupervised unless a caseworker has given prior permission. Caseworker permission should be in writing and documented on a *Teen Supervision Contract* form (see Exhibit A).

Lack of Information About Foster Children

One of the challenges for foster parents is the lack of information they have when a child is placed into their home. So, how do you decide what is appropriate supervision for this child if it is to be based on the developmental level of the child and the child's ability to accept independence and accountability? This is what the rule says you must do.

Here are some ideas:

- Safety is the primary consideration - as is when caring for any child.
- You should observe the foster child in different situations to begin the process of learning what level of supervision a child needs.
- "Listen" to the child's behaviors. If when you leave the foster child to play with your own children unsupervised it results in someone crying - then supervision may need to be put in place for this type of activity.
- When in doubt - be on the safe side. Provide more supervision than you think may be necessary until you are sure what is needed.
- When you get the chance (such as at an IceBreaker) ask the parents if there are any special concerns or considerations as far as supervising their child.
- Use "universal precautions" when caring for children you don't know anything about - and even when you know something about the children being placed in your home.

Universal Precautions

- This is actually a term used primarily in the medical field to describe how precautions should be taken to prevent an HIV infection when caring for patients. Medical practitioners do not wait to find out if a patient has HIV before donning protective gloves and masks when they are going to come into contact with a patient's blood or other bodily fluids.
- In foster care the term is used to describe how precautions should be taken to prevent a foster child from harming himself or herself or someone else in the foster home.
- There are times when a child being referred for placement in your home will have a known history of sexual acting out. In these situations foster parents know to provide an increased level of supervision. But, what about the children that come into care that have these issues and no one knows?
- An important precaution is to prepare your children and the foster children for potential problems:

- You can have rules in place that are taught to all of the children in your home. When a new child is placed into your home a family meeting takes place where these rules are gone over for the new child and to reinforce them with all of the children.
- "No games or activities with the lights out" or "no games or activities behind closed doors" are two examples. Children are instructed to let an adult know immediately if someone wants to break the rules or does break the rules.
- You cannot be everywhere at once. You cannot keep children from being alone with each other - if only for moments at a time. You don't want to have to know what is going on every second in your house. Having these types of rules can help involve everyone in the house to ensure everyone is safe.

What Can Go Wrong?

I apologize in advance to those who already understand what I am going to be discussing in this next section. My problem is it is impossible for me to know who gets it and who doesn't get it. Some of the examples I will be using involved foster parents who Kids Crossing believed they would never have done something like they did. So, we have to give everyone this information.

- It is against the law to leave children unattended in the car - even just for a moment to run something into the Kids Crossing office. There is no worse place than our parking lot to leave children unattended in the car. There are more mandatory reporters walking through our parking lot than just about anywhere else. A DHS worker walked by - reported it - and the foster parent was founded for neglect. Since no children were harmed the foster parent was able to appeal and after six months was able to continue as a foster parent.
- Foster parents left an adolescent boy alone at the foster home while they went to Las Vegas for the weekend. They left him with money, food, and a phone number of a family friend to call in an emergency. A parent can do this if the boy is their own son. These foster parents lost their license to do foster care for neglect - "lack of supervision".

Note: There is also a lesson about "keeping secrets" in this example above. The foster parents were hoping that the boy would not tell they had left him alone - he apparently liked the plan. But, a week later when the foster parents grounded him for something - he told our staff member. I don't know why anyone would trust a foster child to keep such an important secret.

- A twelve-year-old girl was placed into a Kids Crossing foster home. The foster parents were given information that she may have sexually assaulted her younger nephew. The foster parents were informed not to leave this girl alone with younger children. After the child was in care for six months the foster parents went to visit their family and took this girl along. The girl was allowed to play alone with a number of younger children and she was discovered molesting a six-year-old little boy. The foster parents ended up having a founded case of neglect filed against them for "lack of supervision". Supervision is not something that just happens in the foster home.

- A seventeen-year-old girl had to be rushed to the hospital because of a drug overdose. She was treated at the emergency room and the admitted to a psychiatric hospital. The girl reported that she had gotten into the medicine box (which she says had been left unlocked) and had taken a number of pills from her prescription bottle and a number of pills from another girl's prescription bottle. In checking the pills left in the bottles and comparing with the med logs - it was determined that pills were missing. The good news - the girl was OK. The bad news - the foster parents had a founded case of neglect filed against them - for medical neglect.

