

Foster Family Handbook

Supplement to the

OKDHS Bridge Resource Family Handbook

Available at:

http://www.okbridgefamilies.com/wp-content/uploads/misc/2011/bridge_resource_handbook_acc_20110321.pdf



FOSTER CARE SERVICES

Foster Parent Handbook Acknowledgement

I, _____, acknowledge that I have received a copy of

(Print foster parent(s)'s full name)

TFI Family Connections LLC's **Foster Parent Handbook, supplement to the Oklahoma DHS Bridge Resource Parents Handbook**. I agree to read both Handbooks and to be bound by the policies, practices and rules contained in the Handbooks. The Handbooks contain the Rights of Foster Parents and the Grievance Policies of TFI and DHS.

I understand that:

1. The Handbook is prepared for informational purposes only and does not constitute a contract between TFI Family Connections LLC and its care provider families, and should not be construed as such.
2. The policies and information contained in the Handbook may be changed or amended at any time by TFI Family Connections LLC with or without notice.
3. The Handbook is the property of TFI Family Connections LLC and upon termination of my services, I must return said Handbook to my Foster Care Worker.

Foster Care Provider's Signature	Date Signed

Foster Care Provider's Signature	Date Signed

WITNESS:

Agency Official's Signature	Date

Printed Name	Title

This Receipt is to be placed in the foster care provider's file.

TFI FAMILY CONNECTIONS LLC

Mission Statement

Devoted to the Strength of Family

PHILOSOPHY

TFI Family Connections LLC believes that children learn from their environment and the adults around them. TFI Family Connections LLC provides a supportive, consistent, structured environment of role models for children, enabling them the opportunity to thrive to their fullest potential.

The purpose of TFI Family Connections LLC is to provide a caring home atmosphere for children who are unable to live with their parents. TFI Family Connections LLC believes that all children thrive in a family environment and therefore makes every effort to place all children in foster homes unless a group setting is needed for the child's safety or treatment.

Reasons for each child's placement vary widely. The goal of TFI Family Connections LLC is to move each child toward permanency as quickly as possible. "Permanency" may be reintegration with the child's biological family, adoption, independent living, or guardianship/custodianship. TFI Family Connections LLC attempts to make a positive difference in each child's life by giving that child varied opportunities that facilitate overall growth.

The fundamental belief of TFI Family Connections LLC is that, in order to have a healthy environment for our children, we must facilitate, support, and encourage healthy families and individuals that nurture those children. We support and encourage our staff and foster families to work as professional partners in providing safe, supportive homes for all children in care.

A key goal of our Foster Care Services program is to make a good match between foster parent and foster child at the time of placement. Once the child is placed, we are committed to providing all needed services to help the child maintain in the foster home. Each time a child disrupts from a foster home, the child is impacted in a negative manner. Preventing children from disruption is a team effort accomplished by implementing supports such as respite, mental health services, on-call services, and training offered by TFI Family Connections LLC to our foster families.

Our foster families are the basis of all we do, and their commitment and dedication to children cannot be measured in material goods. The philosophy of our program is that children learn from their environment and the adults around them. As role models, our foster families provide a supportive, consistent, structured environment for children, which enables them the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential. The purpose of the program is to provide services in the least-restrictive, most home-like environment, for all children until they can reach their permanency goal.

To achieve our purpose, we believe in taking care of our foster families so they can take care of the children in their care.

TFI Family Connections LLC Core Commitments

- Safety is Always First to Us.
- We Stand on the Truth.
- We are Dedicated and Motivated to Positive Outcomes.
- We are Professional – Be Awesome!
- We are Available, Responsive, and Quick to Respond.
- We are Committed to the Families of Oklahoma!

Every day, we strive to meet these commitments. Some days, we do better than others. Please let us know if we are missing the mark, so we can make improvements.

What you can expect from TFI Family Connections LLC

- A Foster Care Services worker will be assigned to your home. If you have children placed in your home, you will receive at least one or two visits per month, depending on the level of care of your placements.
- Your Foster Care Worker will create a family profile that will help placement workers (Intake and Assessment) know what types of placements you would like in your home. Your Foster Care Worker will inform you of any restrictions to your profile that the worker may have made.
- You will have your phone calls returned and your questions answered by your Foster Care worker. You will be treated with respect and viewed as an important team member in the decision-making process for children placed in your care.
- You will have access to 24-hour, 7-day-a-week crisis support from an on-call worker.
- You will have the right to refuse any placement or ask for a placement to be moved with appropriate notice. You will have the right to ask that a placement be moved without notice in an emergency situation, generally defined as the child being a danger to him/herself or others.
- You will receive a monthly “Between Families” newsletter that will include numerous training opportunities.
- Your local TFI Family Connections LLC office will host monthly support meetings for all TFI Family Connections LLC Foster Families in the area.
- Your worker will provide support during any DHS investigations.
- You have the ability to voice any concerns through the agency’s concern/complaint line: 877-942-2239, or through our open-door policy that encourages you to talk to your worker’s supervisor, manager, or higher-level management as needed.

On-Call/Emergency Information

If you have an emergency or crisis situation with your foster child that occurs after normal business hours or on the weekend, your first call should be to our 24-hour Intake and Assessment Department. The toll free number is **877-921-4114**. It is a good idea to keep this number in a convenient place where it can be easily accessed, in the event you should have an emergency. (It is also on the Emergency Plan form.)

The Intake and Assessment staff will assist you with your emergency or crisis situation. If they are unable to assist you with your particular problem, they will contact the on-call worker in your area and have them contact you.

We do ask that you make sure your need is truly an emergency that cannot wait until regular business hours before calling the crisis number.

Foster Family's Role and Responsibility

The resource parent's main role is the day-to-day care of children placed in your home. The importance of that role must not be overlooked when other professionals are making decision that will impact the life of the foster child in your home. You are an important team member and it is vital that you attend team meetings and individual service plan meetings and voice your knowledge of the child in your home.

The foster children in your home must be treated like one of your own children. The foster family has the responsibility to measure the impact of their actions on the foster child. If a decision is made by the foster parent to request that a child be moved, consideration of the impact that decision will have on the child must be addressed, creating the need for as much notice as possible when requesting a move. If you ask for a child to be moved from your home, you will be asked to assist your Foster Care Worker in the completion of a disruption report in order to provide the most current information to the next care provider.

At the time of placement, a foster family will be given all available information on the child. Children coming into the system for the first time will have minimal information available to the foster parent. Foster families have the right to expect basic information to be furnished at the time of placement and other information to be given to them within a realistic time frame.

