

# SELF-STUDY COURSE

## Supervision in Foster Care

November 2019

### 2.0 Hours Credit

This self-study was developed utilizing concepts from the following sources:

- Alaska Office of Children's Services Child Protective Services Manual, (2019)  
<http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/Publications/CPManual/cps-manual.pdf>
- 7 AAC 50.400 (2019) Alaska Administrative Code
- "Dealing with Sexually Acting-Out Behaviors in Foster Care" Alaska Center for Resource Families, Self-Study Course

This self-study course was developed by Kimberly Mouriquand, Family Support Specialist, Alaska Center for Resource Families.

If you wish to receive training credit for reading this self-study, please fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire at the back of this course. Return the questionnaire to the Alaska Center for Resource Families for 2 hours of training credit. This course is yours to keep for further reference.



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The Alaska Center for Resource Families, a project of Northwest Resource Associates, is under contract with the State of Alaska Office of Children's Services to provide training and information to resource families statewide.

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Additionally, each foster family is required to complete a *Plan for Care*. The *Plan for Care* covers specifics on how you'll make sure any child in your care has appropriate supervision. Some items included in the *Plan for Care* are:

- **Identifying an emergency caregiver.** In the *Plan for Care*, OCS asks you to identify someone who can help care for the child in the event of illness, an emergency, or accident that may prevent you from caring for the child.
- **Identifying appropriate childcare.** OCS needs to know where the child will be attending daycare/childcare to ensure the child is properly being supervised.
- **A firearm safety plan.** This section of the *Plan for Care* is designed to prompt the foster parent to ensure the child's caseworker and birth parents are informed and give consent for firearm use. It also ensures the foster parent has a solid supervision plan in place to keep everyone safe during firearm use. Firearms include guns but also includes bow and arrows, crossbow, and other weapons.

## Babysitters



Regulations state that any caregiver providing supervision of youth 15 years and older need to be at least 21 years old. If children are 14 years and younger, a caregiver must be at least 18 years of age. However, there is a separate regulation that provides foster parents guidance for short term (less than 6 hours) care. In the regulations, these persons are referred to as “babysitters.” A babysitter must be at least 14 years old and mature enough to handle common emergencies.

Regulations for babysitters are not a replacement for daycare providers or regularly used caregivers. The intent behind a rule for babysitters versus substitute caregivers is that babysitters are short term and infrequently used. Other substitute caregivers could include a child's regular day care provider. These providers do not fall under the “babysitter” regulation.

**QUIZ:** Read the example that is given about 14-year-old Cynthia. Now imagine you have the same 7-year-old in your care and you want to attend an 8-hour training on a Saturday at the Alaska Center for Resource Families. Can you have the same Cynthia from the example babysit your 7-year-old for 8 or more hours?

**ANSWER:** NO. Babysitters can only provide care for less than 6 hours. The appropriate caregiver for this situation must be at least 18 years old.

**EXAMPLE:** You have a 7-year-old foster child and need to run to the grocery store. You will only be gone for about an hour and a half. You have used 14-year-old Cynthia from next door to babysit your birth children in the past. You know she is mature and able to navigate basic supervision AND you know she is able to handle your foster child's emotional and social behaviors.

*Can you use Cynthia as a babysitter for a short trip to the store? The answer is YES.*

## Foster Youth as Babysitters

Foster youth should not babysit other foster youth without the involvement and approval of both children's caseworkers. A plan needs to be in place to ensure both foster youths' safety. Babysitting is considered a normal activity for youth and foster youth can babysit as any other teen might for neighbors or family friends. The *Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard* allows foster parents to make decisions about participation in normal, childhood activities. However, it is the foster parent's duty to ensure the youth is mature enough and able to make sound decisions if that's the type of work they want to do. It is important that foster parents be thoughtful about this decision and base it on the abilities and age of the youth involved. When in doubt, always consult with the youth's caseworker, GAL, and any other important team members for input and guidance.