What If I Leave a Child Alone at Home - Unsupervised?

You are putting the child and your license at risk if you purposefully leave a child at home with no supervision. But, we know there are times when children are left alone due to an emergency or some other unforeseen event.

- When a child is left alone at home unintentionally you need to notify Kids Crossing immediately - any time day or night.
 - Let us know why - you were late coming home because of an accident and no one was home when Johnny got home from school, for example.
 - Kids Crossing will document what happened - to decrease the chances of anyone (like a parent or GAL) making the incident into a licensing issue.
- If an emergency arises and you know a child will be alone at the home, then call Kids Crossing immediately. Telling us before it happens is even better.
- Even if you do intentionally leave a child alone at home it is best to notify Kids Crossing immediately - any time day or night. We will work with you best we can - depending on the situation and depending on if anything bad happened to the child.
- There are times when a caseworker will approve an adolescent being left alone for specified amounts of time and/or for specific reasons. Please take a look at the *Teen Supervision Contract* included in this training module as Exhibit A. If you have any questions, please contact your Coordinator.

Safety Plans

These plans (see Exhibits B and C) are guidelines we put in place when we have information about a child or youth being a risk to others or in reaction to an incident at a foster home that causes concern for someone's safety in the home.

- We must always be realistic about the level of supervision that can be provided in a foster home. A foster home is a family environment and it cannot be ensured that a child will be supervised 24 hours a day seven days a week.
- Incidents with these children and youth even occur when they are in a residential facility, psychiatric hospital, or detention center where there is round the clock staff.

- A foster parent should not agree to a level or type of supervision that is impossible to provide. Kids Crossing staff should not allow this and should not ask for this from foster parents.
- When a foster parent signs a Safety Plan - it is critical that the foster parent follow the plan.
- Please take a look at the "Safety Plan" forms included in this Competency Training module in Exhibits B and C. If you have any questions, please contact your Coordinator.

Sexual Behaviors

Children are sexual beings. It is not unusual for foster parents to observe some type of sexual behavior from a foster child. Some behaviors are normal and some are evidence of a child being a danger to others. Report and discuss what is observed with your Coordinator or the child's therapist (if there is one).

- After sexual behavior is observed there is usually a need for increased supervision. It may be an educational issue or a therapeutic issue or a behavior management issue. These different issues are often then addressed in a Safety Plan (see Exhibits B and C).
- As foster parents you are "mandatory reporters". If you observe a child sexually abusing another child or if a child tells you they have been sexually abused (by anyone) you are required to report that to the child's caseworker (or the Department's after-hours pager). If you are not sure what to do - contact Kids Crossing - day or night.
- There is a training called "informed supervision". Foster parents who take in juvenile sex offenders are required to complete this training. Other foster parents may be asked to complete this training if a particular child in their home is assessed to be a possible risk to other children.
- The issue of sexual behaviors is a difficult one - there are so many variables to consider. The foster parent's responsibility is to let others know what is going on. If nothing else - if in doubt - call Kids Crossing - day or night.

Conclusion

Let's end where we started - with the rules for foster parents in Colorado regarding the supervision of foster children.

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Foster parents shall provide supervision and care appropriate to each child's age, level of development and ability to accept independence and responsibility".

EXHIBIT A - Teen Supervision Contract

Kids Crossing

Teen Supervision Contract

This form is to be completed on any teenager who has been approved to be left alone in a foster home for any period of time. Without completion of this Supervision Contract, no child may be left unsupervised by a foster parent! Form 2.1.4 prior to completing the Teen Supervision Contract.

Child's Name: _____ Date: _____

Caseworker's Name: _____ Foster Home: _____

Due to the age of the teenager, he/she has permission to be left alone: *(Please check the appropriate boxes.)*

- For less than 1 hour
- For more than 1 hour, but a maximum of 2 hours
- For the following amount of time: _____, not to extend _____.
- Only under the following circumstances: _____.

