

A Guide for Foster Families in Vermont



 **VERMONT**
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION

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INTRODUCTION

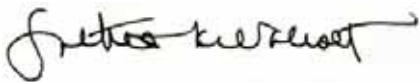
Welcome! As a foster parent, you will have the opportunity to provide a nurturing life experience for a child in the state's care. Thank you for joining our efforts to protect children, support and strengthen families, and help young people develop to their fullest potential.

Fostering is all about partnership. Each child and family has a team that develops a plan to provide the services needed to help the child achieve a safe, permanent living situation—ideally, with the parents. The team includes key people in their lives such as extended family members, foster parents, and social workers.

The insight and knowledge that comes from living with a child is invaluable. That's why, as the foster parent, you participate in the development and implementation of a child's plan and play a critical role on the child and family's team.

This guide will provide you with basic information about making the decision to care for a child, transitioning a child into your home, caring for a child in foster care, working with DCF, understanding the court process, and the resources available to you. Be sure to contact your Resource Coordinator for more detailed information if you have questions on any of these topics.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Vermont Foster and Adoptive Family Association (VFAPA) for their invaluable contribution to developing this resource guide.



Cindy Walcott,
Deputy Commissioner
Family Services Division

ACCEPTING A CHILD INTO YOUR HOME

Before you accept a child

Before you accept a child into your home, you need to:

1. Assess your family's strengths and limitations;
2. Decide what special needs and behaviors you feel you can handle; and
3. Decide the age and gender of the children you prefer to foster.

How soon you may be asked to take a child into your home depends on how flexible you are in terms of the age, gender, and special needs of the children you will accept. Keep in mind that the greatest need is homes for adolescents, sibling groups, and younger children with special needs. Your wait may be longer if you specify, for example, that you only want to foster children under the age of three.

If you have not received a call in awhile, don't assume your services are not wanted. It is just a matter of waiting for a child who is a good match for your family.

When you get a call

When you get a call about a child, the resource coordinator or social worker will share as much background information as is known at the time.

It is important to ask questions to help you decide if this is a good match for your family— at this time.

Questions you may want to ask when you get a call about a child

- What is the case plan goal? May I have a copy of the most recent case plan?
- Why does the child need placement?
- What do the child and family understand about the reason for placement?
- How long is the child expected to stay?
- What is known about the child's history?
- What is the child and family's current situation?
- What are the child's medical and educational needs?
- Does the child pose any risks (e.g., violence, fire-setting, sexualized or other potentially-dangerous behavior)? How can these risks be minimized?
- Does the child's family pose any risks to our family?
- Are there any restrictions on the child's contacts with friends, family, relatives or others?

- When, where, and how often will the child have visits with members of his/her family (called *family time*)? What role is the foster family expected to play? Are there court orders in effect regarding visitation?
- What is the child's religion? Does he or she attend religious ceremonies? If so, where?
- What school and grade is the child in? Is he or she on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)? Does he or she have an educational surrogate (see page 10 for more on the educational surrogate program)?
- What transportation is required to meet the child's needs (e.g., transportation to school, doctors, therapists, court, visitation, and childcare)?
- Does the child/family participate in any ethnic or cultural practices?

Take some time to think about the request and talk to your family. Tell the social worker you will call back shortly, after you have had a chance to think about it.

When to say no

You need to carefully weigh all the factors when deciding whether to accept a child into your home. Only say yes if you think it will work.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO SAY NO. Saying "NO" upfront will protect you and the child from a lot of pain and guilt later. Don't feel pressured into situations that make you uncomfortable or you feel will not work. Some foster parents fear that if they say no, they will not be called again. That is not the case. The ability to say no is one of the most important skills you can have as a foster parent.

Some effective ways of saying no include:

- I don't think this is a good match because...
- Now is not a good time for us. Please call in a couple of weeks.
- I am not sure we are ready for this type of situation.
- Adding this child will not work for other family members.
- I don't want to mix boys and girls or teens with younger children.
- I am concerned about the impact on other children in our home.
- I have some safety concerns.
- I am concerned because...

When to say maybe

There may be times when you say “maybe”. You may, for example:

- Want more information before you make a decision. In non-emergency situations, you may be able to talk to the current caregiver to learn more about the child, how you can successfully meet the child’s needs, and how to transition the child into your home.
- Not be able to take the child on the day you are called because of other obligations, but would consider having the child come to your home in a few days.

Discuss your questions and concerns with the resource coordinator or social worker.

WELCOMING A CHILD INTO YOUR HOME

You have just agreed to provide care for a child who needs the services you have to offer. So now what? Where do you begin?

It is important to remember that for the child being placed in your home, everything is new: new people, new space, new routines, new rules, new food, and possibly even a new school. There are some ways you can prepare for the child’s arrival to help make the transition as smooth as possible.

Have some standard items on hand

- Toothbrush
- Hairbrush/combs
- Soap
- Bath towel
- Night light
- Rubber sheets
- T-shirt (oversized for sleeping)
- A few toys, stuffed animals
- Craft supplies

Tips for a smooth transition

Here are a few suggestions that others have found helpful:

- Be sure to ask the social worker for a completed placement check list, completed medical authorization form, and the child’s Medicaid card or number.
- Welcome the child quietly. While you may be excited, the child is likely scared and confused. Settle down to a regular routine as quickly as possible.

- Give the child a tour of the house and identify their personal spaces (e.g., where they will sleep, where they can store personal belongings).
- Explain your house rules. It may be helpful to make a list of the three or four most important rules and share others as you go along. Keep them positive and simple.
- Remember the child may be used to different routines, structure, and ways of doing things.
- Let the child know how she/he should address you. Many foster parents are comfortable using their first names. It is not appropriate to suggest the child call you “Mom” or “Dad”. The social worker can help you decide what’s best.
- Do not discard the child’s belongings brought from home. Familiar possessions will be a comfort.
- Respect the child’s loyalty to his or her family. Expect the child to have mixed feelings about what has happened. Do not speak negatively about the child’s parents.
- Ask about his or her family’s way of doing things and, to the extent possible, incorporate those routines into your family’s routines.
- Don’t have a house full of friends or relatives over the first few days. It may be too overwhelming for the child.
- Give the child time to adjust. This is a time of great emotional stress, more than the child may show. Expect occasional problems, but try to keep them in perspective. Do not emphasize small problems or minimize serious ones.
- Remember that you are not alone. Keep the child’s social worker and other team members informed.
- If you need support, contact the resource coordinator. He or she can provide support and connect you with other foster parents in your area.