Bridge Foster Families are paid directly by DHS, while Therapeutic Foster Families are paid by TFI. It is expected that you will not discuss the daily rate you receive with your foster child.

As a foster parent, you are responsible for the daily care of the child. This includes transporting the child where he/she needs to go, making daycare arrangements, enrolling the child in school, scheduling doctor and dental appointments, and meeting their basic needs. A foster family should be prepared to use their reimbursement check to pay for the additional needs of the child that are not covered through clothing vouchers and medical cards. These needs include special fees for school-related activities and costs associated with participating in sports or other school activities. Flex funds may also be available through Foster Care Service dollars to provide merchandise or services for TFI Family Connections LLC clients and resource foster homes when funds through DHS are not available or applicable.

Foster families must provide nutritious meals, snacks, a safe atmosphere, basic personal needs, religious observance, and allow children to participate in activities consistent with their religion.

Foster families have a responsibility to let their Foster Care Worker know how the child in their home is doing. This is accomplished through home visits, phone calls, and office visits. It is important that you as a foster parent make yourself available for home visits and allow the worker to visit with the child separate from you. Your Foster Care Worker is there as a support to you. However, they also have a role in working with the child to ensure his/her needs are being met.

As a foster family, you should encourage and support visits between the child and their biological parents when it is in the best interests of the child. Visitation will be set during team meetings. Changes and modifications may occur if approved by the child's DHS Worker. If siblings are not placed together in a foster home, families will need to work with the Foster Care Worker and DHS worker to support sibling visits. Foster parents are encouraged to be role models and examples to the birth parents of children in care and are asked to promote natural parent/child interactions in the least-restrictive setting possible (for example, having the parent over for visits, being willing to transport a child to the birth family home instead of the office, or keeping birth parents informed of doctor/dental appointments so that they may attend).

Visits with biological parents typically occur weekly. They may be supervised, unsupervised, or monitored. Supervised visits means a worker or other approved individual (examples could be a doctor during a medical visit, or the foster parent at the park) is present during the entire interaction between the parent and child. Unsupervised visits mean that the parent and child can interact with one another for pre-determined periods of time without the presence of workers or other professionals. Monitored visits mean that a worker or other professional periodically checks in unannounced during the visit to monitor the situation. As a family works toward reintegration, visits/interactions become longer, often moving toward overnight or weekends and holidays.

Whenever possible, you should work with and communicate with your foster child's biological parents. There are many advantages to partnering with your foster child's birth family. Foster children have the opportunity to see their biological and foster families working together toward a mutual goal of reintegration into the biological home. This can often lessen the tension between the birth family and foster home as birth families become aware that foster families are not trying to replace them as parents. If you have questions about the level of contact allowed between the child in your home and their biological family, you should contact your assigned Foster Care Worker.

MATCHING FOSTER PARENTS AND CHILDREN

When you become a TFI resource foster parent, you are assigned a Foster Care Worker who will work with and support you and the children placed in your home. A large part of a successful placement is making a good match at the time of placement. Your worker will get input from you to fill out a **Foster Parent Profile**. Your family profile will contain basic information on how to reach you if there is a possible placement for your home. The profile will also list the ages and sex of your biological children living with you, along with your preferences regarding age and gender of children you are interested in taking through foster care. If there are specific behaviors that you do not believe are acceptable in your home, or if you have specific skills that would benefit certain types of children, these are listed on the profile, as well. The more accepting you can be in working with kids who have behaviors, and the more flexible you care on gender and age of children you would like placed in your home, the more referrals for placement you are likely to receive.

If there are restrictions on your home, those will be noted. You have the right to expect that restrictions placed on your profile will be discussed with you prior to placement on the profile. Your profile will also note if you have a placement in your home that prohibits the placement of certain other types of placements. For example, if you have a sexually aggressive teen girl in placement, your home may be prohibited from taking teen boys while that placement is in your home.

Once your profile is complete, it will be entered into a computer database. When Intake and Assessment Staff is looking for a placement, they will pull up all available homes that meet the needs of the child. Based on several other factors, including location and ability to keep siblings together, they will call the best “match” family first. If there is no response, Intake and Assessment must move on to find a placement the same day as the referral. Placement of children who are moving from one foster home to another often allow enough time to wait for a family to call back. It is important that we have all phone numbers that allow us to try and contact you immediately if we have a child in need of placement.

Sometimes, a TFI home that can best meet the child’s needs is not available in the child’s home county. There may be a good match in an area that is further away. However, this may not meet the need of providing a home close enough to make family visits and mental health treatment easily accessible. For that reason, homes sponsored by other Child Placing Agencies may be chosen for placement instead of a TFI foster home.

When you are called with a referral, you will be given all known information to help you make a decision about taking the placement. You may only accept placements when the call comes from TFI Family Connections LLC’s Intake and Assessment Department or your assigned Foster Care Worker. Generally, Intake and Assessment Staff will make a follow-up call to you to make final arrangements even though your Foster Care Worker may have already given you all the referral information regarding the child. If agencies (including DHS) other than TFI Family Connections LLC contact you directly for foster care placements, please direct them to call TFI’s Intake Department at **1-877-921-4114**.

In this section, you will find a list of questions you should ask when Intake calls you regarding a possible placement. This list is just a guide to help you, if there are other questions you would like to ask, feel free to add them to your list. You also have the right to speak to your Foster Care Worker about the match before accepting placement if he or she is available.

At the time of placement or shortly after, you will receive a DHS **placement agreement** with the child's name, date-of-birth, and reimbursement rate information filled in. If you do not believe the reimbursement rate listed on the placement agreement is what was quoted to you when you accepted the placement, or if you have other questions about the placement agreement, please contact your assigned Foster Care Worker as soon as possible. You will also receive a separate TFI placement agreement.

Sometimes when a child is first placed, not all information is known about the child. Depending on the behaviors of a child, you may ask for the child to be re-evaluated by DHS to make sure that he or she is at the correct level of care. It is important that you report all behaviors, both positive and negative, to your Foster Care Worker during monthly visits as this information is used during the re-evaluation process.

If a good match did not occur and you must ask for a child to be removed from your home, we ask that you give as much notice as possible. At a minimum, we ask that you give 14 days' notice to allow time to locate an appropriate match. Children may be moved the same day if an emergency situation exists. Possible reasons for emergency removal include DHS investigation that warrants removal due to possible safety concerns, foster family requests the move due to the child being a danger to him/herself or others, and unexpected situations such as accidents or serious illness of the foster parent. Moving is traumatic for the child each time it has to occur, so it is important to make moves as planned and orderly as possible.

