

UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATIONS:

What Alaskan Foster Parents Need to Know

TOPIC: #1 Positive Parenting and Managing Behavior

7 AAC 67.100 Qualification of a foster parent

7 AAC 67.230 Program and Management in Foster Home

7 AAC 67.240 Behavior Guidance

This series is a guide to the regulations but is not a substitute. In all discrepancies between the information in this series and the regulations, the regulations are the final authority. Contact your licensing worker or ACRF for a complete copy of the regulations.

WHAT ARE THE REGULATIONS FOR BEING A FOSTER CAREGIVER?



Foster homes provide a safe place for children who are unable to live with their birth parents. Foster care regulations focus on factors that increase the level of safety for children. Foster parents are held to a higher standard of care than birth parents because of the need to assure safe, licensed care.

What are the qualifications outlined in the foster care regulations? *A foster parent should be able to develop and use appropriate discipline to address challenging behaviors and understand that these behaviors may be the result of the child's trauma, grief or past experiences.*

That means, a foster parent needs to:

- Be of reputable character, to use good judgement, and show responsible law-abiding and emotionally mature behaviors.
- Be able to meet the physical, behavioral emotional and social needs of children in care.
- Treat all children in the home fairly.
- Show respect for the foster child's own family and work cooperate with all the team members providing services in the home.
- Be capable of dealing with frustration and conflict and be able to work with children who may show negative behaviors.
- Be free of any physical, health or mental health problem that poses a risk to the children in their care.
- Be able to use positive guidance and set clear and consistent limits.
- Act as a positive role model for children and be able to use strategies to de-escalate volatile situations.

**Foster parents
should be
capable
parents and
good for kids!**

WHAT DO THE REGULATIONS SAY...

About how to treat children?



Chores should be shared equally amongst children and match their ability, health, and age. A foster home must also ensure that chores do not interfere with school, health, and the necessary recreation activities of a child.

Any money earned by the child or given as a gift to the child is considered the child's and should not be used or borrowed by a foster home member. Foster parents are responsible for ensuring a child is educated about money management and planning as age appropriate. A foster parent may put limits on the amount of money a child may have in possession and should help a child establish a bank account, especially if he has money over the amount of \$200. The foster parent should also notify the child's caseworker if the child has funds or savings over \$200. The foster care reimbursement payment is not considered property of the child.

A foster parent should help a child get clean and well-fitting clothing appropriate to the age of the child and seasonal weather conditions. All personal clothing and belongings in use at the time a child leaves the foster home should go with the child. A foster parent should also provide a child with items needed for grooming and personal hygiene.

Have a specific space for each child to keep his own clothing and personal possessions. A foster child does not need to have his own bedroom, but each child should have his own crib or bed (with the exception that young children under six years and of the same sex may share a double bed.)



A foster parent should ensure the privacy of a foster child while in their home by having household members make themselves known before entering the bathroom or a child's bedroom while the child is using it. Foster parents are not permitted to perform pat, body or strip searches of a child. Foster parents however, may perform a search of a foster child's room when there is cause to believe there is a health or safety concern. The use of surveillance cameras is permitted in a foster home, however they cannot be located in places where a child would expect privacy, such as bathrooms and bedrooms. Video baby monitors are allowed for infants and toddlers, as well as bed alarms necessary to meet the medical needs of a child. Foster parents can also ensure privacy of a child by not opening their mail or packages, to include electronically transmitted communications. If a concern arises regarding the health or safety of a child in regard to mail, packages, or electronically transmitted communications, a foster parent should seek the consent from the child's caseworker first, to open these items.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT SUPERVISION...

We expect you as a foster parent to be a responsible individual who exercises sound judgement. This means when you are supervising foster children, it is important that you provide the supervision and limits to keep a child safe. Appropriate supervision of children depends on good judgement. As a foster parent, you are expected to put the safety of the child first and foremost.

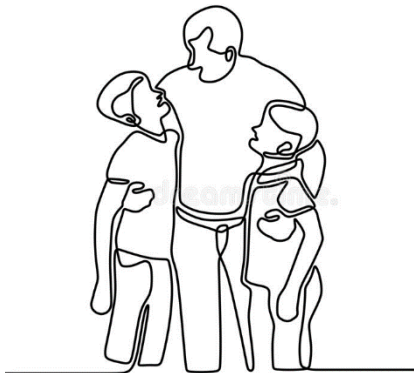


For more information about Supervision Regulations, check out ACRF's **Understanding the Regulations Unit #8: Supervision, Alternate Caregivers and the Reasonable & Prudent Parent Standard**

WHAT DO THE REGULATIONS SAY...

About the relationship between a child and his birth family?