Understand what the child is going through

Don’t be disappointed if the child doesn’t respond to you immediately. It will take some time for everyone to adjust to the changes and for relationships to form.

Staying in a different place can be difficult for anyone, even in the best of circumstances. This child has been separated from his or her home, family, and neighborhood, often under traumatic circumstances. In addition to feeling like an outsider in your home, the child may experience an overwhelming sense of grief and loss and may feel guilty about what has happened. At the same time, the child may feel relieved and thankful to be safe.

The first few weeks can be a confusing time for everyone. The child will likely have a wide range of emotions that even she/he doesn’t understand, including anger, despair, fear, guilt, shame, helplessness, and relief.

Initially, the child may be quite well behaved. This is commonly referred to as the “honeymoon” period. This is a good time to work on establishing a positive relationship while sharing some of your expectations and rules. As the child begins to relax and feel more comfortable in your home, his or her behaviors may become more challenging. The child will test the limits you have set and your commitment to him/her.

It is common for children who have experienced abuse/ neglect and been separated from family to show their pain either by withdrawing or acting out. This is to be expected and is not a reflection on you. Fortunately, there are people who can help you understand these behaviors and how best to respond. Let the social worker and other team members know what is happening. Ask for help early.

Help others in the family adjust

Other members of your household will also be experiencing change. In addition to sharing space and time, they are giving up a certain level of privacy. It is important to acknowledge this and have regular conversations.

It is common for other children to become jealous or resentful of the new child in your home. Some children may experience changes in their family position and may no longer be the oldest, youngest, or only child.

Your relationship with your partner may change as well. It’s important to maintain open communication and have a common approach to problem solving. As you focus on caring for a child who may have challenging behaviors and helping other children in the home to adjust, you might have less time for each other and for yourself. It is important to carve out time to connect with each other and have fun. Maintaining a strong relationship is important.

CARING FOR THE CHILD DAY-TO-DAY

Model and maintain family rules and boundaries

- Think about the rules that are important to your family and share them with the child. A child coming into a new situation won’t know the rules unless you explain them.
- Have a few main family rules and be prepared to negotiate on others.
- Some decisions will need input from the child’s social worker or parents. A child in your care may not always be allowed to do the same things your child does—for legal, policy or safety reasons.
- Give the child age-appropriate choices. For example: Would you rather wear your blue or your red sweater today? Do you want to participate in the school play or the school choir? Which of these three videos shall we watch tonight?

Use positive discipline

Children learn best from a problem-solving approach to discipline, with positive reinforcement for steps in the right direction. They need boundaries and limits so they can grow and learn in safety.

To discipline really means to teach.

Tips for a positive approach to discipline

- Redirect. For example, say “let’s play with this toy” while you whisk away the inappropriate item.
- Give short time outs. For children under 12, one minute per year of age is a good measure.
- Count to three and be clear about what will happen when you reach three (e.g., you will get a time out or lose a privilege). It is best for children to have a “time out” in the same room with you, so they do not feel separated or alone.
- Ignore some behaviors as long as the child is not hurting him or herself, others, or property. This does not mean you are approving of the behavior.
- Provide natural or logical consequences.
- Let the child help choose the consequences.
- Let the child repair or pay for damages or make amends in some way.
- Have open, clear, and positive communication.
- Teach and demonstrate better approaches for the child to get what he or she wants.

Discipline not allowed with children in foster care

- Spanking.
- Any physical punishment (e.g., standing in a corner facing the wall, standing on one leg, or putting soap in a child’s mouth).
- Repetitive tasks such as writing lines 100 times (i.e., I will not...)
- Locking a child in his or her room for a time out.
- Locking a child out of the house.

Understand your role in day-to-day life

As the child's foster parent, you will be involved in every aspect of his or her daily life. Below is some information about what may be involved.

Education

Note: Vermont law recognizes the importance of school stability for children in foster care. For this reason, special exceptions may be made for a child to stay enrolled in the same school even if he or she moves to another school district. Decisions are made based on the child's best interest.

You will attend special events and participate in meetings at school. Some children who need special educational services are assigned an "educational surrogate parent" (a trained person who will represent the child at meetings, request evaluations, and develop and monitor special educational plans). This could be the child's parent or you. Many foster parents participate in specialized training that allows them to assume this role. Contact the social worker or resource coordinator if you would like to become an educational surrogate.

Medical and dental care

You may arrange for the child's routine health and dental care and immediate medical treatment in case of illness, accident, or emergency. If possible, the child should remain under the care of the same physician and dentist he or she has been seeing. If appropriate, the child's parents should remain involved in his or her medical care.

In case of an emergency, seek medical treatment first and then notify DCF by calling the district office during regular business hours or the Emergency Services Program (ESP) after hours (1-800-649-5285). It is your responsibility to keep the social worker and family (as appropriate) informed about any health concerns. The social worker must give permission for anesthesia, surgery, and psychiatric services. After hours, ESP social workers give permission.

Transportation

You will routinely provide or arrange transportation for the child — to go to school, doctor's appointments, childcare, family visits, and court hearings.

Religion

You are expected to respect and support the cultural and spiritual values of the children in your home. They should be given opportunities to attend services, celebrations, and other events to promote their cultural and spiritual growth. They have the right not to participate in religious ceremonies or other cultural traditions if they choose not to or if the parents do not want them to. The social worker and family can help you find resources when there are differences in spiritual or cultural customs.