If a child has resided in the foster home for three months or more, OKDHS will (except in an emergency), give a minimum of five judicial days written advance notice to the foster parent and the court before removing the child from that foster home. The notice tells the reasons for the child being removed. In usual circumstances the matter of the child's moving and the reasons for it will have been discussed and planned for in advance. If an emergency exists, the advance notice is not required. An example of an emergency would be when a request is made by the foster parent to remove a child immediately or when there is a medical emergency. Emergency circumstances include, but are not limited to, an allegation of the abuse or neglect of the child in the foster home such that the child's safety cannot be ensured during an investigation.

If a child has resided in the same foster home for six months or more, and the move being planned is not agreed upon, the foster parent may file an objection with the court of jurisdiction within five judicial days after receiving the notice of removal. If the objection is filed and served timely, unless an emergency exists, the child's removal is stayed (stopped for the time being) and the court has 15 working days in which to consider the foster parent's objection.

When a good match occurs, the hope is that the child will stay with you until he/she achieves permanency. “Permanency” may mean going home, being adopted by someone other than the foster parent, or moving into Independent Living.

QUESTIONS TO ASK PRIOR TO ACCEPTING PLACEMENT OF A CHILD

1. HOW MANY PLACEMENTS HAS THE CHILD HAD BEFORE?
2. WHAT KIND OF MEDICATION DOES THE CHILD TAKE, IF ANY?
(What is the medication for? When the child arrives: when was the medication last taken?)
3. DOES THE CHILD HAVE AN IEP AND, IF SO, WHAT TYPE? WHAT GRADE IN SCHOOL IS THE CHILD?
4. WHAT TYPE OF VISITATION DOES THE CHILD HAVE (i.e. supervised, unsupervised, weekend, day pass, etc.) HOW OFTEN?
5. WHAT ARE THE CHILD'S CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS NEEDS?
(i.e. what church, if any, does the child prefer to attend?)
6. TEENAGERS: PROMISCUOUS, SMOKING, DRUG/ALCOHOL USAGE, RUNNING, PHYSICAL OR VERBAL AGGRESSION, STEALING?
7. DOES THE CHILD HAVE ANY ALLERGIES? (i.e. food allergies, medication allergies, pet allergies, asthma)
8. WHY IS THE CHILD IN CUSTODY?
9. WHAT IS THE EXPECTED LENGTH OF PLACEMENT?
10. HAS THE CHILD(REN) BEEN IN CUSTODY BEFORE? IF SO, WHY?
11. WHAT IS THE CASE PLAN GOAL (reintegration, guardianship, emancipation, and/or adoption)?
12. ALERTS: IS THE CHILD A SEXUAL OFFENDER OR FIRE STARTER?
13. BEHAVIORS TOWARD YOUNGER OR OLDER CHILDREN?

(i.e. if this child is not getting along well with other children in the home, are they going to get along in my home? Is the child a threat or danger to younger children?)

14. ASK YOURSELF THIS: DO I HAVE THE BED/PERSONAL SPACE CAPACITY? IF NOT, CAN I GET AN EXCEPTION?
15. IF THE YOUTH HAS A BABY—WHO GETS VISITATION WITH THE INFANT? IS THE INFANT IN DHS CUSTODY, TOO? WHAT ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE TO HELP WITH THE INFANT?
16. WHY DOES THE YOUTH NEED A NEW PLACEMENT?
17. WHAT IS THE YOUTH'S CURRENT LEVEL OF CARE?
18. IS THE YOUTH APPROVED FOR SELF-CARE TIME? HOW MUCH?

DAILY LOGS/INCIDENT REPORT FORMS

Foster families who are providing therapeutic care are required to keep logs on a daily basis. These logs should note behaviors and issues that are addressed within the foster home. These logs may be brief if it is an “average day” but should be more specific than “Timmy had a good day.” What made Timmy’s day good? If there has been an issue or concern, or something very positive, you should take the time to provide a more extensive log entry. Please include the following information: who was involved, where and when did the event take place, what was the situation, and how was it addressed or resolved? Please feel free to add other information you believe is important.

Foster parents who provide other types of care should log any accidents or incidents that would be of concern to the agency or to the biological parents. These logs can be very helpful if there are alleged charges of abuse or neglect. For example, if your foster child falls from his bike and bruises his arm the day before a home visit, it is helpful to log the incident so that any questions about the bruising and how it happened can be answered with the supporting documentation.

Incident Report Forms should be filled out when there is a serious situation that has occurred with a child placed in your home. Foster Parents should call their Foster Care worker or the on-call number at 1-877-921-4114 to report the situation immediately and then complete the form and send it to your Foster Care Worker by the next working day. A copy of the form should be kept on file in the family foster home as well.

“Critical Incidents” or “Significant Incidents” include the following scenarios:

1. Fire damage or other damage to the dwelling or damage to the property that affects the structure of the dwelling or the safety of the child in foster care.
2. A vehicle accident involving any child in foster care, a missing or runaway child in foster care, the physical restraint of a child in foster care, the injury of a child in foster care that requires medical attention
3. The death of a child or any other resident of the family foster home.
4. The arrest of a child in foster care.
5. Any incident involving the presence of law enforcement.
6. All complaint investigations by DHS.
7. Any other incident that jeopardized the safety of a child in foster care.

The above are situations that require calls to your Foster Care Worker or the after-hours crisis line. In situations where a child has run away, in addition to notifying your Foster Care Worker, you should also notify local law enforcement. The officer will want the following information:

- Child’s full name
- Age/Date-of-birth
- Current picture
- When (time) the child was last seen
- Places the child may have gone
- Description of clothing the child was wearing

- Any identifying marks

For additional guidance regarding any of the above situations, you should contact your Foster Care Worker or the emergency after-hours crisis line.

PERSONAL BELONGINGS OF YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

In order to ensure that youth in the care of TFI Family Connections LLC maintain possession of their personal belongings throughout their time in care, especially through placement changes, all TFI Family Connections LLC foster care providers are asked to complete a **Personal Belongings Inventory Form** on each youth placed in their home within 24 hours of placement, if not provided one by DHS.

The inventory should be updated each time the youth receives new personal property during his/her time in placement and should also be completed on the day the youth leaves the home for all planned moves and disruptions with notice. The foster parent and youth should both sign the form when possible. The completed form needs to be forwarded to the next placement with the youth or to the child's Permanency Worker.

