

2011 Foster Parent Implementation Plan DCFS Cook Central Region

Foster parents have the right to:

1. Dignity, Respect & Consideration
Be treated with dignity, respect and consideration.
2. Training
Be provided Pre-Service and ongoing training to meet needs and improve skills.
3. Contact with the Agency for Support
Be informed on how to contact the placement agency for assistance to access support services.
4. Timely Financial Reimbursement
Receive timely financial reimbursement for care included in the service plan.
5. Placement Plan Information
Be provided with information about the agency's plan for placement that includes supporting family relationships and cultural heritage.
6. Investigation of Alleged Licensing Violations
Be provided fair, timely and impartial investigations, including mediation and/or administrative review and explanations of decisions concerning licensing.
7. Additional Information about Children
Receive additional or necessary information relevant to the child's care.
8. Information Given About Children at or Prior to Placement
Be given information concerning a child.
9. Notification of Scheduled Meetings
Be notified of scheduled meetings concerning the child and decisions made concerning the child. To have input concerning the plan of services for the child and to communicate with other professionals who work with the child.
10. All Necessary Information on Child/Family
Have any information the caseworker has about the child and his family that pertains to the child's needs and care.
11. Written Notice of any Placement Changes
Receive written notice of any plans to end placement, along with the reason, and appeal information.
12. Notification of Court Hearings
Receive timely notification of court hearings.
13. Placement Option for Children Re-entering Care
Be considered as a placement option for foster children formerly in their care.
14. Timely Access to Service Appeal System
Have access to an agency's or DCFS's appeals process without retaliation.
15. Foster Parent Hotline Information
Be informed of the Foster Parent Hotline and information on reporting staff misconduct.

Foster parents have the responsibility to:

1. Open Communication
Openly communicate and share information about the child with the child welfare team.
2. Confidentiality
Respect the confidentiality of information about foster children and their families.
3. Advocating for Children in Care
Advocate for children in their care.
4. Treating Children & Families with Dignity and Respect
Treat children in their care and their families with dignity, respect and consideration.
5. Foster Parent Strengths & Weaknesses
Recognize their own strengths, limitations and support needs when considering placement of a child.
6. Affiliations with Foster Parent Associations
Be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent groups in improving the quality of care.
7. Foster Parent Training Needs
Assess their on-going individual training needs and take action to meet those needs.
8. Strategize to Prevent Placement Disruption
Develop and implement strategies to prevent placement disruptions, and to provide support if preventative strategies fail and disruption occurs.
9. Acknowledge & Minimize Stress
Know the impact that foster parenting has on individuals and the family and minimize the resulting stress as much as possible.
10. Promote Foster Parenting Positively
Know the rewards and benefits of foster parenting and promote the experience in a positive way.
11. Roles, Rights & Responsibilities of Child Welfare Team
Know the roles, rights and responsibilities of foster parents, other child welfare professionals, the child and the child's family.
12. Mandated Reporter Responsibility
Know their role as a mandated reporter of suspected child abuse/neglect. Know the policy regarding allegations against foster parents.
13. Administrative Case Reviews and Court Hearings
Understand the purpose of and participate in administrative case reviews, service plans and court processes, according to their designated role.
14. Appeals Systems
Know the child welfare agency's appeal procedure for foster parents and their rights.
15. Maintain Accurate & Complete Records
Maintain accurate and relevant records regarding the child's progress and history and follow agency procedures and regulations.
16. Communication with Subsequent Caregiver
Share information about the child's adjustment with a subsequent caregiver, whether it is the parent or another substitute caregiver.
17. Cultural Sensitivity
Respect and maintain a child's cultural needs and support relationships with his own family.

RIGHTS

1) Dignity, Respect & Consideration

Be treated with dignity, respect and consideration as professional child welfare team members.

- Strategies to ensure that foster parents are treated with dignity, respect and consideration as professional child welfare team members

DCFS recognizes that foster parents require competencies—specific knowledge and skills—to effectively work with neglected and abused children who have been separated from their parents/families. Foster parents must also work effectively as partners with the various child welfare professionals for the benefit of children in care.

The Department requires foster parents to complete the Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training to assist them in evaluating their competencies and how to be a part of the professional child welfare team. The Department continuously offers additional training classes in the region and materials for in-home use to promote ongoing learning and further development of skills, knowledge and competencies.

Foster parents' capabilities, preferences and utilization are assessed in partnership with the licensing worker during the initial and ongoing licensing process. The assessment helps make placements that consider and respect the foster parents' strengths—a combination of their capabilities and preferences.

Information regarding a child prior to placement and additional information *thereafter* respects the foster parents' role as members of the professional child welfare team and their ability to make informed decisions regarding a child in their home. Foster parents are notified of and invited to meetings, staffings and hearings for their input on the child.

Cook Central staff is expected to return phone calls within 24 business hours. Foster parents are encouraged to contact the caseworker's supervisor when they do not receive a timely response from the caseworker.

Monthly in-person contact is mandated between the caseworker and foster parent and by telephone as needed. More frequent contacts occur when the child has other needs or services in place (mentors, in-home counselors, parent-child visitation). Worker compliance with monthly contacts is tracked and reviewed by supervisors and management.

Licensing workers and foster parent support specialists are available for additional support or direction.

Monthly Foster Parent Advisory Council Meetings are held for information sharing, training, networking and support. The meetings are the 4th Tuesday of each month, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Cook Central distributes a telephone directory of regional staff telephone numbers annually along with a copy of the implementation plan. The telephone log includes contacts such as: managers, educational advisors, crisis assistance, payment line and the advocacy office (attachment a).

The region mails customer satisfaction surveys annually to foster parents for input on their experiences, both satisfactory and unsatisfactory.

2) Training

Be provided pre-service and ongoing training to meet needs and improve skills.