- Foster parents need to respect and support the religious and cultural beliefs of the child and child's birth family. This may mean taking or arranging transportation for a child to attend a certain church even when it is not your own place of worship. This may mean taking a child to or arranging transportation to a cultural event that reflects the child's heritage. These actions show respect for a child and his family.
- It is also part of the regulations that you refrain from saying derogatory remarks about a child's family characteristics, physical traits, culture, ethnicity, language, or traditions. This means you should not say anything negative or anything that puts a child's family in a bad or negative light.



- Foster parents are also expected to support the family contact schedule set up in the case plan. This may include transporting a child to a visit or allowing phone calls. Foster parents cannot restrict visits with family members as a form of punishment or consequence. All family contact should be in accordance with the case plan. If a family member is abusing that privilege (such as calling too often or constantly after the child is in bed), you may need to contact the caseworker to intervene.

WHAT DO THE REGULATIONS SAY...

About what is not allowed in foster care?

This section comes directly from the foster care regulations of what not to do when using behavior guidance with children and youth in foster care. Violation of these can result in an investigation and possible action against your license. So let's do the DON'TS first, and then go on to look at some DO'S.

REFERENCE: 7 AAC 67.240 Behavior Guidance.

(a) A foster parent shall demonstrate the ability to develop and use appropriate discipline strategies to address the challenging behaviors of a child in care that may be the result of the child's trauma, grief, or past experiences.

(b) A foster parent shall provide for positive reinforcement, redirection, the setting of realistic expectations, and clear and consistent limits.

(c) A foster parent is responsible for behavior modification practices for a child in care as follows:

- (1) this responsibility may not be delegated to a child;
- (2) behavior modification must be based on an understanding of the child's needs and stage of development;
- (3) behavior modification must be fair, reasonable, consistent, and related to the child's behavior;
- (4) a child in care may not be
 - (A) spanked with a hand or object, or be subjected to any form of corporal or physical punishment, including biting, jerking, kicking, hitting, pulling the child's hair, or shaking or throwing the child;
 - (B) assigned strenuous exercise or work as a form of punishment; this excluded age and developmentally appropriate chores or exercise;
 - (C) threatened with physical harm;
 - (D) threatened to be expelled from the foster home or intimidated;
 - (E) submitted to verbal abuse and derogatory remarks about the child or the child's family characteristics, physical traits, culture, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, or traditions;
 - (F) placed in a locked room;
 - (G) placed under a cold-water shower;
 - (H) forced to eat or have hot sauce, soap, or other burning or foul-tasting substances placed in a child's mouth;
 - (I) subject to the use of a physical restraint, except when necessary to protect a child from injury, or to protect property from serious damage; a physical restraint permitted under this subparagraph may be passive physical restraint only; the foster parent shall report the use of any physical restraint to the department;
 - (J) subject to the use of a mechanical restraint, except for a protective device such as a seatbelt;

- (K) subject to the use of a chemical restraint; or
- (L) disciplined in a manner that is cruel, humiliating or otherwise damaging to the child.

(d) A foster parent may not use methods of behavior modification that interfere with a child's basic needs, including

- (1) depriving the child of sleep;
- (2) providing inadequate food, clothing, living space, or shelter;
- (3) withholding food or other items essential to the protection, safety or well-being of a child in care;
- (4) restricting a child's breathing;
- (5) forcing a child to shower or bathe as a form of punishment;
- (6) interfering with the child's ability to take care of their own hygiene and toilet needs; or
- (7) providing inadequate medical or dental care.

(e) A foster parent may not deprive or deny a child of necessary services or contacts, including

- (1) the child's caseworker or assigned legal representative;
- (2) the child's parents or other family members who are identified in the family contact plan;
or
- (3) individuals providing the child with therapeutic activities as part of the child's case plan.

Additionally, OCS has a few more specific guidelines for resource parents to help ensure children are safe while they are in out-of-home care.

- Youth in placement cannot be deprived of sleep. They also need adequate food, clothing, living space, and shelter. Resource parents may not withhold food or other items essential to the protection, safety or well-being of a child or young adult. No actions may be used that can restrict the breathing of a child. A child in care cannot be forced to shower or bathe as part of a punishment. Likewise, a resource parent cannot interfere with a child's ability to take care of their own hygiene (cannot prevent them bathing). And of course, behavior modification cannot interfere with medical or dental care.

There are also some important people and activities that resource parents should ensure children have access to per the regulations.

- Youth in custody need to have access to their caseworkers and/or legal representative. They also need to be able to see their parents, siblings, and other family members who are approved on their family contact plan. Some youth may also have identified therapeutic activities that can be a part of their case plan. Resource parents need to make sure they have access to and are attending these activities.