For unplanned, or emergency, moves from TFI Foster homes, the foster parent needs to make every effort to get the youth's belongings to the Foster Care Worker, Permanency Worker, or placement setting when applicable within 48 working hours of the youth leaving the home. The Foster Care Worker assigned to the home the youth is leaving will be responsible for coordinating the delivery of the youth's belongings to the youth's new placement if the new placement is a TFI Foster home or to the DHS Worker if the new placement is a non TFI home (ie: shelter, relative, or other agency foster home).

Foster Parent Liability Insurance

TFI Family Connections LLC is required by The Council on Accreditation (COA) to provide Foster Parent Liability Insurance to all certified foster families sponsored by the agency. The purpose of the policy is to protect foster parents from lawsuits of bodily injury or property damage caused by a foster child to someone else. It also provides defense cost coverage for you for claims of abuse, molestation, willful neglect, or corporal punishment. A secondary part of the policy provides limited coverage for damage to property you own caused by a foster child. There is a \$500 deductible per claim.

A small portion of the cost of this policy (\$6.00) is deducted from Therapeutic Foster Parents bi-monthly care provider checks with the balance of the premium paid by TFI Family Connections LLC. This coverage is not optional and is required for all homes with children placed for any portion of that month.

The claim form that must be used to file a property damage claim is attached. You will fax or email the completed form directly to the claim handling company.

Thank you for the services you provide to Oklahoma youth!

FOSTER PARENT CLAIM INFORMATION

Please Fax or Email a copy of this claim form with the estimate, if you have one. The policy has a \$500 property damage deductible, therefore a property damage claim should not be filed below this amount.

Fax: (814) 269-4334 Linda Penrod

Email: fpp@floodcity.net

If you have questions, Linda Penrod’s number is (800) 841-5161.

AGENCY NAME: TFI FAMILY SERVICES, INC./TFI FAMILY CONNECTIONS LLC

STATE: OKLAHOMA

DATE OF INCIDENT:

REPORTED BY:

FOSTER PARENT NAME AND ADDRESS:

FOSTER PARENT PHONE:

HOME () _____ - _____ WORK() _____ - _____ CELL() _____ - _____

CLAIMANT (OTHER THAN FOSTER PARENT) NAME AND ADDRESS:

CLAIMANT PHONE:

HOME () _____ - _____ WORK() _____ - _____ CELL() _____ - _____

DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT (DO NOT INCLUDE THE CHILD'S NAME DUE TO PRIVACY):

Foster Parent's Rights

From: Oklahoma Statutes Citationized Title 10. Children Chapter 72 – Oklahoma Foster Care and Out-of-Home Placement Act. Section 7206.1 – Statement of Foster Parent's Rights.

A statement of foster parent's rights shall include, but not be limited to, the right to:

Dignity, respect and consideration

Be treated with dignity, respect, and consideration as a professional member of the child welfare team.

Training

Be notified of and be given appropriate, ongoing education and continuing education and training to develop and enhance foster parenting skills.

Support services for foster child

Be informed about ways to contact the state agency or the child-placing agency in order to receive information and assistance to access supportive services for any child in the foster parent's care.

Reimbursement

Receive timely financial reimbursement for providing foster care services. Be notified of any costs or expenses for which the foster parent may be eligible for reimbursement.

Information about foster child's treatment and services

Be provided a clear, written explanation of the individual treatment and service plan concerning the child in the foster parent's home, listing components of the plan pursuant to the provisions of the Oklahoma Children's Code and the Oklahoma Foster Care and Out-of-Home Placement Act. Receive, at any time during which a child is placed with the foster parent, additional or necessary information that is relevant to the care of the child.

Notification of meetings

Be notified of scheduled review meetings, permanency planning meetings and special staffing concerning the foster child in order to actively participate in the case planning and decision-making process regarding the child.

Provide input regarding services for foster child

Provide input concerning the plan of services for the child and to have that input be given full consideration in the same manner as information presented by any other professional on the team.

Communication with other care providers

Communicate with other foster parents in order to share information regarding the foster child. In particular, receive any information concerning the number of times a foster child has been moved and the reasons why, and the names and telephone numbers of the previous foster parent if the previous foster parent has authorized such release.

Communication with other members of foster child's treatment team

Communicate with other professionals who work with the foster child within the context of the team including, but not limited to, therapists, physicians, and teachers.

Information about foster child and birth family permanency plan

Be given, in a timely and consistent manner, any information regarding the child and the child's family which is pertinent to the care and needs of the child and to the making of a permanency plan for the child. Disclosure of information shall be limited to that information which is authorized by the provisions of Article V of the Oklahoma Children's Code for foster parents and Article VII of the Oklahoma Juvenile Code.

Information about changes in services plan for foster child

Be given reasonable notice of any change in or addition to the services provided to the child pursuant to the child's individual treatment and service plan.

Notice of /reason for plan to terminate placement

a. Be given written notice of:

plans to terminate the placement of the child with the foster parent pursuant to Section 7208 of this title, and the reasons for the changes or termination in placement, and

b. The notice shall be waived only in emergency cases pursuant to Section 7208 of this title.

Notification of foster child's court hearings

Be notified by the applicable state agency in a timely and complete manner of all court hearings, including notice of the date and time of any court hearing, the name of the judge or hearing officer hearing the case, the location of the hearing, and the court docket number of the case.

Notification of court and placing agency decisions

Be informed of decisions made by the court, the state agency or the child-placing agency concerning the child.

Preferential consideration as placement for foster child returning to care

Be considered as a preferred placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parent is to re-enter foster care at the same level and type of care, if that placement is consistent with the best interest of the child and other children in the foster parent's home.

Fair, timely impartial investigation of complaint

Be provided a fair, timely, and impartial investigation of complaints concerning the foster parent certification.

Fair, impartial hearing of decisions regarding status of foster home

Be provided the opportunity to request and receive a fair and impartial hearing regarding decisions that affect certification retention or placement of children in the home.

Parental substitute authority

Be allowed the right to exercise parental substitute authority.

Fair access to appeals process

Have timely access to the state agency's and child placement agency's appeals process and the right to be free from acts of harassment and retaliation by any other party when exercising the right to appeal.

Foster Parent Hotline

Be given the number of the statewide toll-free Foster Parent Hotline established in Section 7204 of this title.

Access to grievance process

File a grievance and be informed of the process for filing a grievance.

BILL OF RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Ratified in Congress Hall, Philadelphia, on Saturday, the Twenty-eighth of April, Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-three: Reaffirmed during the National Focus on Foster Care Conference, Norfolk, Virginia, on Wednesday, the Fourth of May, Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-three.

Even more than for other children, society has a responsibility, along with parents, for the well-being of children in foster care. Citizens are responsible for acting to ensure their welfare.

