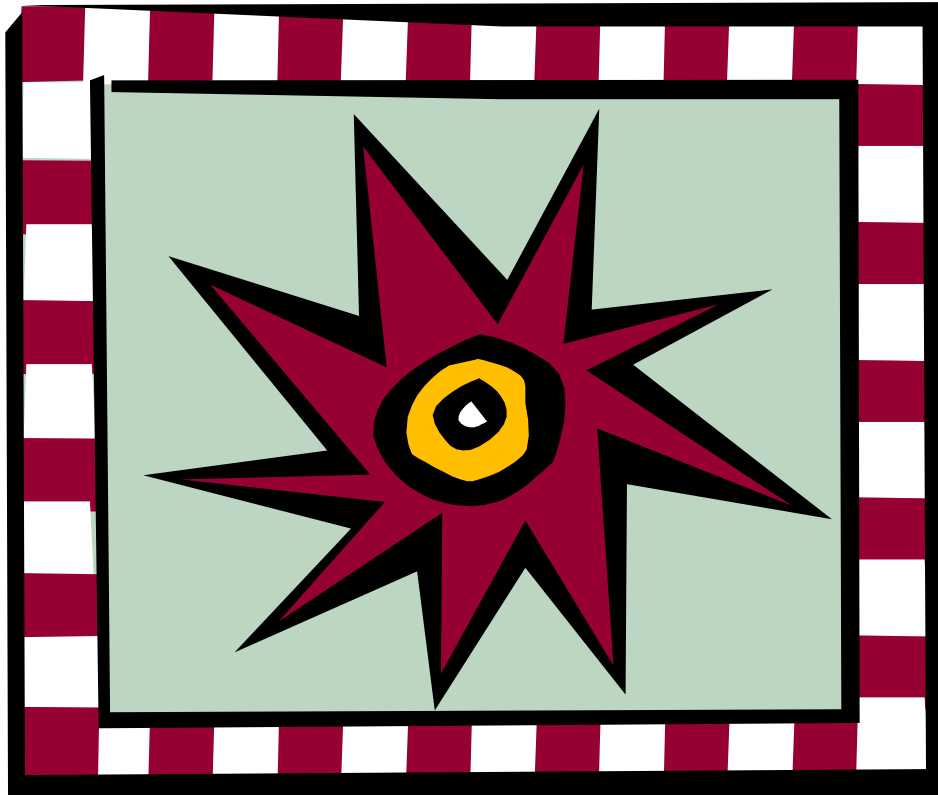
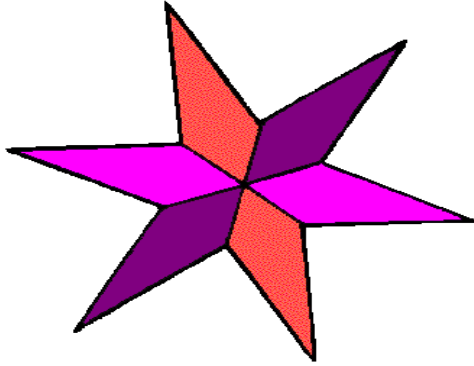


Texas Family Initiative Child Handbook to Foster Care



A resource guide for children in foster care



Child Handbook
to Foster Care

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Introduction

Texas Family Initiative LLC would like for your foster care experience to be helpful to you and your family. The job of Texas Family Initiative is to assure you have a safe and healthy environment in which to live in until permanency is possible.

This handbook was developed to help answer some of the questions you may have while placed in foster care. You are the most important person, and while you are in foster care, the goal is to make sure you receive services that will help you. The handbook is made especially for you so you will know what to expect. Take some time to read this handbook, and please feel free to ask any questions you might still have. Your Foster Care Worker, and/or your foster parents should be able to answer any questions you may have.



General Information



This section will provide helpful information to you such as what is Texas Family Initiative, what role workers have in your case, and how to reach your workers, etc.



Roles of the Workers Involved

The **Foster Care Worker** is the worker assigned to work with your foster home. This worker will ensure that your foster parents have everything they need in order to assist you during your time in foster care. These workers also visit with you face-to-face each month to follow-up with you about your case. If you move to a different foster home, chances are you will have a different worker assigned to that foster home.



Reaching your workers



Regular Contact

Texas Family Initiative offices are open from 8:00 am-5:00 pm Monday through Friday.