A person having regular contact with children in a foster home may not abuse a child or engage in any exploitive or sexual act with a child. An adult having regular contact with children in a foster home may not have a romantic relationship with a child.



RESOURCE PAPER:

Ideas for Discipline and Guidance

Positive parenting and *managing behavior* are words to describe how we teach children how to act and how not to act. There are many ways to teach a child. The practices not allowed in foster care are practices that can hurt foster children more than they help. What is allowed in foster care? Plenty! Following are 17 things foster parents can use to teach good behavior.

1. **Modeling:** Spend time with your foster children. Get to know them. Let them get to know you. Show them the way you want them to act by acting that way yourself.
2. **Lay out some simple rules:** Talk about how you do things in your family. Remember that your foster child comes from a different family with different rules. Keep your rules simple “It is not okay to hit anyone. It’s not okay to destroy property or things. It’s not okay to hurt yourself.” If you have any special ways of doing things in your home, take some time to explain this to the child.
3. **Distracting--Re-Directing:** For young children, putting away a hurtful object or ignoring some behavior can work if you can distract a child’s attention. In other words, move attention away from the problem. With older children, this means not getting into a power struggle. Change the subject, distract the child with another activity, or ask a question that moves the child in another direction.
4. **Provide a variety of positive experiences:** We may not always think of this as *discipline*. But if a child has a chance to build a skill, have fun, make choices, and have success in one area of his life (such as in sports, or arts or music or crafts) he often can be more successful in other parts of his life. Besides, busy children are also not as likely to do something you’d rather they not do!
5. **Structure and Routines:** Children do best when they can predict what is going to happen. Have regular mealtimes, bedtimes, chores, and expectations about what happens after school.
6. **Consequences:** Consequences means a child takes responsibility for what he does. Consequences teach children that they need to accept how their actions affect others. **EXAMPLES:** *If you do not take care of your bike or toys, you lose the privilege to play with them. If you steal, you must replace the object.*
7. **Re-dos:** Offering the opportunity to correct and practice the expected behavior when a mistake has been made. This offers a powerful opportunity for a child to fix the problem without a consequence and practice the correct way so you can praise them!
8. **Time-outs:** Taking a time-out is a good way to help children get back into control. Send the child to sit quietly at the table or sit in a certain chair. One minute of time-out for each year of age is a good guide. Use a timer to help you remember. Keep it short-- just enough to get the child --- or you --- back into control.

9. **Time-ins:** Sometimes 1:1 time gives parents and children a time to connect and talk about the negative behavior. When a child is calm, doing an activity together, like folding the laundry, offers the opportunity to discuss what went wrong and make a plan on how to handle it in the future.
10. **Contracts:** For specific chores or rules, put it in writing. Let your child help. EXAMPLE: “*If I, Johnny, do not swear in the house for one week, Mom will let me go to the school dance next Friday.*” Both sign. Check back in during the week to see how it is going.
11. **Family Meetings:** Family meetings are a regular time to get together and talk about how things are going. At your family meeting, discuss solutions to problems and give recognition for things that are going well. Get the children involved with what is discussed at the meetings. Always end with something fun (a ride, ice cream or a video) so that family meetings are seen as an enjoyable time.
12. **Good Communication:** Talk to children about their behavior. Give them specific information about what you expect. Being clear helps them know what you want. Include lots of *positives* in your talk. Give praise and let your children know how you feel when they do well.
13. **Restitution:** Restitution can be used as a consequence. If a child breaks something or causes someone undue hardship, help the child make up for it by earning money to replace an item or paying for it out of his allowance.
14. **Problem Solving:** If something is an ongoing problem, sit down and work out a solution together when you are both calm. Come up with several ideas together, decide on one you both agree on, and agree on how to use the solution. Doing it when you’re calm and working it out together means it is more likely to work. It also teaches children the valuable skill of solving problems without hitting.
15. **Taking away privileges:** If you take away a privilege, draw a clear connection between the child’s action and the loss of the privilege (EXCEPTIONS: *Do not deprive a child of food, sleep, visits, family contacts and counseling.*)
16. **Earning privileges:** A child can earn back privileges or can earn special privileges (extra hour of TV watching, a trip to the video store, etc.) Try not to present the earning of a privilege as a bribe, but in a way the child learns that good behavior has its rewards.
17. **Getting Help:** Sometimes you have tried *everything* and could use some help! Try talking with another foster parent. Call the Alaska Center for Resource Families for more ideas. The child’s caseworker may have insight into an issue. A child’s counselor may be helpful.

For more information about the **UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATIONS: What Alaskan Foster Parents Need to Know** series, contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families 1-800-478-7307. In Fairbanks/North Pole, call 479-7307.

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