Every child is endowed with the rights inherently belonging to all children. In addition, because of the temporary or permanent separation from the loss of parents and other family members, the child requires special safeguards, resources, and care.

EVERY CHILD IN FOSTER CARE HAS THE INHERENT RIGHT:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Article the First | To be cherished by a family of his own, either his family helped by readily available services and support to reassume his care, or an adoptive family, or by plan, a continuing foster family. |
| Article the Second | To be nurtured by foster parents who have been selected to meet his individual needs, and who are provided services and supports, including specialized education, so that they can grow in their ability to enable the child to reach his potential. |
| Article the Third | To receive sensitive, continuing help in understanding and accepting the reasons for his own family's inability to take care of him, and in developing confidence in his own self-worth. |
| Article the Fourth | To receive continuing, loving care and respect as a unique human being...a child growing in trust in himself and others. |
| Article the Fifth | To grow up in freedom and dignity in a neighborhood of people who accept him with understanding, respect, and friendship. |
| Article the Sixth | To receive help in overcoming deprivation or whatever distortion in his emotional, physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual growth may have resulted from his early experiences. |
| Article the Seventh | To receive education, training, and career guidance to prepare him for a useful and satisfying life. |
| Article the Eighth | To receive preparation for citizenship and parenthood through interaction with foster parents and other adults who are consistent role models. |

Article the Ninth To be represented by an attorney-at-law in administrative or judicial proceedings with access to fair hearings and court review of decisions, so that his best interests are safeguarded.

Article the Tenth To receive a high quality of child welfare services, including involvement of the natural parents and his own involvement in major decisions that affect his life.

Subject: Children's Rights

Purpose: To ensure children's rights, while placed away from their parents, are maintained while also ensuring their safety and security as well as the safety of others living with them.

Religious Worship

Children in Foster Care Services placement shall have the opportunity to practice the religious beliefs of their choice as long as this practice is not harmful to self or others. Foster Parents shall provide opportunity for children to attend the place of worship and practice their beliefs. Specific religious beliefs of Foster Parents shall not be forced upon a child.

Privacy of Mail

Children shall have access to all mail sent to them. Only in rare occasions, when court ordered, can the mail from a parent or other person be opened by any person other than the child. When the court orders that all mail from specific person be monitored, the mail shall go through the DHS Worker to be opened and then shared with the child. It is up to the DHS Worker to share this restriction with the Foster Care Worker and Foster Parent.

Foster Parents or workers shall not read any foster child's mail after opened by the child. This mail is considered confidential and up to the child to share with the worker or Foster Parent. If the Foster Parent is concerned about child's safety (risk of AWOL or self-harm), the Foster Parent must ask permission from Foster Care to read a child's mail for clues. Prior to Foster Care making the decision on reading confidential mail, Foster Care will attempt to contact the DHS Worker and jointly make the decision.

Privacy of Phone Calls

Children may have reasonable access to privacy of phone calls and privilege to use the phone. Reasonable access means foster children should be allowed to talk on the phone without anyone else in the home eavesdropping or listening on the other line. Children (age appropriate) shall be allowed to use the phone to make or accept phone calls. Foster Parents can make reasonable restrictions regarding the use of the phone that include time limitation, number of calls received/made, or hours calls are made/accepted. Foster Parents can also take away privilege of using the phone as a consequence; however this restriction shall never include making or receiving phone calls from the foster child's biological parents.

At times, the DHS Worker may ask that phone calls be monitored with parents especially if supervised visits are occurring. Foster Care Workers must have written documentation (service plan, e-mail, letter etc.) that states Foster Parent is able to monitor phone calls. The information must include what calls shall be monitored and how calls shall be monitored (listened to on the other line or listening to child's conversation) before Foster Parent monitors any phone calls.

Privacy from Media

Children in Foster Care Services shall never be identified in the media or other public venues as a foster child. If a child seeks media attention on their own, the assigned Foster Care Worker must explain to the child their right to privacy and not being identified as a foster child. If child still continues to want to talk with media, the worker must notify the agency's privacy officer. The privacy officer must have the child sign an acknowledgement stating that he/she has been informed of their right to privacy by the agency.

BIOLOGICAL PARENTS' RIGHTS

Parents of children in foster care shall have the following rights:

1. To be treated as individuals who have all the rights guaranteed to them as citizens of the United States and their state.
2. To maintain custody of their child unless it has been demonstrated that this would jeopardize the child's health and welfare.
3. To be provided with opportunities to demonstrate their capacity to provide a suitable home for their child, and to regain custody of their child as quickly as possible, when regaining custody is consistent with the health and welfare needs of the child.
4. To receive proper and adequate notice regarding any grievance or legal proceedings concerning their child.
5. To participate in planning for their child, to receive a copy of the case plan, and to receive notice of any formal review of their child's case plan.
6. To receive services in accordance with the case plan, assistance in overcoming the conditions which led to the removal of their child, and if return of their child to their custody is not feasible, to receive help in adjusting to an alternative permanent plan for their child.
7. To visit and communicate with their child within reasonable guidelines as set by the service plan and by the court.
8. To have their cultural, religious, ethnic, or racial heritage respected as a plan for them and their child is developed.
9. To receive an explicit written description of the expectations they must meet in order to have their child returned home, and of the services the agency will provide to help them meet those expectations.
10. To have information maintained by the agency about them, within a framework of agency guidelines, which takes into consideration others' rights to privacy and provides an opportunity to correct errors contained in those records.

American Public Welfare Association. Standards for Foster Family Services Systems for Public Agencies. For Children's Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, Department of Health, Education and Welfare. DHEW Publication No. (OHDS) 79-30231.

MEDICATION DISBURSEMENT

A licensed physician must prescribe all medications given to children in foster care, including over-the-counter medication. Permission to dispense over-the-counter medication is obtained by having the physician fill out the **Permission to Disburse Over-the-Counter Medication** form. For medication prescribed for psychiatric purposes, a board certified psychiatrist is responsible for overseeing medication management. TFI Family Connections will not take verbal orders to administer medication.

All prescription medication must be kept in the prescribing bottle. The bottle must be labeled with the name of the person the medication is for, the dosage and name of the medication, the name of the prescribing physician, the expiration date, and the number or code identifying the written order as applicable.

It is highly recommended that the child have a physical examination within 30 days of placement in the foster home. At this time, the physician should be informed of all medications the child is taking. At that time, the foster parents can have the physician sign the permission to disburse over-the-counter medications, as well.

When medication is prescribed and/or administered, we must have the written, informed consent of the individual or his/her legal guardian. Information must be presented that fully explains the benefits, risks, and alternatives, and use of all medication must be documented by the foster parents. The **medication record** must be completed at the time the medication is given and a copy should be maintained in your records.