You can leave a message on the office voice mail after work hours. Voice mail may also pick up if workers are out of office and/or all phone lines are busy at the time you call. Office voice mail messages are checked in the morning and after lunch. Please leave your name, phone number, worker's name and what you are calling about. The worker that you left a message for will then return your call as soon as they are available (generally within two working days of their return to the office). Any Texas Family Initiative employee can check the voice mail system; so do not leave information in your message that you do not want other employees to know about you.



Emergency Situations

In times of emergency incidents, Texas Family Initiative has an emergency number that is responded to 24 hours a day to meet your needs. You and your resource parents have access to this number so that they can help you if an emergency situation arises.

Your Rights



While in foster care, you have certain rights. You have a right to confidentiality, to privacy, to voice concerns, etc. This section will provide an explanation of your rights.

YOUR BILL OF RIGHTS

- ❖ Your rights are cumulative of any other rights granted by law or other Licensing rules.
- ❖ You have the right to appropriate care and treatment in the least restrictive setting available that can meet your needs;
- ❖ You have the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation;
- ❖ You have the right to have your physical, emotional, developmental, educational, social and religious needs met;
- ❖ You have the right to be free of abuse, neglect, and exploitation as defined in Texas Family Code §261.401;
- ❖ You have the right to be free from any harsh, cruel, unusual, unnecessary, demeaning, or humiliating punishment, which includes:
 - ✚ Shaking;
 - ✚ Subjecting you to corporal punishment;
 - ✚ Threatening you with corporal punishment;
 - ✚ Any unproductive work that serves no purpose except to demean you, such as moving rocks from one pile to another or digging a hole and then filling it in;
 - ✚ Denying you food, sleep, toileting facilities, mail, or family visits as punishment;
 - ✚ Subjecting you to remarks that belittle or ridicule you or your family; and
 - ✚ Threatening you with the loss of placement or shelter as punishment;
- ❖ You have the right to discipline that is appropriate to your age and developmental level;
- ❖ You have the right to have restrictions or disciplinary consequences explained to you when the measures are imposed;
- ❖ You have the right to a humane environment, including any treatment environment, which provides reasonable protection from harm and appropriate privacy for personal needs;
- ❖ You have the right to receive educational services appropriate to your age and developmental level;
- ❖ You have the right to appropriate equipment and supplies for, and training in, personal care, hygiene, and grooming;
- ❖ You have the right to reasonable opportunities to participate in community functions, including recreational and social activities such as Little League teams, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, and extracurricular school activities outside of the agency to the extent that is appropriate for you;

- ❖ You have the right to have adequate personal clothing, which must be suitable to your age and size and comparable to the clothing of other children in the community, and reasonable opportunities to select your clothing;
- ❖ You have the right to have personal possessions at your home and to acquire additional possessions within reasonable limits;
- ❖ You have the right to be provided with adequate protective clothing against natural elements such as rain, snow, wind, cold, sun, and insects;
- ❖ You have the right to maintain regular contact with your family unless your best interest, appropriate professionals, or court necessitates restrictions;
- ❖ You have the right to send and receive uncensored mail, to have telephone conversations, keep a personal journal and to have visitors, unless your best interest, appropriate professionals, or court order necessitates restrictions;
- ❖ You have the right to hire independent mental health professionals, medical professionals, and attorneys at your own expense;
- ❖ You have the right to be compensated for any work done for the agency or home as part of your service plan or vocational training, with the exception of assigned routine duties that relate to your living environment, such as cleaning your room, or other chores, or work assigned as a disciplinary measure;
- ❖ You have the right to have personal earnings, allowances, possessions, and gifts as your personal property;
- ❖ You have the right to be able to communicate in a language or any other means that is understandable to you at admission or within a reasonable time after an emergency admission, if applicable. We must make every effort to place you with foster parent(s) who can communicate with you. If we are not successful, we must document in your preliminary service plan our plan to meet your communication needs;
- ❖ You have the right to confidential care and treatment;
- ❖ You have the right to consent in writing before permitting any publicity or fund raising activity for the agency, including the use of your photograph;
- ❖ You have the right not to be required to make public statements acknowledging your gratitude to the foster home or agency;
- ❖ You have the right to be free of unnecessary or excessive medication;
- ❖ You have the right to have a comprehensive service plan that addresses your needs, including transitional and discharge planning;
- ❖ You have the right to participate in the development and review of your service plan within the limits of your comprehension and ability to manage the information;
- ❖ You have the right to receive emotional, mental health, or chemical dependency treatment separately from adults (other than young adults) who are receiving services;
- ❖ You have the right to receive appropriate treatment for physical problems that affect your treatment or safety;