Be an active member of the family's team

It is important that you, the child's social worker, the parent(s), and other professionals involved in the case meet together to focus on:

1. Supporting the parents' progress toward reunification; and
2. Helping the child overcome any challenges related to trauma, neglect, developmental delays, health conditions, and so on.

Being part of the team is one way you will share parenting decisions about the child in your care.

Members of the team could include:

- Family Services social worker;
- Parent(s);
- Extended family members;
- Foster parents;
- Respite provider(s);
- Counselor or psychotherapist;
- Guardian ad Litem;
- School staff or childcare provider;
- Youth development coordinator for older children; and
- The child if he or she is able to participate. (Most adolescents and older children do attend.)

Meeting as a team helps ensure you are all aware of the main issues and are working together to resolve them. It allows all voices to be heard, including the voices of the children and parents. Teams develop case plans together, make collaborative decisions to help support the child and family, and provide ongoing assessment.

Support family connections

Maintaining family connections is essential for a child in foster care. Regardless of the type or level of abuse and neglect, the child still loves and is usually attached to his/ her parents and other family members. To support the child's family connections, you may participate in a "shared parenting meeting" and help facilitate "family time".

A *shared parenting meeting* is convened jointly by the social worker and family time coach to bring together parents, foster parents, other family members as appropriate, and sometimes the child.

Family time (or family visits) is the primary tool social workers use to help children cope with separation and loss associated with out-of-home placement. Family time is scheduled between the child and his/her parent(s). Frequent contact with parents increases the likelihood of successful reunification.

Supporting family relationships

Foster parents are essential partners in maintaining connections between children in foster care and the people who are important to them. Below are some ideas of how you can support these relationships. Be sure to discuss them with the social worker to make sure they are appropriate and in accordance with the case plan.

- Support family time, phone calls, and letters;
- Be a formal or informal mentor to the child's family;
- Encourage family participation in decision-making; seek their input or help with parenting issues;
- Keep routines, traditions, and rules as similar as possible;
- Get pictures of the family for the child;
- Have the child draw pictures or create artwork for the family;
- Take the child to visit his/her community, church or school;
- Make sure possessions given to the child by his/her family are respected, even if they are worn;
- Reassure the child that the family cares for him/her despite the difficulties the family has meeting the child's needs;
- Be courteous and respectful to the child's family; don't talk negatively to or about them;
- With the social worker's permission, include family in celebrations, school and community events, etc.

Supporting family time (or family visits)

You play a critical role in the success of family time. For example, we may ask you to transport a child to visits. These could take place:

- In a Family Services District Office;
- In another professional office;
- In the parent's home;
- In your home (if you and the social worker agree this is appropriate); or
- At a public place mutually agreed upon and approved by the social worker.

If both you and the child's social worker feel comfortable and agree it is appropriate, you could be the one supervising family time—in person, by phone, or via mail or email.

If you do supervise family time visits, you are responsible for:

1. Providing parent education (e.g., how to hold an infant, age-appropriate games, and appropriate snacks).
2. Maintaining boundaries and safety as instructed by the social worker. For example, if the child is not to be alone with the parent, you would take the child to the restroom if the need arises, leaving the parent in the common area.
3. Intervening if the parent violates conditions of visitation (e.g., whispering secretly to the child or providing candy to a child with diabetes).
4. Observing the interaction between parent and child and reporting to the social worker afterwards. How are they interacting? What is the parent doing that demonstrates parenting skills? How is the child responding to the parent's behavior/words? What emotions are present for both parent and child?

Understanding your reaction to family time

You may feel some of the following:

- Pleased when the child and parents have a great time;
- Confused about expectations established by DCF;
- Concerned (particularly if the child has a negative response to a parent);
- Ambivalent towards parent(s);
- Resentful or helpless at the demands placed on you by family time if visits are daily (often in the case of an infant) or when family time increases;
- Caught in the middle when family time disrupts other "normal" activities for the child, like naps, meals, and other planned activities; and
- Annoyed or even angry at abrupt schedule changes or miscommunications.

If you are experiencing any of the more challenging feelings noted here, please make sure to get support for yourself. Remember, these are normal feelings experienced by many foster parents.

Understanding children's reactions to family time

Family time often brings up conflicting feelings for children, which can lead to problem behaviors—before and after family time. Unless these disturbances are extreme, they should not affect family time visits. If a child in your care is having a difficult time related to family time and you need support, contact your resource coordinator or social worker.

When first in your care	Seeing a parent on the first visit	Saying goodbye after a visit	Returning to your home
How a child might feel			
shocked, angry, afraid, depressed	happy, relieved, ambivalent, sad, angry, afraid	confused, afraid, sad, relieved, angry, anxious	resentful, sad, angry, depressed, relieved, happy, guilty
How a child might behave			
listless, withdrawn, distracted, hostile, aggressive, tearful, inconsolable	hyperactive, hostile, aggressive, talkative, silent, cowering, avoiding parent, clinging to parent or other adult present	crying, hostile, belligerent, whining, leaving without saying goodbye, clinging, pleading	hyperactive, hostile, aggressive, talkative, silent, avoiding contact, clinging, crying, not eating, not sleeping, bed wetting or other regressive behaviors

WORKING WITH DCF

The partnership between the Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families and Vermont foster parents is critical to the safety and well-being of children in the state's care.

Although DCF is legally responsible for making decisions about the case plan for a child and family, foster parents provide day-to-day care and nurturing. Together, DCF and foster parents support families, so parents can resume the safe care of their child and if that is not possible, reach permanency for the child. The partnership works best when founded on mutual respect, excellent communication, and an understanding of each other's role.

The best way to understand the Department for Children and Families is to learn about the services we provide and some of the staff you may deal with.

Services to children and families

Child safety interventions

The Centralized Intake Unit in Waterbury takes calls about suspected child abuse and neglect. A supervisor determines whether to accept a report for intervention. If the supervisor accepts a report, a local social worker is assigned either an investigation or an assessment, depending on the nature of the allegation. The social worker will assess the child's safety. When it is not possible to make a plan that will keep the child safely at home, the social worker will recommend placement in another setting.