Using the documentation, you will be able to contribute to discussions with medical professionals, case workers, and other professions by providing information on their observations and knowledge of the child's medical profile while in your home. Agency staff will ensure that they have requested any needed test to determine the impact of the medication on the children being served.

Any child may refuse medical treatment or medication unless court ordered. The agency will inform the child of the consequences of refusal.

NON-LICENSING CONCERN PROCEDURE

Sometimes, there may be concerns about a foster family that are not directly related to DHS regulations. Examples include frequent disruptions, failing to give appropriate notice in situations that are not emergencies, not ensuring attendance at required appointments, etc. As a result, this procedure and form were developed to provide a way for anyone to voice a concern regarding a foster family and to have that concern documented.

When someone fills out a Non-Licensing Concern regarding a foster family, the form is submitted to the supervisor in TFI's Licensing Department, who will review it to ensure the concern is not actually a licensing violation. The form is then given to the Foster Care Worker assigned to your home, who will sit down with you to explain the concern and develop a support plan, if appropriate.

SUPPORT PLAN

Your Foster Care Worker will complete a support plan with you if the concern listed is valid. If the concern is not valid, no support plan will be developed. Your Foster Care Worker, along with you, will determine what steps need to be taken to correct the concern. **If a family fails to provide 14-day notice in non-emergent situations, the foster family will be placed on hold for any new placements for up to 20 days. This time period is to be used for the worker and foster family to mutually agree on steps that need to take place so that such incidents do not happen again.**

Support plans may include a review of the family's profile, use of respite care, specific training, and other supports.

The Foster Care Worker will follow up with the person who submitted the concern form. They will not give out confidential information regarding how the concern is being handled, but they will let the person know that the concern is being addressed.

If a family receives three or more concerns, the Licensing Supervisor will meet with the Foster Care Services Director to review and determine if a formal referral to TFI's Licensing Team needs to be made.

DISRUPTION REPORT PROCEDURES

When a foster family asks that a child be removed from their home it is called a disruption. When a child disrupts, the goal of the Foster Care Worker is to try and prevent the child from having to move by problem-solving and providing services to you and the child in the home. If preventing the disruption is not possible, there is a need to document what did not work with the placement and to use that information to find a new placement that will meet the child's needs. Using the **disruption report** completed by the Foster Care Worker, those finding placement will have the most current information regarding the child's strengths and needs and what needs to be different in the next placement to make it successful.

Your Foster Care Worker will need to fill out this form with your assistance right away, so that the information will be available to those placing the child as soon as possible. Most likely, your Foster Care Worker will complete the form with you over the phone. As you work with your Foster Care Worker, think about what kind of information you would want the next foster family to know in order to be successful with this child. The disruption report should include those things you found to work well with the child in managing behavior, as well as interventions you attempted that were not successful. It is also important to note things the child does well. Your input on the child's strengths and needs can be very valuable to the next family.

It is also important that you contact your Foster Care Worker as soon as you start experiencing difficulties that you believe may lead to the child disrupting from your home. Identifying problems sooner can provide you and your worker an opportunity to problem-solve before the situation reaches a critical stage, and may help prevent the disruption from occurring at all.

CERTIFICATION RESPONSIBILITIES

TFI sponsors foster homes certified by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS is the only agency that can decide to terminate a contract with a foster family for reasons of non-compliance or abuse/neglect.

TFI has a Child Placing Agency license through DHS that allows us to place children in certified fosterhomes sponsored by TFI Family Connections LLC. TFI has the right to decide to sponsor or not sponsor a foster home. Each year, TFI will re-certify foster homes that have met DHS requirements for re-certification. TFI is responsible for conducting the re- certification prior to the expiration date. You will receive paperwork from our Licensing Department that you must complete and provide to your Foster Care Worker at the time of your re-certification. Your Foster Care Worker has paperwork to complete, as well, and a walk-through of your home will be done each year. It is your responsibility to ensure you have the required number of training hours prior to your renewal date.

In addition to the yearly walk-through of your home your Foster Care Worker will complete a Quarterly Compliance Checklist if you have had any type of placement during that quarter. The Quarterly Compliance Check involves your worker viewing all areas of the home including bedrooms and identifying any areas that need correction to be compliant with DHS regulations. This is done as a support to your home to provide documentation for your file that your foster home has been in compliance with regulations throughout the year. It is also helpful for identifying any licensing concerns in order that they may be remedied.

TFI may decide to end the sponsorship of a home based on DHS or internal agency concerns. TFI requires that foster parents work with the agency in a positive, constructive manner. If a foster family cannot work professionally with the agency, we may choose to withdraw sponsorship. Foster families who have no open investigations with DHS may transfer to another Child Place Agency that agrees to accept sponsorship of the home.

TFI will work to problem-solve with the foster home. It is our agency's goal to provide quality services to foster homes and to see that they are happy with the agency. When possible, Corrective Action Plans will be developed with the family in an effort to avoid withdrawing sponsorship of the home.

ABUSE/NEGLECT REPORTS/INVESTIGATIONS

Any reports of abuse or neglect have to be immediately reported to DHS. DHS is responsible for informing TFI Family Connections LLC of abuse/neglect allegations they receive against a TFI foster home. DHS will send all allegations and finding reports to the Licensing Department. When an allegation is made against a TFI foster home, your Foster Care Worker will do what they can to inform you of what will happen next and provide you with support. However, during investigations, there may be little your Foster Care Worker can share with you. It is important to note that the Foster Care Worker cannot call to inform you of a pending investigation or provide you with information regarding the reporter, even if the worker is aware of that information.

Once the concern reaches the DHS office, DHS will review the concern and determine if an investigation will occur. If DHS determines that there is due cause for an investigation, they will notify you that there is a concern and begin the interview process. Your home will be placed on hold for new placements during DHS investigations.

If there are children in your home at the time of the investigation, the concern will be reviewed to determine if there are immediate safety issues for them. DHS or TFI can decide it is in the children's best interests to move them to another foster home during the investigation. All efforts will be made to move the investigation along as quickly as possible and return the children to your home if it is in their best interests. Your Foster Care Worker will work with you and provide as much information as they can during this phase of the investigation.

You will be expected to complete any Corrective Action Plans that are presented by DHS or TFI.