- Minimum Standardized Pre-Service Training per DCFS Rule 402

The region offers a variety of Pre-Service training locations both on the west side of the city and in the nearby western suburbs such as Oak Park and River Forest. Weekday and weekend schedules are available year round to complete the 27-hour requirement for licensure that is mandated per DCFS Rule 402. The licensing workers provide the schedule to foster parents and submit the enrollment request to the Office of DCFS Training via *e-mail*. The schedule can also be seen on the Department web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs).

- PRIDE or other DCFS approved training

The 27-hour training for licensure requires attendance to Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE classes. Applicants interested in caring for related children are required to only complete the first 6 hours of the PRIDE classes, though completion of the entire training is recommended. Other DCFS approved training for relative caregivers includes viewing the 6 hours of PRIDE training sessions 1 & 2 on video or DVD. Applicants who complete 6 hours of PRIDE training are eligible to care for related children only.

Training required for license renewal—In-Service training modules—are scheduled at the PRIDE training locations and are available on DVD. Additional In-Service training hours can be obtained through DVDs, books and cassettes through the Lending Library catalog. Other DCFS approved training for license renewal includes relevant topics such as CPR and First Aid.

The region's licensing workers can provide class schedules, DVDs and the Lending Library catalog to foster parents. The information is also available on the DCFS website and in the Department newsletters that are mailed to caregivers. Foster families can register themselves for In-Service training by contacting the

DCFS Training Unit at 877/800-3393 or ask for assistance from their licensing worker *or support specialist*. They can also access the Virtual Training Center at www.dcfstraining.org.

Pre-Service and In-Service classes and materials are available in Spanish.

- Co-training approach

Agency staff and foster parents are all eligible for the same Pre-Service and In-Service trainings. Both staff and foster parents attend the monthly regional Foster Parent Advisory Council meeting trainings. The region and the advisory council together develop an annual training calendar for the Advisory Council meetings that is mailed to foster parents and posted in the lobbies of both regional offices (attachment b). Additionally, regional agency staff participates in the final session of the PRIDE training as panel members to provide input into agency operations and to answer foster parent questions.

- Mutual assessment tool

The Foster Home Utilization Assessment is a form that helps licensing workers and foster parents mutually determine training needs based on the children currently in placement. The Utilization Form is completed by the region's licensing workers annually at minimum. The form asks about the individual children in the home, their ages, their adjustment behaviors and the foster parents' overall response to the children. The assessment helps staff and foster parents select relevant training to the children in their care.

- Training commensurate with type of care provided

An expanded capacity license to allow foster homes to care for more than 6 children requires the completion of additional training hours. To maintain the expanded capacity license, foster parents are required to complete 9 hours of approved training each calendar year beginning with the year the expanded capacity license is issued.

The agency may require foster families to complete additional training in relation to the particular needs of children to be placed or already in their care. Children with medical, behavioral and/or psychological problems are examples that may require foster parents to complete specialized training.

Training requirements are discussed by licensing workers with foster parents at each annual and semi-annual licensing monitoring visit as documented on the Family Foster Home Licensing Monitoring Record signed by the licensing worker and foster parent at each visit. Discussion of this topic is confirmed by the foster parent's initials and signature on the monitoring form during monitoring visits. The region's licensing team mails a copy of the signed monitoring form to the

foster parents soon after the visit following supervisory review and approval.

- Evidence of training schedule/calendar

The region develops an annual training calendar for the Advisory Council meeting trainings (attachment b). The schedule is mailed to foster parents and posted in the lobbies of both regional offices.

3. Contact with the Agency for Support

Be informed on how to contact the placement agency for assistance to access support services.

- 24-hour, 7-day availability of emergency support

The region's foster parent support specialists are accessible 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. The Department also has an emergency/after-hours telephone number (773/538-8800) for 24-hour assistance. Cook Central annually distributes with a copy of the implementation plan a telephone directory that includes the telephone numbers for 24-hour support and other emergency contacts (attachment a).

- Established method for accessing support services (e.g. System of Care, staff phone numbers and on-call schedules)

The region's telephone directory provides easy access to Department staff and support services. The regional phone log lists various support services such as System of Care provider, education advisors, regional nurse, payment line, advocacy office and other emergency contacts (attachment a). An updated phone log is handed out to foster parents annually along with the Implementation Plan. Department staff can provide the directory to foster parents upon request.

The region's licensing workers provide a folder to foster parents at initial licensure with a form that encourages the foster parents to write down important telephone numbers such as caseworker, supervisor, licensing worker, foster parent support specialist and the after-hours number (attachment c).

Records to be maintained is a licensing standard (section 402.26) listed on the Foster Family Home Licensing Monitoring form that Cook Central staff are obligated to discuss at each annual and semi-annual monitoring visit with foster parents. Records should include the telephone numbers of persons to contact in case of emergency.

Discussion of this topic is confirmed by the foster parent's signature on the monitoring form during monitoring visits. The region's licensing supervisor reviews and also signs the monitoring form after the visit to document her

approval. The licensing team’s clerical then mails a copy of the signed monitoring form to the foster parents for their records.

4. Timely Financial Reimbursement

Receive timely financial reimbursement for care included in the service plan.

- Regular board payment (explain payment schedule)

Board payments are made on a monthly basis to licensed foster parents approved and supervised by DCFS to provide care for a child for whom the agency has legal responsibility. Payments are mailed directly from DCFS according to a set schedule typically during the third week of each month. Licensed foster parents providing traditional foster care receive the following board rates:

Licensed Homes (Relative & Traditional Home Care)

Age of Child	Board	Clothing	Allowance	Total Rate/month
0 - 11 mo.	\$ 335.00	\$ 37.00	\$ 12.00*	\$ 384.00
1 - 4 years	\$ 337.00	\$ 42.00	\$ 13.00*	\$ 392.00
5 - 8 years	\$ 329.00	\$ 56.00	\$ 14.00	\$409.00
9 - 11 years	\$ 346.00	\$ 65.00	\$ 24.00	\$ 435.00
12 and over	\$ 354.00	\$ 74.00	\$ 43.00	\$ 471.00

Personal Allowance for children age 4 years and under is to be used by foster parents for incidentals (toys, rattles, etc.), which become the property of the child.