Child protective services

Social workers make sure children are safe and help parents improve their parenting skills when child abuse or neglect is an issue. Whenever possible, children remain in their homes and services are delivered to the families.

Services to families with children in the state's care

Children enter the state's care for a variety of reasons including abuse/neglect, their own behaviors, and delinquent acts. We are always focused on child safety. Social workers arrange for and coordinate services, set expectations, and assess progress made. Social workers work towards resolving the family's situation and ensuring the child has a permanent home, preferably with his or her parents.

Supervision of youth on juvenile probation

Many youth who have committed delinquent acts are on probation. A social worker monitors the youth's progress towards achieving the terms of his/her probation.

Crisis services

The Emergency Services Program (ESP) is staffed by DCF social workers who are available by phone after hours, on weekends, and on holidays. The phone number is **1-800-649-5285**. ESP is available to help you solve problems and resolve emergencies when district offices are closed.

Staff and other professionals you may work with

Assessment/Investigative Social Worker

These social workers conduct investigations or assessments of reports accepted for intervention by the Centralized Intake Unit. Social workers in the Special Investigation Unit investigate reports of suspected child abuse/neglect in licensed foster homes, as well as in all facilities regulated by the department.

Case Manager

In some cases, Family Services contracts with a local agency to provide support services to the child and/or family. In these cases, the child or family is assigned a case manager whose main role is to ensure they receive the services they need.

Child's Attorney

Every child in the state's care has an attorney to represent him or her in court.

District Director

There are 12 district offices in Vermont. District Directors oversee local Family Services district offices. They are available to support foster families when social workers or supervisors are not available.

Family Group Conference (FGC) Coordinator

Family Services contracts with professionals who plan and prepare participants for a Family Group Conference. A Family Group Conference is a process by which the child's family members convene to make a plan for the child. Professionals and foster families participate in the first part of the process. Then, the family meets alone to make a plan.

Family Safety Planning (FSP) Facilitator

Family Safety Planning meetings may be facilitated by a Family Services employee or by a contracted facilitator. Family Safety Planning meetings are structured meetings that support honest communication with the family about safety issues, including both risk and protective factors. Foster parents are often invited to these meetings.

Family Time Coach

The Family Time Coach is a contracted service provider hired to support and coach parents visiting their children who are in foster care.

Guardian ad Litem (GAL)

GALS are appointed by the court prior to the Temporary Care Hearings. These volunteers are trained and charged by the court to advise the court regarding the best interests of the child. GALS meet with the children and attend all court hearings. They do not always agree with the children's attorneys, but rather they advocate for what they believe is in the children's best interests.

Permanency Planning Counselor

Family Services contracts with Permanency Planning Counselors to help Family Services find adoptive homes, prepare children and families for adoption, and finalize the adoptions.

Licensing Social Worker

Licensing social workers are responsible for licensing all foster homes, residential facilities, child-placing agencies, adoption agencies, and shelter programs throughout the state. Each social worker is assigned a geographical area. They also investigate possible licensing violations in foster homes, renew licenses, and evaluate changes in foster homes.

Resource Coordinator

Resource Coordinators recruit foster parents, screen applicants, match children with licensed foster parents, and support foster families in their districts. They also maintain all foster family records and make sure reimbursement arrangements are made.

Supervisor

Family Services Supervisors oversee social workers and are available to foster parents when social workers are not available.

Social Worker

Social Workers are assigned to families who receive services from the department and children who are in the state's care and their families. They help families and children get needed services, help make sure children are safe, and when children are placed out of home, they work with the team towards the case plan goal.

Youth Development Coordinator (YDC)

YDCs prepare youth in the state's care (ages 15 – 21) to live independently; teaching them life skills and providing them with the information, training, support, and services they need to successfully transition from the state's care to living on their own. YDCs can help youth find a job, find an apartment, get health insurance, and so on.

The working partnership between DCF and foster parents is successful when everyone understands what is expected.

What you can expect from DCF

You can expect to:

- ✓ Be respected as a valued and integral part of the child and family's team.
- ✓ Receive a completed placement check list for each child who is placed in your home. (See Policy 94: <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>)
- ✓ Receive timely communication from the social worker. Routine questions should be answered within 72 hours. When the social worker is not available to respond to an urgent matter, contact the social worker's supervisor or another team member.
- ✓ Review the case record of a child placed in your home, after signing a confidentiality agreement. (See Policy 94: <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>)
- ✓ Provide input to the social worker in the development of a case plan.
- ✓ Be invited to attend and participate in case plan reviews. (See Policy 122: <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>)
- ✓ Have an opportunity for a dialogue about any concerns DCF has about the care of a child in your home.
- ✓ Receive notice 2 weeks in advance of a planned move for the child living with you, unless DCF has a concern regarding the immediate health or safety of the child. If the child has been living with you for more than 3 months, you are entitled to a formal review of a planned or unplanned placement change. This includes circumstances in which the child has been recently removed from your home. There are some exceptions. (See Policy 94: <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>)
- ✓ Receive written or verbal notice from DCF of any post-disposition court hearing regarding the child. You have a right to be heard at the hearing. The court will exercise discretion regarding your presence at the entire hearing. (See Policy 94: <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>)

What DCF expects from you

We expect you to:

- ✓ Participate as engaged members of the child and family's support team.
- ✓ Attend and participate in shared parenting meetings when a child is placed in your home.
- ✓ Communicate regularly with DCF about the child's progress, and any challenges you are experiencing in providing a home for the child.
- ✓ Work actively to support the goals of the case plan and the plan for family contact. When you disagree with aspects of the case plan, you should request a meeting to discuss your concerns.
- ✓ Comply with licensing regulations and complete all training requirements (See <http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/pdf/fsd/pf/LicensingFosterCare.pdf>)
- ✓ Give the department at least two weeks notice if you are requesting that a child leave your home, unless safety is a concern.
- ✓ Notify DCF immediately if the child has a serious or emergency medical need, has run away, been in an accident, is abused or has disclosed past abuse, is involved in illegal activity, or if any other unusual events occur. After hours, notify Emergency Services at 1-800-649-5285.
- ✓ Request permission to travel overnight outside of the state of Vermont with a child who is in foster care.
- ✓ Be willing to schedule routine medical, dental, and counseling appointments for the child with providers approved by the child's social worker. Cooperate in arrangements for any other special services needed by the child.
- ✓ Attain prior approval before leaving a child in the care of any respite provider. All respite providers must be approved by DCF. (See Policy 85: <http://dcf.gov.fsd/policies>).