DHS may make the following findings:

- Services Not Needed –no risk was found and there is no need for preventive services.
- Services Recommended-the information was unfounded or there is insufficient information to determine if maltreatment occurred. Services could benefit the foster child or family.
- Confirmed Services Recommended- based upon credible evidence maltreatment has occurred and services are necessary to protect the child.
- Confirmed Court Intervention Requested- based upon credible evidence maltreatment has occurred and the abuse was of such a serious nature that it threatens the child's health and safety. Law enforcement will be notified in order to conduct a criminal investigation.

Confirmed findings of abuse or neglect require the closing of the foster home and the withdrawal of sponsorship by TFI. Families do have the right to appeal confirmed findings through DHS, a process which is explained in the Notice of Findings issued to you by DHS.

TFI may decide to withdraw sponsorship of a home independent of DHS findings.

CORRECTIVE ACTION PLANS

When a Foster Care Worker or that worker's supervisor believes there are concerns regarding the home, a referral can be made to TFI's Licensing Team for review. Foster Care Workers are expected to problem-solve with their families in an effort to prevent formal referral to the Licensing Team. As a result, foster parents should be aware of the concerns that their worker is addressing with the Licensing Team. Investigations of abuse/neglect require an automatic referral to the Licensing Team for review.

If the Licensing Team determines that the family is not meeting agency expectations, not providing "best practice," and/or could improve in specific areas, then a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) or Partnership Development Plan (PDP) will be required. The CAP must be written to explain the specific areas requiring improvement and the steps required to make improvements. It must also be time-limited.

The CAP or PDP will generally be written and presented by your assigned Foster Care Worker, although it can also be presented by the worker's supervisor or a representative from the Licensing Department. Depending on the situation, a hold on new placements may be instituted until the completion of the CAP. Your Foster Care Worker will tell you if that is the case.

FOSTER FAMILY TRAINING HOURS

DHS requires that all foster families receive twelve hours of training per parent in the home each year to maintain your foster care certification.

All therapeutic foster parents must compete 18 hours of in-service training per year to maintain certification, whether or not a child is placed in the home. First Aid and CPR training may count for no more than 8 hours of in-service training within the first year of certification, and no more than 4 years in successive years.

Foster Parents can obtain training hours from a variety of methods, including, but not limited to: support meetings, agency trainings, self-studies, books, videos, online courses, lectures and classes. Television shows and movies are not acceptable media for foster home training hours. All training must be related to the care of children in foster care. One fourth of the required training hours per level of care must be obtained from face to face trainings and no more than one half of required trainings per level care can be obtained from reading books.

A **Foster Parent Training Verification** form must be filed out for all trainings for which you did not complete a sign-in sheet and receive a certificate of attendance.

Credits are accumulated during the certification year and cannot be carried over to the next licensing year. Your Foster Care Worker will collect your training credits, including the Training Verification forms, to submit to Licensing for your annual renewal. It is a good idea to maintain a copy of your certificates and Training Verification forms for your own records in the event that training credit information is lost. It is also a good idea to submit your training hours as you obtain them, rather than waiting until your renewal is due, to ensure you have adequate number of training hours each year.

The Licensing Department will review the training credits to make sure they meet criteria for your foster care certification. If the training is not accepted by the Licensing Department, it will be returned to the Foster Care Worker with an explanation of why it was not accepted.

If the foster family does not have the required training credits as their renewal date approaches, the Licensing Department will notify the Foster Care Worker. The worker will contact the family to discuss the situation and assist the family in taking steps to complete the needed training before the year ends.

HIPAA and You

Important Information for Foster Families

1. What is HIPAA?

- a. HIPAA is the acronym for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996.

2. What is the purpose of HIPAA?

- a. The goal of the law was to prevent arbitrary exclusion with the “pre-existing conditions not covered” clause in insurance policies. Prior to this law, if a person were to change insurance companies or lose their job, they would not be able to get coverage for pre-existing conditions.
- b. The current purpose of HIPAA is to ensure that all persons’ identifying medical information is maintained in a confidential manner while providing enough accessibility that treatment can occur quickly when needed. HIPAA is not only about sharing information but also ensuring that everyone is coding things the same way and that electronic transmittal of information is securely sent over the Internet and maintained secure while accessible to someone’s hard drive.

3. Why do we have to follow HIPAA’s guidelines?

- a. The natural question is: “That sounds good for health care, but we are a child welfare organization...how are we included in this?” That is a good question, because the initial intent of the law was not to include child welfare, but through the implementation process it became evident that we are bound by these regulations. TFI Family Connections LLC is considered a covered entity because we directly bill for Medicaid and insurance services and we indirectly bill insurance companies including Medicaid on almost all children in care.
- b. Foster families must be trained as you are considered under HIPAA laws as a ‘business associate’-- someone who has an agreement with a covered entity to provide services that can ultimately be billed to insurance companies. As a business associate, you are bound by most all HIPAA laws. All persons must be trained on the privacy aspect of HIPAA requirements. After training, all persons must meet and follow the requirements of the law.

4. Who can you share information with? What type of information can be shared and what consent or authorization is needed?

- a. All information that we obtain from clients, professionals, or community members whether verbal or written, is considered confidential information. This includes anything and everything in the child’s file (reports, assessments, tools, forms, medical records, educational records, and case notes). There are specific requirements we must meet to share any of this information with any person other than the client.
- b. HIPAA differentiates between the “use” and “disclosure” of information. To “use” information means to share information within the agency, such as discussing information with your spouse. To “disclose” information means you are sharing information with other professionals such as therapists, doctors, teachers/counselors, Foster Care Workers, contracting agency/Permanency workers, DHS and the Court.
- c. We can use or disclose the **minimum necessary** information for the purpose of **treatment, payment, or health care operations (TPO)**.
 - i. For Treatment is defined as using or disclosing information to provide the client with services needed and identified in the case plan/treatment plan. Treatment services can include mental health services, drug and alcohol services, housing or domestic services, placement services, vocational services, educational services, and medical services. We must provide the minimum