For children for whom the Department is legally responsible who are residing in a home of an unlicensed relative caregiver, the Department will pay only the standard of need established by the Illinois Department of Human Services, currently set at \$310 a month in the Cook County region.

A foster care payment begins the day a child is placed in the foster home. Foster parents will receive a check for the previous month. For example, if a child is placed on October 15, the foster parent will receive the first board payment during the third week of November. The amount will be for days October 15 – 31. A full board payment amount will be received during the third week of December for the month of November.

Board payments are initiated by completion of the Authorization for Payment form that is completed by the caseworker. The Department’s Placement Clearance Desk must be called by the caseworker prior to any placement for approval. Once a clearance confirmation number is obtained, it is valid for only 24 hours; the placement must be made within that 24-hour period. The payment

form is then called into or submitted via fax to the Case Assignment Unit. Any placement move requires the same action by the caseworker.

The caseworker should leave a carbon copy of the payment form with the foster parent when placing the child as a receipt and to document the child's proof of residence.

- Payment for additional services, such as respite and camp

Children are eligible for payment of additional services that promote social development and cultural enrichment. Specifics of what DCFS will pay for and under what circumstances are detailed in DCFS Rule Part 359 Authorized Child Care Payments available *in the Foster Parent Handbook provided at PRIDE training and on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcf)* or by request.

Cook Central region also provides camp vouchers to foster parents each year to enroll children in summer day camp at their local park district. Foster parents are notified via mail to contact the foster parent support specialist or the local DCFS office to obtain the vouchers.

Payments for other services include emergency caretaker services or respite. Respite care is subject to approval, but provides short-term payment to an alternative caregiver when the foster parent needs assistance or is unavailable to care for the children due to an emergency or family crisis. Foster parents should contact the region's foster parent support specialists for assistance with respite care.

Training on DCFS Rule Part 359, Authorized Child Care payments, regarding payments, programs and reimbursements is provided annually in the Cook Central region at one of the Foster Parent Advisory Council meetings. DCFS staff and foster parent support specialists can also discuss with foster parents the variety of payments that they and a child in their care may be eligible for.

- Timely assessment and payment commensurate with type of care provided

The majority of foster children are considered as traditional foster care cases, cared for by families receiving the licensed reimbursement rates shown above. Some foster children, however, have severe behavioral, emotional or medical problems that require foster parents to have additional training and/or competencies. In those cases, the child's case may be referred to an agency that has a specialized program to meet his or her identified needs. Foster parents of a specialized child receive additional monthly compensation based on the child's needs.

When a child exhibits behaviors that have prompted additional resources to be put in place to help remedy or modify the behaviors, and more intervention is still needed, the child is considered for specialization. The caseworker requests a Child and Youth Investment Team (CAYIT) meeting. The CAYIT schedules a staffing involving the foster parent, child and other child welfare team members to review the information. If the CAYIT decision supports the request, the child is matched with a specialized agency that will provide the needed services. Once an agreed upon date for case transfer is set, the Department provides the transfer documents to the receiving agency. The receiving agency submits a new payment form that will change the child's service code type, and the monthly board rate for that child is adjusted accordingly.

For those children who have some special needs but who reside in traditional foster care can still qualify for specialized service fees. Specifics of what DCFS will pay for and under what circumstances are detailed in DCFS Rule Part 359 Authorized Child Care Payments available on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs) or by request.

- Method of resolving payment problems: contact staff, payment unit or advocacy office. Grievance process also a method.

If there are payment questions or problems, the foster parent can contact the caseworker, supervisor, licensing worker or foster parent support specialist for assistance. Foster parents can also contact the Payment Line at 800/525-0499. Staff at the Payment Line can answer questions during normal business hours. An automated message is available 24 hours a day with information about when the last check was mailed and when to expect the next one.

The telephone number for the Payment Line is listed on the region's telephone log (attachment a).

5. Placement Plan Information

Be provided with information about the agency's plan for placement that includes supporting family relationships and cultural heritage.

- Foster parent participation in the development of the child's service plan

Caseworkers are expected to develop the child's portion of the service plan with the foster parent's input. Foster parent input is important because many of the child's service plan tasks are obligations that the foster parent must help fulfill, such as medical care, counseling or other services and family visitation schedules. Foster parents document their input into the plan by signing the child's portion of the plan.

Foster parents are mailed an Administrative Case Review (ACR) invitation/notification through the ACR department. Foster parents can participate

in the review and approval of the child's service plan when they attend the scheduled ACR. Foster parents sign the service plan and are given a copy upon completion of the ACR.

- Timely notification of changes in service plan/permanency goal, including method of notification

Changes to the service plan and permanency goals are made at the Administrative Case Review (ACR). The plan and goal is also reviewed and approved at court during permanency hearings. Foster parents are invited to attend ACRs and permanency hearings.

If foster parents are not present to obtain a copy of the plan and to learn firsthand about changes, caseworkers are obligated to inform the foster parents as soon as possible because a child's goal directly impacts the foster parents' role and obligations. The caseworker provides a copy of the child's plan to the foster parents via mail or in-person so they are aware of the child's visitation plan and specific tasks and obligations scheduled for the next six months. Information can also be given to foster parents via telephone contact.

- Foster parent participation/input into plan for visitation/communication with the child's birth family

Caseworkers are expected to develop the child's portion of the service plan with foster input because many of the child's service plan tasks are obligations that the foster parent must help fulfill. The visitation plan schedule must be done in coordination with the child's availability due to school and service obligations. Foster parents must ensure a child's availability and readiness for scheduled visitation at minimum, but are being encouraged to more actively participate in family visitation & communication with parents.

Cook Central licensing workers together with foster parents must complete a Caregiver Self-Assessment as Reunification Prepared form at initial licensure and each renewal. The form informs and assesses foster parents' willingness to support family reunification and participate in family visits and activities.

6. Investigation of Alleged Licensing Violations

Be provided fair, timely and impartial investigations, including mediation and/or administrative review and explanations of decisions concerning licensing.