Who you may call if you...

Question	Resource Coordinator	Social Worker	School	Therapist	Doctor
Want to cut a child's hair		X			
Need information about childcare	X	X			
Want to sign a child up for afterschool activities		X	X		
Need information about additional supports available at school		X	X		
Are being investigated for child abuse/neglect and want to speak to someone	X	X			
Need to know where to send your expense forms	X				
Want to find out about court dates		X			
Are struggling with a child in your home	X	X		X	
Are going out of state or on vacation	X	X			
Want to know more about a child's likes, dislikes, and routine	X	X			
Have questions about a child's special educational needs		X	X		
Need to seek medical care for a child in your care		X			X or hospital in an emergency
Have questions about a child's health needs, including medications		X			
Need to report that a child has run away		X			

UNDERSTANDING THE COURT PROCESS

Children may come to the attention of Family Court because they are:

1. A child in need of care and supervision (CHINS) due to:
 - o Abuse or neglect;
 - o Lack of parental control; or
 - o Chronic truancy.
2. A delinquent youth.

Court Hearings

There are usually three or more Family Court hearings for a child who has come to the attention of the court, including a Temporary Care Hearing or Preliminary Hearing; a Merits Hearing (Adjudication); and a Disposition Hearing. Additional hearings may occur during the time the child is in the care of the state.

Emergency care hearing

In emergency situations, including immediate danger to the child, the child has run away, or the child has been arrested, the child may come into the state's care. Vermont law authorizes law enforcement to take a child into physical custody and contact the local state's attorney. If the emergency occurs after hours, the state's attorney or police officer contacts a judge over the phone to request an Emergency Care Order (ECO). If the judge agrees that the child's immediate welfare requires temporary state care, a court order will place the child in state care and DCF will place the child. The order may allow the child to remain at home under court-ordered conditions necessary to safeguard the child's safety. Any order for temporary emergency care must be followed by a court hearing within 72 hours.

Temporary care hearing

The Family Court will hold a Temporary Care Hearing within 72 hours of the Emergency Care Order (ECO) to determine whether the child can return home or should remain in temporary care of DCF or another person. At that hearing, the judge will ask the parents, Family Services social worker, the State's Attorney, the child's attorney, and the child's court appointed Guardian ad Litem, (GAL) for their opinions. Children over ten years old are expected to be at court for this hearing. The judge may want to hear from the child as well. The child's attorney may ask the court to waive the child's presence for good reason.

As of January 2009, the law requires the judge when issuing a temporary care order to consider the parent first, non-custodial parent second, relatives third, and DCF care last. If a child is placed in temporary state care, Family Services decides where the child will live, with an emphasis on placing the child with relatives or someone else familiar to the child.

Preliminary hearing (non-emergency CHINS & delinquency cases)

In non-emergency cases, within 15 days of a case being filed in Family Court, the court will hold a Preliminary Hearing to review the information presented in the petition and affidavit and to hear from the parties. In emergency matters, the temporary care hearing is the preliminary hearing.

Merits hearing & adjudication

The Merits Hearing is “the trial” of the case, held within 60 days of the Temporary Care Order. The case is presented to a judge without a jury. The allegations presented by the State’s Attorney must be proven by a preponderance of the evidence. Witnesses are called and testimony under oath is taken. Sometimes, testimony is presented by family members, teachers, doctors, mental health providers, friends, witnesses, police officers, social workers, foster parents, and the child. After listening to the evidence, the judge will make a decision. At or soon after the conclusion of the Merits Hearing, the judge may issue findings of:

- **CHINS A** – The child has been abandoned or abused by his/her parents, guardian, or other custodian.
- **CHINS B** – The child is without proper parental care or subsistence, education, medical, or other care necessary for his/her well-being.
- **CHINS C** – The child is without or beyond the control of his/her parents, guardian, or other custodian.
- **CHINS D**- The child is habitually and without justification truant from compulsory school attendance.
- **Delinquency** – A child over the age of ten has been found guilty of a crime.

If the judge finds the child in need of care or supervision (CHINS) or delinquent, the judge will order Family Services to prepare a disposition case plan. If the judge finds the allegations by Family Services and the State’s Attorney have not been established, the judge will dismiss the petition and vacate any temporary orders issued in the case.

Disposition hearing

A Disposition Hearing is held within 35 days of the Merits Order. In preparation for this hearing, the social worker prepares a disposition case plan. This plan identifies a permanency goal for the child, an estimated date for achieving the goal, and a plan for services. The Family Services recommendations may be contested by any of the parties involved in the hearing, including the parents’ attorneys, the child’s attorney, or the Guardian ad Litem. The judge will accept or reject the plan, based on whether it adequately supports the permanency goal. The judge will also make a decision about custody of the child at this time.

Post dispositional review hearing

The court is required to hold a hearing 60 days after the Disposition Order is issued to monitor progress of the case plan. By law, foster parents have the right to be heard at this hearing and any hearing thereafter. The judge may ask questions. The foster parents may wish to prepare some notes to help them prepare for court.

Permanency hearing

The permanency hearing occurs within 12 months of a child's entering the state's care but may be held earlier for children under the age of six. The purpose of this hearing is to determine the permanency goal for the child and provide an estimated time for achieving that goal.

Status conference

This is a hearing to inform the judge what is going on with the case. It provides all parties an opportunity to update the judge on progress.