- ❖ You have the right to be free from pressure to get an abortion, relinquish your child for adoption, or to parent your child, if applicable; and
- ❖ **You have the right to report abuse, neglect, exploitation, or violation of personal rights without fear of punishment, interference, coercion, or retaliation.**



Confidentiality

Being in foster care can be a very uncertain time for you. You may not want everyone to know about your situation or that you are in foster care. Your Foster Care Worker will work to ensure that information about you and your family remains private and confidential. While you are in state custody, your Foster Care Worker is gathering information about you and your family. They will need to know about your physical health, educational needs, and mental health. Some of the information will be gathered from and shared with others who have treated, evaluated, or provided care to you or your family, including information such as school records, medical records, therapy reports, etc. This information will help your Foster Care Worker and those individuals providing services to you, provide the best care to you.

At Texas Family Initiative, we work to ensure only the people that know the details of your case are the people that are helping to make sure you receive the best care possible and can assist you in going home. Your worker will not share information about you with friends of your family or your neighbors. Your case file is private and information from that file is shared only on a need to know basis with those people involved in your case, as agreed to by your parents and/or your state Case Worker, and we only provide the minimum information necessary for those individuals requesting information about your case. A law called the **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act** of 1996 (**HIPAA**) requires Texas Family Initiative to keep your information private. You and your family's information is protected by this law, because federal and state medical funding helps supports your care while in state custody. You do, though, have the right to view information in your own file. To view the information in your case file, please complete the Access to Case Records Request in the Appendix of this handbook and return the form to your Foster Care Worker. There are limits to the information that you can view.

The primary people that your Foster Care Worker will be discussing your case with include your immediate family, your foster family, any court appointed personnel, your therapist or counselor and staff members from Texas Family Initiative. Our Quality Improvement Department or Licensing Department may review your file for auditing purposes and to ensure the best possible care is being provided to you. Plus, it is possible for the court to request to review your file.

If you have any concerns about with whom your information is being shared, please feel free to talk to your Foster Care Worker about who has access to your information. For more detail, please refer to the Notice of Privacy Practices in the Appendix section of this Handbook.



Privacy

Even though you are not living in your parents' home, you do still have a right to privacy. Unless there is a concern about your well-being your foster family and your workers should not read through your mail or listen to your phone calls. You have a right to have private conversations and mail, even though you are living in another person's home. If it is determined that the mail or phone calls you receive should be monitored; your Foster Care Worker will explain the concerns to you and the restrictions. If you believe that your foster family is violating your right to privacy, please discuss your concerns with your Foster Care Worker.



Other Rights

In addition, you have the right to practice your own cultural and religious beliefs. While you do not have to follow the cultural and religious beliefs of your foster family, you do need to be respectful of their beliefs, just as they should be respectful of yours. If you have any concerns about the freedom to practice your own cultural and religious beliefs, please discuss them with your Foster Care Worker.

Also, even though you are living in another person's home, the foster family or other foster children do not have the right to use your things without your permission. Your clothes, your CDs, your video games, etc. are your belongings. Although it is always nice to share, other people should not be using your belongings without your permission. If you have sentimental or valuable items that you are not sure where they can be stored for safe keeping, discuss this with your foster parent or Foster Care Worker. If you are having problems with other foster children or the foster family's biological children using your belongings without permission, talk to your foster parent about the problem. If that does not solve the problem, talk to your Foster Care Worker about the situation.



Expressing Concerns

Being a child in foster care, you may sometimes feel as though you don't have any control over your case or situation. You are always welcome to voice your opinion with your foster family and your worker. Sometimes, though, you may feel as though you are not being treated fairly. If you feel as though your foster family is not treating you fairly, please talk about the problem with your foster family first. If the problem still occurs, discuss the problem with your Foster Care Worker and they will assist you. If you feel that your Foster Care Worker is not treating you fairly and the situation is not getting better, you can contact the Foster Care Supervisor. If your concern is not resolved with the Foster Care Supervisor, you can contact the Concern Line at TFI. You can

call toll-free at 877-942-2239 or if you have access to the internet, you can also e-mail your problem to ConcernLine@tfifamilyservices.org. Someone not involved in your case will review your concern. They will contact the administration in your area to find out more information about your concern. They will then contact you within 5 working days to discuss the problem with you to see if the problem can be solved. Please try to resolve the problem with the worker yourself first, though, before you resort to using the Concern Line.

Services for you



While in foster care, Texas Family Initiative will be providing you services in order to make sure all your needs are being met, that you are healthy and safe. This section describes the services available to you.