- Policy describing the investigation of alleged violations and demonstration of how the agency disseminates that information to foster parents

The purpose of a licensing complaint investigation in a licensed facility is to determine if there has been a violation of licensing standards and/or the Child

Care Act. A complaint may originate from any source and is routed to the licensing unit responsible for monitoring the home. When the Department is contacted by an individual through the State Central Register or Hotline number, the region's licensing supervisor is notified by the Central Office of Licensing in Springfield via electronic mail. The supervisor then assigns a licensing worker on her team to investigate the allegations.

In Cook Central region, the licensing worker assigned to complete the investigation is usually the same licensing worker that has been monitoring the home. The Cook Central supervisor meets with the worker to discuss the complaint allegations and the plan of action to be taken.

The licensing worker is responsible for conducting and documenting non-accusatory, fact-finding interviews with all persons identified as having information relevant to the allegation(s). The licensing worker allows the licensee an opportunity to discuss the allegations and present his/her side of the story. Complaint investigations are documented on Licensing Complaint Report forms. When completing the investigation, the licensing worker must indicate every section of DCFS licensing rules and/or the Child Care Act alleged to be in violation or to have been violated. Information should be specific and documented on the Complaint forms.

Depending on the nature of the allegations, an investigation can be a stand-alone licensing investigation or a concurrent investigation with the Division of Child Protection (DCP). A stand-alone investigation is where only violations of licensing rules are alleged. When the allegations are related to abuse or neglect, the licensing unit conducts their complaint investigation concurrently with DCP after the 15th day of the initiated DCP investigation.

Complaint investigations are addressed during the Pre-Service training. The professional panel members that participate in session 9 of the Pre-Service training usually include a licensing worker and a DCP investigator; first-hand information is given to foster parents at this time and questions answered. Also, licensing workers can answer questions regarding complaint investigations at any time. Additional information on complaint investigations can be found in the Foster Parent Handbook provided at Pre-Service training and available on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs).

The region has scheduled training on complaint investigations to be conducted during one of the Advisory Council meetings in 2010.

- Person of foster parent's choosing present during the investigation

When the foster parent is contacted by the licensing worker in relation to the investigation, the foster parent has the right to have a person of his/her choosing during the investigation interviews. The foster parent can delay the investigation

interview up to 4 hours to arrange for the presence of a foster parent support specialist, other advocate or friend. The licensing worker and foster parent should agree on a time within the 4 hours when the licensing worker should return to complete the interview. The requested delay is limited to the interview and not the inspection of the home. The licensing worker shall request permission to enter and observe the premises when the complaint alleges children are at risk due to environmental conditions in the home.

Cook Central region's foster parent support specialists have experience with supporting and advising foster parents during complaint investigations and are available upon foster parent request.

- Specified time frames for investigation as required by DCFS rule

The licensing worker shall begin a stand-alone licensing complaint investigation within 2 business days of the Department having received the complaint. The worker shall complete the investigation within 30 days; however, the investigation may be extended for an additional 30 days with supervisory approval.

In the case of a concurrent investigation that involves the Division of Child Protection (DCP), the licensing worker does not initiate a licensing complaint investigation until:

- DCP makes a decision to *unfound* the allegations if done within 14 days or
- after the DCP investigation becomes formal, meaning 14 days later.

Again, the licensing worker shall complete the investigation within 30 days from when it is initiated; however, the investigation may be extended for an additional 30 days with supervisory approval.

The licensing worker contacts the DCP investigator and supervisor via electronic mail identifying him/herself as the worker and need for notice when the decision is made to unfound the investigation or when the investigation becomes formal, 14 days later. Cook Central licensing workers have access to the investigation on the DCFS SACWIS database and are instructed to check it regularly for progress of the investigation.

Upon completion of the complaint investigation, the licensing worker makes a finding of *substantiated* or *unsubstantiated* in regard to each allegation of the complaint as they relate to licensing standards. All investigation documentation is submitted to the supervisor for review and approval. Within 5 days of supervisory approval of the findings, the licensing worker notifies the licensee in writing of each finding and if any follow-up action is required.

If the case was a concurrent investigation with DCP, licensing sends a *Notice to Guardian Ad Litem of Completed Foster Home Licensing Complaint Investigation* to the assigned guardian ad litem of the involved child or children.

- Procedure for appealing negative results/corrective action plans

If a substantiated finding is made, the letter offers the foster parent the option of a supervisory review in which the licensee can meet with the licensing supervisor and worker to dispute the findings and/or the expectations of a corrective action plan. A corrective action plan lists the actions to be taken by the foster parent to correct the violations and the time frames for correcting them.

A supervisory review should be arranged:

- when the foster parent disputes that the violation(s) occurred;
- when the foster parent disagrees with the application or interpretation of a section of the Child Care Act or a licensing standard;
- when the licensing supervisor believes a review is needed to address ongoing issues.

The time frame for requesting a supervisory review is 10 days. The supervisor's name, telephone number and timeframe for requesting the review are listed in the letter that is mailed or hand-delivered to the foster parent. If a review is requested, it will be scheduled within 14 days of the request.

The Cook Central licensing supervisor must review and approve all investigations and related correspondence.

7. Additional Information about Children

Receive additional or necessary information relevant to the child's care.

- Caseworker training in ALL information to be disclosed

Information sharing is vital to ensuring that a child's needs are met and the foster parent has the competencies to meet that child's needs. All DCFS caseworkers are trained in Core, Clinical Practice, specialized trainings and on current policy guides that dictate required casework practices. Policy guide 2007.04 specifies all of the information that must be disclosed to foster parents at the time of placement and thereafter.

Confidentiality training is provided annually at the region's Foster Parent Advisory Council meeting to staff and foster parents to address the limitations on which information can be shared and with whom. The training is given by the region's lead legal counsel, James Greve.

Foster parents in partnership with the professional child welfare team will receive additional information relevant to the child during participation in case-related meetings such as Administrative Case Reviews (ACRs), Child and Youth Investment Team (CAYIT) meetings, clinical staffings, Child and Family Team meetings and court hearings.