## Substitute Caregivers (a.k.a. *Respite Providers*)

Any time a foster youth will be in the care of another responsible adult, foster parents should notify the child's caseworker and their licensing worker. Regulations state you need to notify your licensing worker and the child's caseworker if the child will be in someone else's care for longer than 72 hours whether that means the child is at someone else's home or if another person is caring for the child in your own home. (If the child is going to be away from the foster home for outings such as camp, or a visit with friends or family, you can notify just the child's caseworker.) Good practice says you should let the youth's team know anytime a child will be out of your care for longer than one night. There are some things to consider when identifying a respite provider:



1. Would this person pass the same background checks that you had to pass in order to provide care as a foster parent?
2. Is this person's home safe and free of hazards (such as aggressive animals or unsafe play equipment)?
3. Can this person meet the specific needs of the child in your care? For example, your 7-year-old needs more supervision than a typically developing 7-year-old. Does your respite provider understand this child's needs and is able and willing to provide supervision needed for a child who functions more like a 4-year-old?
4. If the family is a licensed foster home, are they in good standing with OCS? Ask your child's caseworker and/or your licensing worker for guidance.

### How do Foster Parents Find Respite Providers?

All resource families need to take breaks or will need support in supervising the youth in their homes at some point. Below are some suggestions about how to identify appropriate substitute caregivers for the children and youth you care for.

- You can rely on your natural support network (family, friends, and neighbors, people you trust and know well).

- You can ask the child’s caseworker if there are any previous foster families the child is still connected to who may be open to providing occasional respite.
- You can reach out to your licensing worker to connect you with other licensed foster homes who may be available.
- You can post a request for help on one of the Facebook pages. In Alaska, the three largest online community that connect foster and adoptive families are the Alaska Adoptive and Foster Parents Facebook group, the Interior Alaska Foster Care Families group, and the Southeast Alaska Foster Care Families group. Remember to do your due diligence when choosing caregivers even if they are other foster or adoptive parents. It is your responsibility to choose safe and appropriate caregivers.




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**A few reminders about how to navigate Facebook groups:**

- Privacy and confidentiality of youth and their families is required even in closed groups.
  - Foster parents cannot share confidential information with other foster parents just because they are foster parents.
  - Always check with the youth’s caseworker and your licensing worker to verify the person you connected with is in good standing with OCS.
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## When is it Okay to Leave Children or Youth “Home Alone”?



Since Alaska does not have a law that states a child must be a certain number of years old to be left home alone, OCS relies on foster parents to make decisions about youth staying home alone based on the child’s age, maturity, and developmental level. Below is a list of things to consider when making the decision to leave a child home alone or home alone with other children.

- What does the team (caseworker, GAL, CASA, ICWA worker) think?
- How long has the youth been in your care? How well do you know them?
- Is the child/teen mature enough to manage their time and make sound decisions without an adult in the home?
- What is the child/youth going to do while you’re not there?
- Are there things in your home you don’t want your children to get into? How will you prevent their curiosity while you’re not home?
- Does the child know the safety procedures of the home? Where are the emergency contacts posted? Do they know your address to tell First Responders in the event of an emergency?
- Is your decision to leave them home alone based on necessity or based on helping the youth navigate independently and build trust?

# Supervision in Foster Care

## PART TWO: Supervision Situations

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### Spending the Night /Going to a Friend’s House

*The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard* allows for foster parents to make decisions about youth spending time with friends, both for just visits and sleep overs. A good rule of thumb is to always meet the parents prior to agreeing to a sleep over, know where the child will be for the night, and talk with the friend’s parent about any pertinent information to make sure the child will be cared for responsibly.