Motion hearing

A motion hearing is for the judge to decide on a request to compel certain actions, suppress certain evidence, create protective orders, or invoke certain statutory protections of minors. A motion hearing may occur at any point. Evidence and testimony may be presented by any party. A judge will rule on the motion and the ruling can be appealed.

Citation hearing

If a child or youth is charged with a delinquent act but not brought into the state's care, the court process begins with law enforcement issuing a citation for the youth to appear in court.

Other things to know about court hearings

The following people are always parties to the case, which means they have status to present evidence and witnesses in a proceeding.

- The judge;
- The State's Attorney (an attorney who represents the state);
- The Family Services Division Social Worker;
- The Guardian ad Litem; and
- The parents, children, and their attorneys.

People with party status are "persons the court determines are proper or necessary to the proceedings". Parties have the right to present evidence and call witnesses. The judge may grant party status to others.

Foster parents have a statutorily provided opportunity to be heard at Post-Disposition Review Hearings as well as at Permanency Hearings. Once you have arrived at the designated court room, ask the court clerk to put your name on the list requesting entry into the court room

Notice of hearings: All parties to a juvenile case are given advance notice of hearings. The notice is usually given in writing, and is mailed to the lawyers and to any party who does not have a lawyer. Occasionally a notice of a hearing may be given in person or by telephone.

Foster parents are to be notified, in writing or verbally, of post-disposition hearings and permanency hearings. It is customary for the social worker to notify foster parents of other hearings as well. *Always let your social worker and the court know how to contact you if your phone number or address changes.*

Continuances: Any party may request in writing that a court hearing be continued to another date if they cannot attend the scheduled hearing. Continuances are only granted by the judge for reasons such as illness or the inability of a party to be present. When a hearing is continued, all parties and foster parents are given notice (in writing if there is enough time) of the change in date.

Court room guidelines

All persons are expected to be respectful of each other and of the judge. Here are some pointers to help you have a good experience in court.

- Arrival early. It is a good idea to arrive 15 minutes early for all hearings. Security is as tight if not tighter than screening to board a plane. Remember that you will have to pass through a metal detector in order to enter the courthouse. Purses and bags will be screened. Please plan accordingly.
- Do not interrupt, even if you strongly disagree with something being said. The judge will provide an opportunity for all involved in the case to be heard.
- Be aware of your body language and behavior, even when simply observing. The judge will notice. Strive for a neutral and respectful demeanor.
- Let the judge know (raise your hand,) if you cannot hear what the others are saying in the courtroom.
- Get support if you need it. Court can be a stressful experience. If you need support, talk with someone (e.g., the resource coordinator, social worker, or another foster parent).

RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU

Financial support

Foster parents receive a monthly stipend to help with the costs of raising a child. This is considered reimbursement of expenses and is treated by the IRS as non-taxable income. Payment is sent by mail or, preferably, directly deposited into your bank account around the middle of each month for the previous month's care. Payment includes an allowance for room and board as well as money specifically targeted for the child to use for clothing, incidentals (e.g., shampoo, school supplies, cosmetics, etc.) and personal spending allowance. Children should be given responsibility for managing these amounts as appropriate. The reimbursement rate varies depending on the training and experience of the foster parent and the age of the child. Occasionally, supplemental reimbursement may be authorized when the caregiver is expected to provide a greater level of care to meet the child's needs for additional care and supervision. For further information, please refer to Policy 93 at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>.

Case plan expenses

In addition to the monthly stipend, you may request reimbursement for expenses related to carrying out the case plan. This could include, for example, making approved phone calls, attending training, and transporting the child to family visits, meetings, court, and other activities outlined in the child's case plan. You must get approval for these expenses first and submit completed expense forms monthly. A sample expense form is included in the forms section. To avoid delays be sure the form is complete and the totals are correct.

Transportation to medical appointments including counseling, eye care, and dental care can be arranged for, and reimbursed through, Medicaid transportation. Please note that each district has a different process. If you will be transporting a child in your care to a medical appointment, please call the social worker or the resource coordinator in your district.

Clothing vouchers

An initial clothing voucher of up to \$100 may be issued if a child comes into care without adequate clothing and efforts to recover the child's clothing have been unsuccessful.

Hot lunch & WIC

Children in care are eligible for free school lunches. Children under the age of five are also eligible to receive services and food from the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program administered by the Health Department, regardless of your family's income.

Damage claims

If the child damages your home accidentally or on purpose, you may be eligible to be reimbursed for the costs of repairing the damage. Contact your social worker or resource coordinator as soon as possible after the damage has occurred, and they will explain the process. (For further information please refer to Policy 268 at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>)

Unusual expenses and special events

If the child needs special items or has unusual expenses, there may be funds to help. Some organizations help with things like camp, class trips, or other special events. Ask the social worker for more information. Again, any request for reimbursement for unusual expenses must have prior approval.

Training support

In addition to the Foundations Training, which everyone who cares for a child in the state's care is required to take, there are other training opportunities available to you. Some are mandatory, while others are optional.

DCF workshops

DCF provides one- and two-day workshops for staff throughout the year. Foster parents are welcome to attend these workshops for free, as space allows. Ask your resource coordinator for a calendar of these workshops, which cover a broad range of topics and are held during normal work hours.

Ongoing training

Foster parents need on-going training to help them learn how to deal with the complex issues faced by children and families. There are many resources available to help support your continued development. A listing of the trainings is included in local and state newsletters. Ask your resource coordinator to include you on the mailing list. To advance through the level system of reimbursement, foster parents are expected to continue training. For further information on training requirements, please refer to Policy 93 at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>.

Adoption training

In addition to attending Foundations Training, there is a special training for those who are interested in adoption. These classes may be taken at any time, but are most useful when you are preparing for the adoption process. The resource coordinator can advise you and tell you when the next classes are scheduled.

Childcare

Subsidized childcare is available if you work outside the home or if it's authorized because of the special needs of the child.

Protective services childcare is provided for some children. The child's social worker can authorize this service if he or she feels the child's situation calls for it.