- Description of how caseworkers are held accountable for sharing the information

Worker accountability is dictated by the policy guide and the requirement to file required forms and documents in the case record. Supervisory review and approval is routine and also addressed during individual worker supervision. Quarterly peer reviews and Quality Assurance reviews track worker compliance. Supervisors can access case notes, case contacts and various other compliance reports through the Department's SACWIS database. Chronic reports inform staff of missing documentation.

Staff has detailed performance objectives that include accountability and are rated annually as part of their employee evaluations.

Customer satisfaction surveys mailed to foster parents provide feedback regarding caseworker responsibility and accountability.

8. Information Given About Children at or Prior to Placement

Be given information concerning a child.

- DCFS has clear rules and procedures as to what information to share and how to share it with foster parents

Policy guide 2007.04 specifies the:

- information that must be given to foster parents when a child is placed
- time frames for providing additional information and
- caseworker's need to document that the foster parent was given the information.

Information relevant to the proper care of the child is to be given to the foster parent in writing. *Sharing Information with the Caregiver* form dictates what information is to be provided. Both the caseworker and foster parent sign and date the form. One copy is left with the foster parent and another is filed in the child's section of the case record. The information provided is to include:

- case information and history;
- health and medical;
- educational information and history;

- placement history; and
- behavior/social information.

When all of the information is not available at that time, the worker shall provide the information as it becomes available. The caseworker must obtain the foster parent's signature on this form to verify that the information has been provided on a timely basis. Within 10 days of the child's placement, the worker shall obtain signed verification of receipt of the information from the foster parent on the *Sharing Information with the Caregiver* form. A copy of all of the same information must be forwarded to the guardian ad litem for the child.

Foster parents can also contact the caseworker and supervisor with additional information or when required information has not yet been provided to them.

- Staff are trained in all pertinent policies and procedures

DCFS staff training is mandated and continuous. Much training is computer-based including webinars and self-paced trainings on the virtual training web site. Staff are notified of all new policies and procedures through announcements made on the Department's internal web site. Paper copies of all new policies and procedures are distributed to the regional offices. Supervisors ensure caseworker completion of mandated trainings and practice of new or changed policy guides that dictate casework responsibilities.

- Description of how caseworkers are held accountable for sharing the information

Worker accountability is dictated by the policy guide and the requirement to file the *Sharing Information with the Caregiver* form in the case record. Supervisory review and approval is routine and also addressed during individual worker supervision. Quarterly peer reviews and Quality Assurance reviews track worker compliance. Supervisors can access case notes, case contacts and various other compliance reports through the Department's SACWIS database. Chronic reports inform of missing documentation.

Staff has detailed performance objectives that include accountability and are rated annually as part of their employee evaluations.

Customer satisfaction surveys mailed to foster parents provide feedback regarding caseworker responsibility and accountability.

9. Notification of Scheduled Meetings

Be notified of scheduled meetings concerning the child and decisions made concerning the child. To have input concerning the plan of services for the child and to communicate with other professionals who work with the child.

- Foster parents are notified and encouraged to participate in all meetings/staffings about children in their care

Foster parents are encouraged to be active participants at court dates, Administrative Case Reviews (ACRs), clinical staffings, Individual Educational Planning (IEP) or other educational meetings, Child and Family Team meetings, Child and Youth Investment Team (CAYIT) meetings and any other consultations that involve children placed in their home.

For any meeting involving DCFS, foster parents are notified in person, via regular or certified mail and/or by telephone, usually by the worker or supervisor. The ACR division notifies foster parents of all administrative case reviews via mail. Foster parents are notified of the regional Foster Parent Advisory Council meetings each month by mail and/or by telephone by the foster parent support specialists. Licensing workers also notify foster parents who are in need of In-Service training hours of the council meetings.

- Foster parents are informed of decisions made by agencies and courts

Foster parents are invited to attend all staffings, meetings, ACRs and court hearings. Caseworkers provide this information via telephone or mail. If foster parents are not present to learn firsthand about decisions made at staffings, meetings, ACRs or court, caseworkers and/or supervisors are obligated to inform the foster parents of the results as soon as possible to keep them abreast of current information and because a child's service planning and permanency goal directly impacts the foster parents' role and obligations.

Caseworkers inform foster parents about the outcome of all court hearings and when the next court date is scheduled. In regards to an ACR, the worker provides a copy of the child's plan to the foster parents via mail or in-person so they are aware of the child's visitation plan and specific tasks and obligations scheduled for the next six months. Information can also be given to foster parents via telephone contact.

Policy dictates worker accountability for this responsibility. The supervisor reviews case record documentation, case entry notes and SACWIS database reports for compliance. Supervisors also conduct case supervision with each worker to verify documentation of information sharing with foster parents. The region's quarterly peer reviews and Quality Assurance reviews also address and evaluate information sharing. Staff has detailed performance objectives that include accountability and are rated annually as part of their employee evaluations.

- Foster parents are encouraged to give input into case planning and input is given full consideration

Caseworkers are expected to develop the child's portion of the service plan with the foster parent's input. Foster parent input is important because many of the child's service plan tasks are obligations that the foster parent must help fulfill, such as medical care, counseling or other services and family visitation schedules. Foster parents document their input into the plan by signing the child's portion of the plan and/or by participating in the review. Foster parents are notified of the scheduled review by mail directly from the DCFS ACR division. Foster parent presence is vital as a professional child welfare team member as they can provide valuable insight into the child's day-to-day actions and behaviors.

- Foster parents are encouraged to communicate with all child and family team members

Foster parents' input is invaluable as they usually have the closest contact with and perspective into a child's behaviors. Foster parents are informed that the primary contacts should be the caseworker and supervisor. Foster parents are also advised to contact their licensing worker or one of the region's foster parent support specialists for additional support or advice.