Just like substitute caregivers, foster parents should only share information necessary for the care of the child. You’ll need to use your discretion based on the needs of the child when navigating this, but it also may not be necessary to tell the friend’s parent the child in your care is even in foster care. In either circumstance, you should not and do not need to share any information about the child’s reason for being in foster care. You should only share information on a “need to know basis” that addresses how to best meet the needs of the child who will be in their care.

When in doubt, always talk with your child’s caseworker who can define the information that needs to be shared. Additionally, you can always talk with staff from the Alaska Center for Resource Families for ideas and tips on how to promote normalcy for the child while respecting their confidentiality. ACRF also has a self-study on *The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard* to learn more about promoting normalcy for children and youth in foster care. Call 1-800-478-7307 or visit [acrff.org](http://acrff.org) to find a copy.

### Care Providers for Medically Complex Youth



For providers caring for youth who have significant medical needs, you may find it challenging when it comes to arranging for a babysitter or overnight care if you need respite. First and foremost, you should always try to utilize your natural support network (such as your family and close friends) as they’ll be best known to the child. If that is not possible, start with contacting your licensing worker. Many times they may know of another foster parent who has the same experience or willingness to help with respite.

You may still find times when the needs of a child are beyond your support network’s abilities. Talk with your family and friends and your child’s medical providers to see if they can recommend a safe person. As always, make sure to check with the child’s caseworker and your licensing worker when you identify a new potential caregiver. This caregiver needs to be willing

to learn necessary procedures to ensure the child's medical needs are not neglected in your absence.

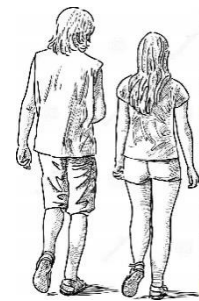
If you are considering supporting a child with medical needs, but have not welcomed a child into your home yet, we encourage you to start looking for these folks in your life now. Get them trained and comfortable with helping in advance so that they'll be there when there is a need.

## Youth with Substance Use Issues

Youth who are navigating substance use issues need a great deal of support. You may also need to have a different supervision strategy than with other pre-teen and teens. There is a balancing act that requires promoting and supporting normal developmental activities (such as hanging out with friends, participating in sports and other extracurricular activities) while ensuring the youth is safely navigating substance use issues.

You should always be working with a team to develop expectations and provide supports for youth with addictions. The teen should ALWAYS be a part of the team.

Simply removing the substances from around the teen, then hovering over their every action will only teach the youth that you don't trust them, and will also encourage them to be more covert in their using behavior. Work to first establish clear boundaries and expectations with your team and substance abuse treatment professional, then start to implement supervision. This level may be higher than other youth require. Implementing any type of higher supervision with a teen requires you to work harder on building a relationship of trust and healthy connections. Without this kind of relationship, boundaries are likely to not be respected.



## Youth with Sexual Abuse Histories or Sexualized Behaviors

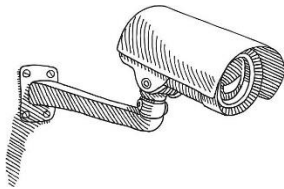
Foster parents caring for a child or youth who have sexual abuse histories or who exhibit sexualized behaviors may need additional safety measures put in place regarding supervision. This protects them from further victimization as well as prevent any sexualized interactions with other youth.

You should work closely with your child's team to determine the individualized needs of the youth in your home, but here are a few safety measures you can implement on your own.

- Establish rules that only one child at a time is allowed in places where there is limited or poor supervision. This includes bedrooms, bathrooms, or any other place in your home you determine. You will need to teach your children to be vocal and say things like "Is anyone in here?" and "OK, I'll wait in the hall until you're done."