Placements

It's difficult to not be living with your family in familiar surroundings, away from your family, your house, your neighborhood, your friends and your things. Texas Family Initiative wants to place you in as much of a home-like environment as we can and make this time as comfortable for you as possible.

If at all possible, we also try to place you with your brothers and sisters who are also in custody. Sometimes the foster homes available when you need to be placed do not have enough room for you and all your brothers and sisters. We do try to place as many of you together and as close together as we can.

We also try to place you as close to your parents as possible. If there are no foster homes available in your hometown, we try to place you as close as we can. That way, you are closer to your family and it is a community you are more familiar with. If we do have to place you in a different foster home than your brothers and sisters, or if we do not place you close to home, we do keep searching for other foster homes that may be available later that will better meet your needs. As well as make efforts to help you maintain contact with your home community, family and friends.



Visits with your Worker

Your Foster Care Worker will visit face to face with you and your foster family at least monthly during the time you are in state custodianship. These visits will usually occur in your placement but could occur at your school or in the community.

Dental and Medical Care

While you are in foster care, Texas Family Initiative wants to make sure you are in the best health. You will receive a medical and dental check-up within the first 30 days of your coming into foster care. If there is anything that needs followed up on, you may have other appointments. While in foster care, you will receive a dental check-up every six months and a medical check-up once a year. If you have not been to the doctor in quite a while, talk to your foster parent about whether you are due for another check-up.



Mental Health

You have been through a lot in your life. A lot of things have happened in your life before you entered foster care. Now that you are in foster care, you are placed away from everything you know and love. Texas Family Initiative wants to help you deal with things happening in your life. While you are in foster care, you may see a counselor or therapist for individual therapy. You may not understand why you have to go to these appointments. Your counselor or therapist is a trained professional there to help you deal with the stresses in your life and to teach you how to deal with these situations on your own. If you have any questions about seeing a counselor or therapist, please talk to your Foster Care Worker.

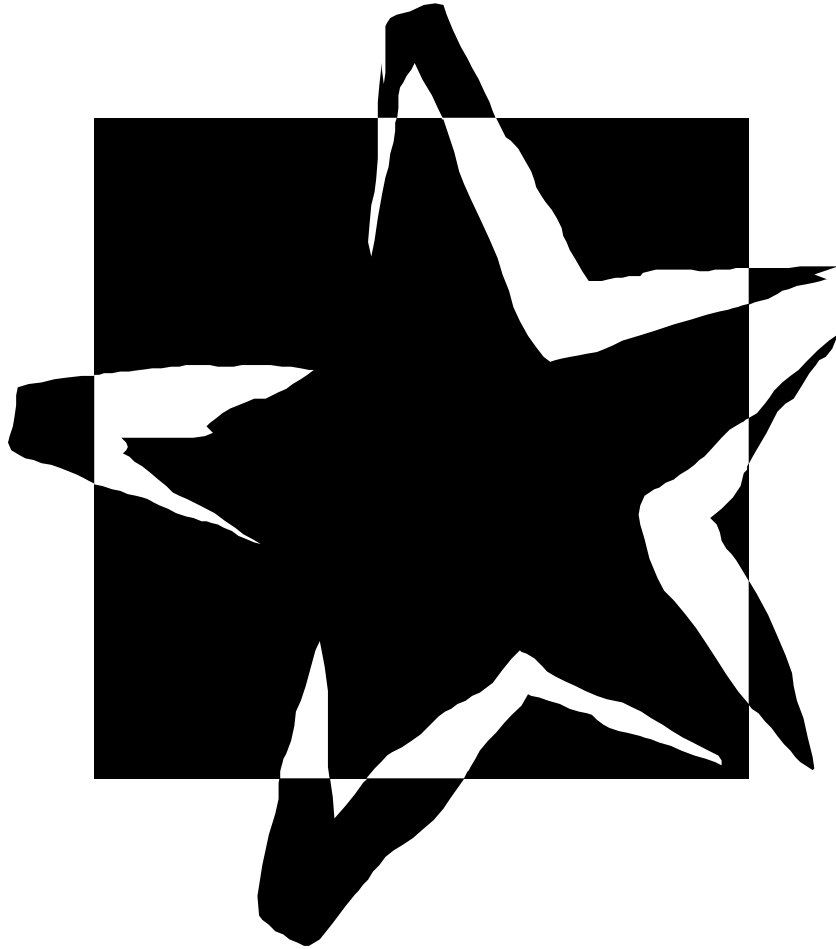
Besides individual therapy, there are other mental health services that you might participate in. Depending on your needs, you might receive supportive services, attendant care, in-home services, etc. All of these services are designed to help you address your particular needs.