Foster parents are equipped with relevant regional telephone numbers on the directory to encourage accessible communication with any of the child welfare team members, including the regional education advisors, nurse, management staff, etc. (attachment a). Notification of meetings and foster parent input is vital to ensuring that a child's needs are met and the foster parent has the competencies to meet that child's needs.

10. All Necessary Information on Child/Family

Have any information the caseworker has about the child and his family that pertains to the child's needs and care.

- A description of information is given to foster parents at intake, and a prescribed method of disclosing information is utilized

Information sharing is vital to ensuring that a child's needs are met and the foster parent has the ability to meet that child's needs. Confidentiality always applies. Information relevant to the proper care of the child is to be given to the foster parent in writing at the time of the placement and should include known case and placement history, medical history, education history, a copy of the child's portion of the service plan if already developed, visitation arrangements and other pertinent background information that is essential to understanding the child's needs but that protects the rights of the child's family. The information provided is guided by policy guide 2007.04 as detailed in right #8. What information is given and how is guided by the form, *Sharing Information with the Caregiver*.

Department staff is trained on issues of confidentiality and what pertinent information about the biological family can be released and with whom. Confidentiality training is provided annually to staff and foster parents to address the limitations on information sharing. The training is given by the region's lead legal counsel, James Greve. DCFS staff can contact legal counsel James Greve in-person, via telephone or electronic mail with questions.

Licensing staff cover confidentiality during each monitoring visit and can answer questions. Respecting confidentiality is a licensing standard listed on the Family Foster Home Licensing Monitoring Record signed by foster parents and the licensing worker.

Additional information about confidentiality is found in the Foster Family Handbook and in the Foster Parent Law, both part of the PRIDE training materials and located on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcf). Department staff and support specialists can also provide confidentiality information.

- Ongoing sharing of information that is pertinent to the health and well-being of the child

Caseworkers are accountable for providing necessary information to foster parents for the proper care of the child at the time of placement and thereafter. Caseworkers are to inform foster parents of pertinent information about a child in an ongoing manner. Foster parents should also inform caseworkers or their supervisors of pertinent information regarding the child's health and well-being.

The region developed a Foster Parent Visit form that is distributed to foster parents with each year's implementation plan and upon request (attachment i). The form lists various topics of discussion that the foster parent should inquire about if the subject is not covered by the caseworker during in-home visits or telephone contacts. Examples include:

- Court issues—results of hearings, upcoming hearings, what is next?
- Recreational and social activities—child's hobbies and interests, how to access activities and payment issues.
- Administrative Case Review—foster parent input and participation. Review date, time and location. Permanency goal progress/changes.

During monthly and quarterly supervision between the caseworker and supervisor, case entry notes are reviewed to document that current information on the child and family is being shared with the foster parent. Supervisors can access notes and a full report on their workers case contacts that are recorded in the Department's SACWIS database.

As part of the effort to support family reunification, more foster families and parents should strive to develop a positive relationship; when a positive relationship exists between the foster parents and the parents, the child's family

may consent to the disclosure of additional information or provide additional information themselves.

11. Written Notice of any Placement Changes

Receive written notice of any plans to end placement, along with the reason, and appeal information.

- 14-day written notice (Not applicable for movements involving imminent risk)

When the Department makes a critical decision to move the child from one out-of-home placement to another, it will inform the foster parent or relative caregiver that the child will be moved to another placement and why. Unless there are concerns for the child's safety, the Department will notify the involved parties at least 14 days prior to the proposed move. The caseworker removing the child will give the caregiver a copy of the *Notice of Change of Placement*. Copies must be sent to the child's family and the child (through the child's representative, the guardian ad litem).

- Appeal information, including emergency review process (e.g. clinical reviews and hearings), is given to foster parents

If the foster parent or relative caregiver disagrees with the decision to change the child's placement, he or she may request a clinical placement review of the decision within three working days of the receipt of the *Notice of Change of Placement*. The clinical placement review can be requested by either phoning 312/633-3754 or faxing the *Notice* to DCFS at 312/633-4091. This information is included on the *Notice of Change of Placement*. Appeal process brochures explaining clinical placement reviews are available in the region's office lobbies, by request and on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs) (attachment d). The brochures are also provided to foster parents annually along with the implementation plan.

The purpose of the clinical placement review is to evaluate the current placement, the reason for the disruption or change of placement, the child's needs and the appropriateness and stability of the proposed placement.

When in disagreement with the final clinical placement review decision, the foster parent or relative caregiver may request a fair hearing through the Department's service appeal process as addressed in right #14.

In the event the Department has reason to believe the safety of the child is at imminent risk, the child will be removed immediately. An emergency review allows the Department to make a temporary decision based on a concern that imminent risk of harm may come to a child while your case is proceeding through the appeal process.

12. Notification of Court Hearings

Receive timely notification of court hearings.

- Method for notifying foster parents of hearings and their right to be heard

Caseworkers are the primary providers of information regarding all scheduled court hearings, reasons for the hearing, the outcome and the following court date. Notification can be written or verbal.

Foster parents have a right to be heard. Foster parent input is vital as they are the primary caregiver for the child and have valuable insight. The Cook Central region provides annual training on juvenile court and related issues during the October Foster Parent Advisory Council meeting.

Any foster parent not receiving notice of court hearings can contact the caseworker, the supervisor or other Department staff. Foster parents can also call the Office of the Public Guardian at 312/433-43300 or DCFS Legal at 312/633-3400. Both of these numbers are included in the region's telephone log (attachment a).

- Description of how caseworkers are held accountable for notifying foster parents

Worker notification to foster parents about scheduled hearings and their results are documented in the case file per policy. Case file documentation such as case notes and contacts are entered by the caseworkers into the Department's SACWIS database for accessible supervisory and managerial review. Hard copies of required documentation are filed in the case record. Supervisory review and approval is routine and also confirmed during individual worker supervision. Quarterly peer reviews and Quality Assurance reviews track worker compliance with policy and procedures. Various other compliance reports through the Department's SACWIS database are sent to the region. Chronic reports inform of missing documentation.

Staff has detailed performance objectives that include accountability and are rated annually as part of their employee evaluations.