Medical benefits

Children in state care are covered for medical expenses either through their parents' insurance or through Vermont Medicaid.

Other supports

Contracted support services: case management

DCF works with several agencies that provide a limited amount of additional support to foster parents including case management. Case managers may be available to come to your home to consult with you about child-specific behaviors and ways to manage them. Ask the social worker or resource coordinator what services are available to you.

Urgent care

If there are situations requiring immediate attention during office hours, call the DCF district office, or if you are involved with a support agency contact them. After regular business hours, on weekends, and on state holidays, call the Emergency Services Program (ESP) at 1-800-649-5285.

Respite care

Respite care is planned time in which the child can stay with an approved respite care provider, and you can have a break from full-time care giving. Respite care does not mean you are inadequate as a foster parent. Besides giving you some time to relax and renew your inner resources, a respite stay can be a welcome break for the child. It can help him or her connect with other caring adults who may become part of their network of supportive connections. Prior to a respite stay, all respite providers must be approved by the social worker or resource coordinator in your district. To the extent that funds allow, foster families are entitled to reimbursement for at least two days of respite care per quarter. For further information please refer to policy 95 <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>

THE ULTIMATE GOAL: PERMANENCE

State care is meant to be temporary. The goal is to provide children with safe, permanent homes, ideally with their parents. When this cannot happen, however, the state must pursue other options to achieve permanence for children.

Social workers often work towards two goals at once (called *concurrent planning*):

1. Supporting reunification with the parent(s); and
2. Achieving permanence for the child if reunification does not take place.

Let's look at the step-by-step process from the foster parent's viewpoint:

1. **Reunification** - The first hope for a child who comes into the state's care is for reunification with the parent or parents. If reunification takes place, you'll be helping the child transition home to his or her parents.
2. **Adoption or Permanent Guardianship by Extended Family** – DCF will try to identify relatives who may want to adopt or assume guardianship for a child. If relatives step forward and are appropriate, the child will be placed with them.
3. **Adoption by Non-Related Foster Family** - You may be asked to provide a permanent home for this child.

Transition

If the child leaves to reunify with his or her parents, join relatives, or to transition to an adoptive home, you will work with the social worker to help the child successfully transition into his or her new home.

Collaboration is vital. Sharing detailed information about the child's strengths, areas for growth, and daily routine with the child's new caregiver will help make the adjustment easier. Helping the child to express his/her feelings about the move can also help.

It is best practice to provide the child with a planned and organized transition. The time can be used to recognize positive change and celebrate a new beginning. Many foster parents help mark the occasion by planning a favorite meal, holding a good-bye celebration, or giving the child special mementos to help provide closure. It is important for children to learn how to say "good-bye" in a positive manner.

Foster parents come to care a great deal for the children living with them. Having a child leave their home can be both rewarding and painful. After the child leaves, it is helpful to schedule a meeting with the social worker or resource coordinator to discuss how the placement went and to share what you have learned that will help you in the future.

SAMPLE FORMS

Placement Checklist and Medical Authorization

THIS CHECKLIST IS REQUIRED FOR USE WHEN A CHILD IS PLACED. PLEASE REMEMBER THAT, IN AN EMERGENCY, DCF MAY HAVE LITTLE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHILD AND HIS OR HER SITUATION/NEEDS. ALSO PLEASE MAKE SURE THERE IS A COMPLETED AUTHORIZATION FOR TREATMENT ATTACHED TO THIS FORM.

Child's name: _____

Date of birth: _____ SSN: _____

Parents' names: _____

Social Worker: _____ Phone: _____

Supervisor: _____ District: _____

If child has been physically or sexually abused, briefly state by whom and the nature of the abuse:

Doctor(s): _____

Dentist: _____

Health Insurance: Fee-for-Service Medicaid PC Plus Medicaid

Private Insurance: _____

Medical Concerns/conditions: _____

Current medications, including dosage: _____

Authorization for Medical Treatment Completed

Plan for contact with family and others. List any concerns the resource family should be aware of: _____

If there is any history of threatening behavior towards resource families by the child or family, describe (when, how often, what kind): _____

Grade: ____ IEP 504 plan Individual aide Last School: _____

Reimbursement rate: _____ Usual Expenses: _____

Behavior/Issues	Past 6 Mos.			Before 6 Mos.			No information		
	Past 6 Mos.	Before 6 Mos.	No information	Past 6 Mos.	Before 6 Mos.	No information	Past 6 Mos.	Before 6 Mos.	No information
Sexually active									
Sexually reactive or aggressive									
Destructive of property									
Steals									
Problems with the law									
Confused/strange ideas									
Injures self									
Suicidal thoughts or behaviors									

Date of next hearing: _____ Date of next meeting with social worker: _____

Social Worker Signature: _____ Date: _____

Foster Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION BETWEEN SOCIAL WORKER AND FOSTER PARENT

- Why does the child need placement at this time?
- What is the purpose of the child's stay?
- How long is the child anticipated to stay?
- What does the child and his/her family understand about the reason for placement?
- What is known about the child's history?
- What is the child's and family's current situation?
- What are the child's behaviors and needs, including medical and educational needs?
- Does the child pose any risks due to violence, fire-setting, sexually abusive, or other behavior?
How can those risks be minimized?
- Does the youth or child's own family pose any risks to the resource family due to violence or aggression?
- What are the social worker's expectations of the foster parents?
- What are the child's transportation needs? School, extra curricular activities, medical appointments, therapy, court hearings, family visits, etc.
- What is the goal of the case plan? What are the anticipated time frames?
- Are there any restrictions on the child's contacts with friends, family, relatives or others?
- When, where and how often will the child visit with family? Will visits be supervised? What role will the foster parent be expected to play?
- What is the level of reimbursement to the foster family?
- Who is on the child's treatment team?

(Adapted from Social Services Policy No. 94, June 2000)

AUTHORIZATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT

On behalf of the Vermont Department for Children and Families, I hereby give permission for _____ to obtain any documents and otherwise take any actions necessary to obtain any and all routine and emergency medical, psychiatric and psychological, dental, ophthalmologic or other specialized medical services or treatment to the extent recommended by any licensed physician for _____, whose date of birth is _____.