The teenager may take part in the following activities unsupervised: *(Please check all appropriate boxes.)*

- Movies
- Ride the bus
- Ride in cars with approved friends, specifically _____.
- Walk to school by him/herself
- Go on dates
- Go to the mall, skating, etc.
- Sleep over at approved friends house
- Go to parents or relative's home, specifically _____.
- Other _____.

Although the above mentioned restrictions are allowed, there are still the following restrictions:

Please provide a brief statement as to why the teenager is allowed this freedom indicated above:

Is this in support of the child's treatment plan? Yes No

Signatures:

Caseworker: _____ Teenager: _____

Foster Parent: _____ Home Supervisor: _____

Chaffee Worker (if applicable): _____ Probation Officer (if applicable): _____

Placement Supervisor reviewed: _____ Date: _____

A copy needs to be placed in the child's file at Kids Crossing and at the foster home.

EXHIBIT B - Safety Plan

Kids Crossing

Safety Plan

SAFETY PLAN FOR: _____ (Child's Name)

The following guidelines are for the protection of children in foster care from sexually inappropriate or unsafe behaviors. The guidelines are to ensure the safety of all children who live in the foster home.

Target problem: _____

The following rules are guidelines only. It is important that staff do not create plans that are not realistic. For example, it is unrealistic to expect that a foster child can be supervised 24 hours a day seven days a week. It is important that foster parents do not agree to a plan that they do not think is realistic.

GUIDELINES: (Check only the guidelines that apply to this individual child/adolescent.)

- ___ 1) Child/Adolescent will have his/her own room and may not share a room with another child.
- ___ 2) While in the home or in public, the foster parent must not allow the child/adolescent to be alone with younger children for any extended period of time. This means not allowing the children to play together or to watch TV together outside the supervision of an adult who is aware of this safety plan. It is understood that the children in your home or in your care in public cannot be supervised 100% of the time. You are agreeing to make extra effort to supervise.
- ___ 3) Younger children are not to be placed in the home while this child/adolescent is in the foster home. This includes respite and babysitting.
- ___ 4) If child/adolescent is left with substitute caregiver or respite provider, the foster parent will ensure that these persons will be made aware of the safety plan.
- ___ 5) Foster parent will provide children with rules regarding appropriate and inappropriate play with instructions on who to tell if rules are broken.

___ Other, please describe: _____

SIGNATURES:

Foster Parent: _____ Date: _____
 Foster Parent: _____ Date: _____
 Team Coordinator: _____ Date: _____

EXHIBIT C - Safety Plan For Sexualized Behaviors

Kids Crossing

Safety Plan For Sexualized Behaviors

SAFETY PLAN FOR: _____ (Child's Name)

The following guidelines are for the protection of children in foster care from sexually inappropriate or unsafe behaviors. The guidelines are to ensure the safety of all children who live in the foster home.

Target problem: _____

The following rules are guidelines only. It is important that staff do not create plans that are not realistic. For example, it is unrealistic to expect that a foster child can be supervised 24 hours a day seven days a week. It is important that foster parents do not agree to a plan that they do not think is realistic.

GUIDELINES: (Check only the guidelines that apply to this individual child/adolescent.)

- ___ 1) Child/Adolescent will have his/her own room and may not share a room with another child.
- ___ 2) While in the home or in public, the foster parent must not allow the child/adolescent to be alone with younger children for any extended period of time. This means not allowing the children to play together or to watch TV together outside the supervision of an adult who is aware of this safety plan. It is understood that the children in your home or in your care in public cannot be supervised 100% of the time. You are agreeing to make extra effort to supervise.
- ___ 3) Younger children are not to be placed in the home while this child/adolescent is in the foster home. This includes respite and babysitting.
- ___ 4) If child/adolescent is left with substitute caregiver or respite provider, the foster parent will ensure that these persons will be made aware of the safety plan.
- ___ 5) Foster parent will provide children with rules regarding appropriate and inappropriate play with instructions on who to tell if rules are broken.

___ Other, please describe: _____

This safety plan will be reviewed by the team in _____ days.

SIGNATURES:

Child (if appropriate): _____ Date: _____

Foster Parent: _____ Date: _____

Foster Parent: _____ Date: _____

Team Coordinator: _____ Date: _____

Caseworker Signature: _____ Date: _____

Placement Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: _____