Customer satisfaction surveys mailed to foster parents provide feedback regarding caseworker responsibility and accountability.

13. Placement Option for Children Re-entering Care

Be considered as a placement option for foster children formerly in their care.

- Method for checking past placement records

If a child re-enters the foster care system, the previous foster parents should be considered a placement option. DCFS staff can access the child's entire placement history via the CM-07 screen in the Department's database. Department staff can also interview the child about previous foster homes and contact licensing staff or utilize the database for contact information on foster parents. Staff can then contact previous caregivers to determine their availability and willingness to care for the child again.

- Process for determining best interest regarding placement decision

The best interest of a child is a guiding principle in all Department decisions. The assigned caseworker and supervisor assess a child's needs, how well the former foster parents met the child's needs in the past and the foster parents' ability to currently meet the child's needs. Subject to approval by the Department's placement clearance desk, a child can be approved for return to the former placement if deemed to be in the best interest of the child.

14. Timely Access to Service Appeal System

Have access to an agency's or DCFS's appeals process without retaliation.

- Documentation that an internal appeals system has been established and description of how it prohibits retaliation

The Department has a service appeal process (see attachment d). Service appeals are addressed in Pre-Service training and in the Foster Parent Handbook. If foster parents do not agree with a decision made or action taken by DCFS, they can challenge the decision or actions by filing an appeal. The most common service appeals in the region address removal of a child from a foster parent, denial of services or permanency goal changes.

The appeal should be a written request and submitted to: Administrative Hearings Unit, DCFS, 406 E. Monroe, Station 15, Springfield, IL 62701, 217/782-6655. The request should include your name, address, telephone and a statement about your desire to appeal and what you are appealing.

The service appeals brochures are *distributed annually to foster parents along with the implementation plan, provided at the conclusion of each Administrative Case Review (ACR)*, available in the region's office lobbies, available on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcf) and by request. *Foster parent support specialists are available to assist foster parents with obtaining and filing service appeals information.*

The region *has an* internal grievance procedure to attempt to resolve problems *not covered by the Service Appeal Process such as a lack of communication, lack of services or a violation of foster parents' rights and responsibilities.* The

foster parent grievance process is handled by a regional mediation committee, consisting of regional staff and a member of the Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council.

Brochures on the grievance process are available in the region's office lobbies and by request (see attachment e). A copy of the grievance brochure is attached to the Implementation Plan when distributed to foster parents each year. Awareness of the grievance procedure *is annually* covered in training at the Advisory Council meeting. *The grievance process brochure was updated, discussed and accepted by the foster parents in October 26, 2010.*

- Process for accessing the external DCFS appeals system when necessary

The foster parent is to be treated with respect and dignity in all situations. If a foster parent feels they are being retaliated against, they should report this to the caseworker's supervisor or higher up the chain of command. Foster parents can also contact the DCFS Advocacy Office at 800-232-3798 for assistance. The Office of Affirmative Action can be contacted in cases of alleged discrimination.

15. Foster Parent Hotline Information

Be informed of the Foster Parent Hotline and information on reporting staff misconduct.

- Training/brochures available on the Foster Parent Hotline and Office of Inspector General

Cook Central region's telephone directory that is distributed to foster parents *annually* includes the telephone number for the Office of Inspector General (OIG) (see attachment a). The OIG handles reports on staff misconduct that should be investigated. This resource is *addressed in the Foster Parent Handbook* given to foster parents during Pre-Service training.

The region's telephone directory also includes the numbers for the general information Foster Parent Hotline (800/624-KIDS or 800/624-5437). The Advocacy Office assists with a broader range of problems or complaints, and their number is also listed on the region's telephone log (800/232-3798 or 217/524-2029).

Office of the Inspector General and Advocacy Office brochures are available in the region's office lobbies. The brochures, information and telephone numbers are *listed in the Foster Parent Handbook*, on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcf) *or by request to Department staff.*

RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Open Communication

Openly communicate and share information about the child with the child welfare team.

- Training on type of communication and importance

Working as a Member of a Professional Team is addressed in session 1 of the Pre-Service training. Working as a Professional Team Member is one of the In-Service training modules offered as a class or on DVD. The training addresses team roles and how to advocate for a child in care.

Foster parents' input is invaluable as they usually have the closest contact with and perspective into a child's behaviors. Open communication is encouraged by regional staff. Foster parents are invited to staffings, meetings, reviews, hearings and trainings to solicit their input. Cook Central distributes a telephone directory of regional staff telephone numbers to foster parents to encourage open communication and access to any of the team members (see attachment a).

2. Confidentiality

Respect the confidentiality of information about foster children and their families.

- Initial and ongoing training on the importance of confidentiality

Confidentiality is addressed in the initial PRIDE training and by licensing staff during the licensing process and each monitoring visit. Respecting confidentiality is a licensing standard listed on the Family Foster Home Licensing Monitoring Record signed by foster parents and the licensing worker.

The Department's regional legal counsel, James Greve, provides training annually on confidentiality to foster parents and staff at one of the region's Advisory Council meetings. The previous confidentiality training was offered in October 2009.

Additional information about confidentiality is found in the Foster Family Handbook and in the Foster Parent Law, both part of the PRIDE training materials and both located on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs). Department staff and support specialists can also provide confidentiality information.

- Laws and regulations available to foster parents

Confidentiality is a licensing standard (section 402.24) that is discussed by the region's licensing workers during the initial licensing process and again at each monitoring visit. It is one of the standards listed on the *Foster Home Licensing Monitoring Record* signed by the licensing worker and foster parent at each visit.

Foster parents can access state laws, Department rules and confidentiality information on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs) and in the Foster Family Handbook (provided at PRIDE training and available on the web site). The region's telephone log (attachment a) also has the numbers for the DCFS legal department and the Advocacy Office if foster parents have questions about confidentiality.

3. Advocating for Children in Care

Advocate for children in their care.