Clothing Allowance

While you are in foster care, your body continues to grow. Texas Family Initiative wants to make sure that you have enough clothes to fit you properly. Even though you are not currently living with your family, your parents should help provide you with your own clothes and continue to buy you new ones. On a needed basis, your Foster Care Worker may assist in ensuring you have adequate clothing.

Appendix



Attached are beneficial forms and information that will be helpful to you.



Texas Family Initiative *NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES*

This notice describes how information about you may be used and disclosed and how you can get access to this information. Please review it carefully.

Privacy is a very important concern for all those who come to Texas Family Initiative for services. It is also complicated because of federal and state laws and our profession. Because the rules are so complicated some parts of this Notice are quite detailed and you probably will have to read them several times to understand. If you have any questions our Privacy Officer will be happy to help you. Your Foster Care Worker or Foster Parent can provide you with the contact information for the TFI Privacy Officer.

A. INTRODUCTION TO OUR CLIENTS

This notice will tell you about how we handle information about you. It tells how we use this information in our office, how we share it with other professionals and organizations, and how you can see it. We want you to know all of this so that you can make the best decisions for yourself. We are also required to tell you about this because of the privacy regulations of a federal law, the **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act** of 1996 (**HIPAA**). Because this law and the laws of Texas are very complicated, we have simplified some parts. If you have any questions or want to know more about anything in this Notice, please ask our Privacy Officer (listed on page 24 of this handbook) for more explanation or more details, or feel free to talk to your Case Management Team.

B. WHAT WE MEAN BY YOUR INFORMATION

Each time we meet with you or a member of your family, we are collecting information about you and your well-being. Much of this information is related to your physical, medical, educational, emotional, and mental health status from the past, present or future. Information collected can also be relating to payment for care and services provided treatment or other services you received from an affiliate agency or us. This information goes into your case file at the office. In the office this **Protected Health Information (PHI)** is likely to include the following kinds of information:

- ✓ Your family history (you and each family member) will include family information, marital history of your parents, past services received, your parents' work experience and skill level, educational information, relationship with extended family, support systems, past allegations, past charges or convictions, or diagnosis.
- ✓ Reasons you were referred, individual and family strengths, needs, goals, tasks, progress toward goals and tasks.
- ✓ Treatment plans and/or case plans.
- ✓ Records we get from others who treated, evaluated or provided care for you or your family members (reports, school records, medical records, test results, etc.).
- ✓ Progress notes are individualized notes that workers make after all contacts with you or others that work with you that describe what was discussed and what was observed.
- ✓ Reports on incidents that have generally occurred with children in custody such as injury, behavior or conduct concern, or allegations.
- ✓ Insurance billing information (placement agreements, authorizations).
- ✓ Legal documents (court report, court order and journal entry).

This list is just to give you an idea about what types of information will be kept in a file (record) about you. There may be other kinds of information that will be in your clinical file. You will also find consents and authorizations that legal guardian and clients sign to allow professionals to share information in order to work with your family most effectively. Other reports and assessment tools are also completed to assure that those providers working with us have enough information and we are making all necessary referrals needed to work with you and your family.

C. PRIVACY AND THE LAWS

The HIPAA law requires us to keep your family's information private and to give you this notice of our legal duties and our privacy practices, which is called the Notice of Privacy Practices (NPP). We will obey the rules of this notice as long it continues to meet with the requirements of the current laws. If the laws change, and/or we need to change the rules of the notice to follow the current law, the new NPP will apply to all the information we keep. If we change the NPP we will post the new Notice in our office and our web site at www.the-farm.org.

D. HOW YOUR PROTECTED HEALTH INFORMATION CAN BE USED AND SHARED

When others read your information in the agency that is called by law **"use"**. If the information is shared with or sent to persons outside this agency, that is called by law, **"disclosure"**. Except in some special circumstances, when we use your protected information here or disclose it to others we share only the **minimum amount of information necessary** needed for the purpose.

1. Uses and Disclosures of Information with Your Consent

Your parents will be asked to sign a separate **Consent form** to allow us to use and share only the minimum necessary. In almost all cases we intend to use your information here or share your information with other people or organizations to provide **Treatment** to you, arrange for **Payment** for our services, or some other business functions call health care **Operations** (providing needed safety information).