- necessary to adequately treat the client. This means we do not share the same information with the school as we do the therapist.
- ii. For Payment is defined as using or disclosing information for purposes of billing a payee which includes private insurance companies, Medicaid, or DHS. Foster families will generally not have a need to disclose information regarding payment issues.
 - iii. For Health Care Operations is defined as using or disclosing information to make improvements in services that we provide. This would include things like investigations in your home by DHS.
- d. However, to be able to use or disclose the **minimum necessary information**, foster families must have a signed **consent** to treat the client. The consent must be signed by the legal guardian of the child (this could be DHS or the parent). Foster families will obtain the signed consent through their Foster Care. All TFI youth will have a signed informed consent that will be put in the child's red book. We do not know exactly how other agencies will be meeting this requirement. All biological parents signing the informed consent will be given a copy of the Notice to Privacy Practices which outlines the information which will be shared based on signing of the informed consent.
- i. If biological parents choose not to sign the informed consent, HIPAA states that we can choose not to serve the client. However, we know we cannot refuse to care for children in custody. In the event that a parent refuses to give informed consent, we must request that DHS sign the informed consent as the child's legal guardian.
 - ii. Clients can later complete the **Limitation on Disclosure of Information Request** form. This form allows clients the opportunity to request that specific information not be shared with specific treatment providers, payees, or other health care operations.
 - iii. If you do not have appropriate consent, you cannot share any information with schools, therapists, etc. You should have a medical consent and could share medical information with doctors/nurses using that consent.
- e. The law allows us to use and disclose information that is considered private for the following reasons whether consent is given or not:
- i. Reporting suspected abuse or neglect of children
 - ii. Disclosure to governmental agencies responsible for monitoring our licensure and compliance with federal and state laws (DHS investigations)
 - iii. Investigation of a crime or criminal by law enforcement
 - iv. Investigation of a disease or injuries by the health department
 - v. To prevent the serious injury or death of a client or other person where the client has threatened harm to that person
- f. Anything not covered as minimum necessary to treat, bill, or other (TPO) as indicated above requires an Authorization to Release Information. We cannot release to other agencies or obtain from other agencies any information that does not meet the above requirements without a signed release of information. There are specific requirements that must be met for the authorization to be valid. If all these requirements are not met, we cannot release information to or obtain information from the other agency. Clients must be given a copy of the Authorization to Release Information. The requirements include:
- i. Must identify the specific person (not agency) that information shall be released to,
 - ii. Must identify specific person (not agency) that information shall be obtained from,
 - iii. Cannot use one authorization to release and obtain information from; if information is to be shared both ways, two authorizations are needed,
 - iv. Must identify all information that will be authorized to share,
 - v. Must identify a specific purpose for releasing/obtaining information,
 - vi. Authorization must have a statement about how authorization can be revoked,

- vii. Must have a start and end date identified for when information can be released or obtained. If authorization is for a one-time purpose, the length of time cannot exceed 90 days. If authorization to release/obtain ongoing information, the length of the time cannot exceed 365 days (one year),
- viii. The client or legal guardian if the client is a minor must sign the authorization.

5. Client Access to Files:

- a. Children may have access to their case file, including the foster family's file on the child. The child shall ask for access to review the case file in writing to their assigned Foster Care. The Foster Care Services Director must approve of the information to be reviewed in the case file and will seek direction from the Privacy Officer as needed. TFI Family Connections LLC shall comply with the client's request within a minimum of 30 days from the date of request. The child must review the information at the TFI Family Connections LLC office and can only have access to a copy of the file, not the original. The limitations to allowing access to the case file include:
 - i. The client may not view any information regarding another person including siblings, children, or parents, as this information is confidential,
 - ii. The client may not view any information TFI has obtained from a third party source,
 - iii. Information may be extracted from the file that could cause emotional or physical harm to the client or others,
 - iv. Information may be extracted from the file if the client is in process under legal action or jurisdiction.

Clients may also have access to copies of information they have reviewed. The agency may charge the client for the cost of copies and mailing. Clients may not take information to be copied. If information has been approved for client review, he/she may have any of that copied information.

Clients may also request to have information stricken from the record or enter information into the record. If clients want to add information or have information deleted, they must request in writing and present to their worker. The Director must review the request and make a decision to accept or deny the request. The Director may seek direction from the Privacy Officer as needed. The Director will provide written notification to the client within 30 days of the client presenting the request to the assigned worker. The written notification will be placed in the client's file and, if approved, information can be added or deleted.

6. Notice to Privacy Practices:

- a. Notice to Privacy Practice (NPP) must be shared with all children who receive services from TFI Family Connections LLC Workers and foster families shall make every attempt to meet the client's privacy request (i.e. not introducing the child as a foster child). Respecting the child's privacy can also be meeting with the client where he or she feels comfortable and we can attempt to arrange this as best as possible. Some clients may not want to meet with their social worker at school, for example. The NPP will be located in every child handbook. The NPP describes more specifically all the information that can be disclosed and used without individual authorization. Foster Families should be very familiar with the NPP as well, so they can explain and give examples to the children in their care.

7. What else should you know?

- a. Around the House/Office:
 - i. Keep all files containing confidential information locked
 - ii. Make sure phone calls are not made where others can hear the content of the conversation

- iii. Be sure phone messages given do not identify the client or issue
- iv. Don't use the client's name in a waiting area or elsewhere where it could be overheard by unauthorized persons
- v. Don't talk over a speaker phone
- b. Faxes
 - i. When sending faxes, call the intended recipient so they know you are about to fax confidential information to them so they can be prepared to receive it.
 - ii. If you have a fax machine in your home where confidential information regarding children is sent, the fax should not be accessible to children and/or plans should be made to assure that all faxes are taken off the machine timely and put in a locked location
- c. Email
 - i. Foster Families cannot email confidential information regarding clients to workers, therapists, biological parents, or schools. This includes emails sent from the foster parent's house or work. The reason for this is that TFI Family Connections LLC cannot assure access and privacy on foster families' home or work computers. Types of email correspondence with your worker that are acceptable can include:
 - 1. "I need respite for 3 days from 02/27/07 through 03/01/07." *You didn't indicate any identifying client information*
 - 2. Scheduling monthly home visits over email is acceptable as long as clients' names or other identifying information are not indicated.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Concerns with TFI Family Connections LLC Workers and Policies

Any concerns that you, as a foster family, have should be addressed with your assigned Foster Care Services Worker first. Very often, clear communication between the worker and the foster family can clear up concerns between you and the worker. If you are uncomfortable talking directly with your worker, you may contact the area Foster Care Services Supervisor. If that contact does not meet your need, you may contact the Foster Care Services Regional Director and then the Vice President of Foster Care Services.

Another option that is available to you is the Concern/Complaint Line. The phone number for that line is **1-877-942-2239**.

TFI Family Connections LLC maintains an open-door policy so that foster families can contact anyone who works for the agency, including the CEO. We do ask that you work to resolve your concern first with your worker and then work up through the levels explained in this procedure. Generally, those in the field have a working knowledge of your situation and should be able to resolve your concern in the most expedient manner.

Concerns with DHS

When you have a concern about services provided by DHS, you should first talk with your TFI Foster Care Worker. Your Foster Care will work as your voice to resolve your concern with DHS. If your concern involves several departments, you should call the concern and complaint line to voice your concern.