Name _____

Title _____

Date _____

Direct Deposit Information

Please **PRINT** all information clearly.

Account Holder: _____

Account Holder Address: _____

Account Holder Social Security Number: _____

Bank Name: _____

Bank Address: _____

Bank ABA #: _____

Bank Account #: _____

Account Type: _____ checking _____ savings

Signature _____ Date _____

PLEASE ATTACH A COPY OF A VOIDED CHECK OR DEPOSIT SLIP

FOSTER PARENT/KINSHIP FOSTER PARENT EXPENSE REPORT

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Complete legibly, ***in ink***, or form will be returned.
2. Submit ***separate*** expense forms for each foster child, unless expenses are clearly for two children (such as transporting two children, phone calls related to siblings, etc.)
3. Submit training expenses on a separate expense form.
4. Except for mileage, ***you must attach a receipt.***
5. If you are not sure a certain expense is covered, check ***before*** incurring it. ***See back for prior approvals required.***
6. Submit expenses ***within six weeks*** of incurring them. Expenses more than three months old ***will not be paid.*** Retain the last copy for your records.

Foster Parent _____
 Address _____

 Social Security No. _____

Training Expenses
 Foster Child Expenses
 Name of Child: _____

MILEAGE (see back for further instructions)

Code = 33

DATE	TOWN OF ORIGIN	DESTINATION and REASON	END POINT	# MILES	AMT DUE
Ex: 6/3/99	Worcester	Barre (court hearing)	Worcester		
TOTAL					

OTHER EXPENSES: ATTACH ALL RECEIPTS (see back for further instructions)

DATE	CODE	EXPLANATION	AMT DUE
Codes: Transportation=33 Respite = 34 Clothing = 38 Medical = 39 Training = 46 Telephone/Misc. = 31			
TOTAL			

If I am requesting reimbursement for respite care I have provided, I certify that I have not been reimbursed for this service by any other source. I also certify that the expenses include only the actual expenses to which I am entitled. (Also see back for further instructions for respite payments.)

Foster Parent's Signature _____ Date _____

District office use: Child MIS _____ IV-E? Yes No Amt approved: _____

District Director/designee _____ Date _____

District Office: _____

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENTS:

TYPE OF EXPENSE	CODE	EXPLANATION
Transportation	33	<p>Each trip must be listed separately.</p> <p>First column: Enter the date of the trip. Second column: Enter the town from which you started Third column: Enter your destination and the reason for the trip. Fourth column: If this was a round trip, enter the town in which your trip ended. Fifth column: Enter the total number of miles</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Worcester to Barre (court hearing) Worcester to Montpelier (family visit) to Worcester Barre to Barre (admin review) to Barre Worcester to Montpelier (family visit) to Barre (meet with SW) to Worcester</p> <p>All mileage expenses for medical, dental and mental health appointments are paid by Medicaid. Submit those expenses on the Medicaid Transportation Form, available from your Resource Coordinator.</p>
Respite Care	34	<p><u>Respite care must be pre-approved.</u> Two methods of reimbursement are acceptable:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. If you have already paid the provider, attach a signed receipt from the provider (Example: I, Mary Doe, provided respite care for Joey Smith on 1/3/99. I received \$20.00 from Ralph Smith for this service.)2. If you have not paid the provider, the provider may request direct payment from the department. The provider must note that he or she has not received payment from any other source.
Training	31	<p>Use a separate expense report form for all training expenses. <u>Check with your district director to make sure that all expenses are fully reimbursable.</u> Include the topic of the training and the trainer's name. List each expense separately (e.g. registration, lodging, child care, mileage.)</p>
Telephone	31	<p>Planned telephone calls specifically related to the case plan are reimbursable. Attach a copy of your telephone bill, indicating the specific calls to be reimbursed.</p>
Miscellaneous	31	<p>Other expenses that have been pre-approved by the district office. Describe expenses and attach receipts.</p>

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DISTRICT OFFICE:

1. Make sure the form is filled in COMPLETELY. Forms with missing information will be returned to you.
2. Expense reports may be signed by the District Director or a person specifically designated by the director to approve foster parent expenses.
3. Review each expense, crossing off any that are not allowable.
4. Enter the required information on the bottom of the form. Sign and date.
5. Send the original and the first copy to the DCF Business Office. Retain the second copy for your records.

Family Services Division District Offices

BARRE - (802) 479-4260

255 North Main Street, Suite 7
Barre, VT 05641-4189

BENNINGTON - (802) 442-8138

Suite 14, 150 Veterans Memorial Drive
Bennington, VT 05201-1932

BRATTLEBORO- (802) 257-2888

2nd Floor, 232 Main Street
Brattleboro, VT 05301-2879

BURLINGTON - (802) 863-7370

426 Industrial Ave. Ste. 120
Williston, Vermont 05495

HARTFORD - (802) 295-8840

226 Holiday Drive, Suite 32
White River Junction, VT 05001-2024

MIDDLEBURY - (802) 388-4660

700 Exchange Street, Suite 105
Middlebury, VT 05753-1529

MORRISVILLE - (802) 888-4576

63 Professional Drive, Suite 3
Morrisville, VT 05661-8522

NEWPORT - (802) 334-6723

Suite 230, 100 Main Street
Newport, VT 05855-4898

RUTLAND - (802) 786-5817

88 Merchants Row, 220 Asa Bloomer
Rutland, VT 05701-3449

SPRINGFIELD - (802) 885-8900

100 Mineral Street, Suite 101
Springfield, VT 05156-3166

ST. ALBANS - (802) 527-7741

20 Houghton Street, Suite 211
St. Albans, VT 05478-2247

ST. JOHNSBURY - (802) 748-8374

67 Eastern Avenue, Suite 4
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819-5603

**After hours, on weekends, and on
State holidays, call 1-800-649-5285.**