1a. For Treatment, Payment or Health Care Operations:

If a child is in state custody and the Court has determined that a department of the state has legal custody of the child, then the state department responsible for the care of that child can provide us with consent to provide treatment. This means that if your parents refuse treatment, we may ask the State department that currently has custody of you to provide consent to treat you. We prefer however, that your parents consent for us to provide care and treatment for you.

For Treatment. We use or disclose your information to provide you and your family with the services needed and identified in your case plan/treatment plan. These treatment services can include: mental health services, drug and alcohol services, housing or domestic services, placement services, vocational services, educational services and medical services.

For Payment. We may use or disclose your information to bill your parents' private insurance, client medical card, your parents' directly, or the State for services provided.

For Health Care Operations.

We may use or disclose your information to see where we can make improvements in the care and services that we provide.

1b. Other Uses in Healthcare

Phone Calls and Written Correspondence. We may use and disclose information to reschedule, remind you of appointments, notify you of incidents, request surveys for treatment or other care. I

Treatment Alternatives. We may use and disclose your information to tell you about or recommend possible treatment or alternatives or other health-related benefits that may be of interest to you.

Research. We may use or share your information to do research to improve treatments. In all cases your name, address and other information that reveals who you are will be removed from the information given to researchers.

Audits. Internal and external agency case file audits may randomly occur. The auditor will have access briefly to all of your information and is bound by confidentiality not to reveal any information they read to any other person.

Business Associates. There are some jobs we hire other businesses to do for us. They are called our Business Associates by law. Examples include transport drivers. These business associates may need to receive some of your information to do their jobs properly, but they are bound by confidentiality.

2. Uses and Disclosures Requiring Your Authorization

If we want to use your information for any purpose besides treatment, payment, and other benefits/services, or those we described above we need your parents' permission on an Authorization form. We don't expect to need this very often.

If your parents' do authorize us to use or disclose your information, your parents' can revoke (cancel) that permission, in writing, at any time. After that time we will not use or disclose your information for the purposes that we agreed to. Of course, we cannot take back any information we had already disclosed with your permission or that we had used in our office.

3. Uses and Disclosures of Information from Clinical Files not requiring Consent or Authorization

The laws let us use and disclose some of your information without your consent or authorization in some cases.

When required by law. There are some federal, state, or local laws, which require us to disclose information.

- ✓ We have to report suspected child abuse or neglect.
- ✓ If you are involved in a lawsuit or legal proceeding and we receive a subpoena, discovery request, or other lawful process we may have to release some of your information.
- ✓ We have to disclose some information to the government agencies, which check on us to see that we are obeying the privacy laws or with which we have a contract to provide services.

For Law Enforcement Purposes. To investigate any crimes.

For public health activities. To agencies which investigate disease or injuries.

For specific government functions. To military personnel, veterans, worker's compensations or correctional facilities.

To Prevent a Serious Threat to Health or Safety to yourself or your family.

4. Uses and Disclosures Requiring You to have an Opportunity to Object

We can share some information about you with your family or others such as those involved in your care or anyone else your parents' choose such as close friends or clergy (i.e. locating kinship placement).

If it is an emergency -so we cannot ask if you disagree- we can share information if we believe that it is what you would have wanted and if we believe it will help you if we do share it.

5. An Accounting of Disclosures

When we disclose your information we keep some record of whom we sent it to, when we sent it, and what we sent. You can get an accounting (list or record) of many of these disclosures.

E. IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

If you need more information or have questions about the privacy practices described above, please speak to the Privacy Officer whose name and telephone number is Brenden Long, 1 (800) 279-9914.

TEXAS FAMILY INITIATIVE

Access to Case Record Request

Client: _____ DOB: _____

Assigned Foster Care Worker: _____

I am requesting to: (mark only one per form) read edit copy add
Information to the above named client record maintained by TFI.

The purpose of my request to have access to the above named client file is:

The specific information I wish to review/add/copy edit includes:

Signature of Client _____ Date _____

For use by TFI ONLY

Date request was received by TFI _____ By Whom: _____
Whom: _____ Date Assigned Worker was informed: _____
Date Manager was given form: _____

Please indicate date information was reviewed by client: _____ (must be within 30/60 days)
Please indicate information shared with client: _____

Please indicate any information copied for client: _____

Cost paid by client: _____

Was request to add information approved or denied Reason for denial: _____
Was request to edit information approved or denied Reason for denial: _____

Administrator Printed Name _____ Administrator Signature _____ Date _____

cc: case file, client

EFF: 03/03