- Children should not share beds. Depending on the circumstances, it may be wise if they do not share bedrooms as well.
- Teach youth that if doors are closed, to knock and get permission before entering. No one should enter a room with a closed door without first hearing that it's okay to enter. This includes parents with the exception of when there might be a safety concern.
- If your home is two levels, you may even choose to have a rule that no youth are allowed on a level unless there is also an adult present. (EXAMPLE: If I'm downstairs, no one can be playing in the bedrooms upstairs without supervision.)
- The rules need to apply to everyone in the house, not just the child with sexualized behaviors. Focus on the need for everyone in the home to follow the rules to make sure that everyone is comfortable and safe.
- Whenever possible, for the protection of everyone in the home, avoid "two-somes" or just two people in the room alone together. It's best if there is always a third party if possible. If this is challenging, work with your child's caseworker and therapist to help you navigate the issues and provide guidance.
- Teach everyone in the home that they need to tell an adult if someone breaks a safety rule.
- When in doubt, ask for help!

## Cameras/Audio Monitoring in the Home

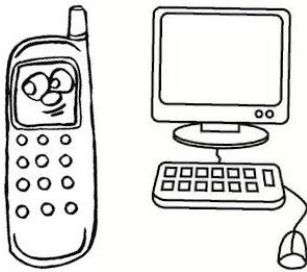


Before making the decision to install cameras, door alarms, audio or any other type of monitoring device, always consult with your licensing worker and the child's caseworker first. There is not currently a regulation preventing a foster home from having cameras, monitoring equipment, or audio devices in and outside of the home, but foster youth are entitled to a right to privacy. These devices cannot be placed in, record, or monitor private areas. Private spaces include bedrooms and bathrooms or any other place where privacy is reasonably expected.

If you already have these items inside or outside your home, or plan on keeping them in your home after a specific youth leaves, talk with your licensing worker about their placement to ensure that a future foster youth's privacy will be respected.



## Internet and Cell Phones



It helps to think of the Internet and cell phones as tools of our modern age. As with all tools, proper training and oversight are necessary to ensure the tool is being used safely and in the manner it was intended. The internet and cell phones are no exception to this.

Foster parents are often tasked with supporting a youth who is already using these tools. Youth may or may not have been taught safe ways to use technology. Supervision with regard to internet or cell phones will look differently for each youth in your home based on that youth's age, maturity, and developmental level. So, it is okay that different youth have different rules because of this. For example, a 7-year-old may not have access to Facebook because Facebook's user rules prohibit this. But a 16-year-old in the same home may reasonably have a Facebook account. On the other hand, there may be some basic rules for the home that apply to all, such as the rule that all cell phone usage ceases by 10 p.m. and all phones are plugged in at a central location in the living room for the night.

Below are some steps regarding supervision and the internet:

- Password protect your Wi-Fi; ask your neighbors to do the same. Change the password frequently.
- Talk with any child in your home about how to use the internet safely. These rules include not giving out personal information, considering anyone online as a stranger even if they tell you they aren't, and other rules designed to protect privacy and promote safety. (Educate yourself on rules to have in your home to promote safety.)
- Talk with any child in your home about how to use the internet smartly. This includes helping them identify bullying, teaching them to use the internet in a kind way, and to ask for help.
- Talk with the youth in your home about a safe adult to go to if there are problems with social media and the internet that they need help with. This does not have to be you, but help them identify a person they feel safe and comfortable going to.
- Foster parents cannot search their child's electronic communications (such as Facebook, texts, emails, or voicemails) but if you have a concern, let your child's GAL and caseworker know.
- You may not install tracking and monitoring software on a foster youth's computer or smart phone devices without the caseworker and GAL's approval, even if you purchased the device for the youth.
- You can have rules about no computers or smart phone devices in bedrooms. Make sure you are a good role model and follow this rule as well.

## Final Reminders

Just a few reminders as you navigate supervision:

- ❖ The rules around supervision for youth in OCS custody focus on the safety and well-being of youth.
- ❖ Supervision should be appropriate to the youth's age and developmental stage while still ensuring the opportunity for normal and age appropriate activities.
- ❖ And finally, when in doubt, who should you call? The child's caseworker and your licensing worker, not the ghost busters.

**TEST**