- Educational Advocacy training available

The region offers *Educational Advocacy* training year round in a variety of locations both on the west side of the city and in the nearby western suburbs such as Oak Park and River Forest. Weekday and weekend schedules are available. Foster parents can obtain the schedule from their licensing worker, support specialist, or the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs). Foster parents can also contact the DCFS training unit directly at 877/800-3393.

Completing *Educational Advocacy* training is a licensing requirement for license renewal. At least one foster parent in each licensed home is required to complete the *Educational Advocacy* training.

- Court training available

The Department's regional legal counsel, James Greve, provides court training annually to foster parents and staff at one of the region's Advisory Council meetings, usually in October of each year.

- Service appeal brochures and training available

The Department has a service appeal process brochure (see attachment d). The brochure is available in the region's office lobbies, given out at the service appeal training, at the conclusion of each Administrative Case Review (ACR), and with the Foster Parent Implementation Plan when distributed to foster parents each year. The brochure is also found on the Department web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs). Foster parents can also request a copy of the brochure from Department staff.

The appeals system *is annually* covered in training at the Advisory Council meeting.

- Encouragement to participate in all staffings, including ACRs, CAYITs, IA activities, case conferences and court hearings

Foster parents are encouraged to be active participants at court dates, Administrative Case Reviews (ACRs), clinical staffings, Individual Educational Planning (IEP) or other educational meetings, Child and Family Team meetings, Integrated Assessment (IA) activities, Child and Youth Investment Team (CAYIT) meetings and any other consultations that involve children placed in their home.

The importance of participating in the various scheduled events is reinforced by DCFS staff, foster parent support specialists and the advisory council meetings. Foster parents are equipped with relevant regional telephone numbers to encourage accessible communication with any child welfare team members.

The following in-service trainings are also regularly offered in the region: *Child and Family Team Meetings for Caregivers; Integrated Assessment & Foster Parents; and Working as a Professional Team Member.*

4. Treating Children & Families with Dignity and Respect

Treat children in their care and their families with dignity, respect and consideration.

- Initial and ongoing training on this topic

The need to treat children and their families with dignity, respect and consideration is addressed in the initial PRIDE training and the In-Service training modules 2 and 5: *Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs and Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families.*

This need is also addressed by the region's licensing staff during the initial licensing process and each monitoring visit. Staff can answer foster parent questions or concerns regarding this topic.

- Monitoring by staff charged with case management

Casework staff communicates with children in care to determine how they are being treated and to ensure there are no violations of dignity, respect and consideration.

Licensing workers address the treatment of children at each monitoring visit by speaking with the foster parents and the children placed in the home. Discipline

of children is one of the standards (section 402.21) listed on the Foster Home Licensing Monitoring Record signed by the licensing worker and foster parent at each visit. Foster parents are prohibited from subjecting a child to derogatory remarks about him or his family.

The region's licensing workers also complete a *Caregiver Self-Assessment as Reunification Prepared* discussion with foster parents and complete the self-assessment form to address foster parent willingness and need to work with the child and his family by meeting them, sharing information with them and helping them remain involved. This can only occur if children and families are treated with dignity, respect and consideration.

5. Foster Parent Strengths & Weaknesses

Recognize their own strengths, limitations and support needs when considering placement of a child.

- Ongoing mutual assessment method

Together foster parents and the licensing worker review at least annually the license capacity and age range based on the foster parents' preferences, capabilities and utilization. Cook Central region's licensing staff developed a *Foster Home Utilization Assessment* as an ongoing mutual assessment tool to track the types of children that were being placed in the home. Since 2006, that form has been used statewide.

The region's licensing supervisor requires that the utilization form be completed at the annual monitoring visits and requires supervisory review and signature. The form can also be completed during semi-annual visits if there have been changes in placements. Requests for changes in license age range and capacity can occur at any time. License provisions are guided by licensing standards, but also by foster parent ability and interest.

- Training (offered/recommended) based on assessments

The utilization form addresses the children currently in placement and their adjustment behaviors. Specific training may be requested by the foster parent or recommended by the licensing worker based on a child's adjustment and behaviors in that home. Because renewal training is discussed at each monitoring visit, the utilization assessment can offer ideas on relevant training for the foster parent.

- Placements based on strengths

Placements should be based on the foster parents' strengths—a combination of their capabilities and preferences. During the initial and ongoing licensing

process, the foster parent's capabilities, preferences and utilization are addressed. The license capacity and age range are based on the assessment.

Cook Central region attempts to make good matches between children and foster parents to help ensure stable and long-term placements; this effort is best served when placements are made based on foster parent strengths and in recognizing their limitations. This information helps guide the type of children a particular home should or should not accept.

- Support needs addressed

Foster parents are continuously informed of the support resources available to them through regional staff, foster parent support specialists, trainings, informational mailings, the monthly advisory council meetings, the statewide foster parent newsletter and the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs).

The utilization form helps licensing staff and foster parents determine possible support needs based on the adjustment and behaviors of the children in the home. Licensing staff are also required to contact the caseworkers who have a child in the home before each monitoring visit to help ensure the foster parent is meeting the child's needs.

Any of the Cook Central staff or support specialists can assist foster parents in how to access needed supports.

6. Affiliations with Foster Parent Associations

Be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent groups in improving the quality of care.

- Internal support groups encouraged and information is provided to foster parents

The region hosts the monthly Foster Parent Advisory Council meetings—the 4th Tuesday of each month except December—and all foster parents and staff are invited. The meetings serve as a support group where foster parents can raise issues, ask questions and network with other foster parents and staff.

Reminders of the meetings are mailed to all caregivers each month and support specialists regularly call foster parents in need of training hours to encourage their participation.

- Affiliations with foster parent associations are encouraged and facilitated

The region invites foster parents to caregiver conferences and other child welfare-related conferences and institute days. Registration information is mailed to caregivers and regional staff. The support specialists also inform foster

parents of the conferences. The Department pays for travel expenses and for lodging expenses if the conference is more than 35 miles away.

7. Foster Parent Training Needs

Assess their on-going individual training needs and take action to meet those needs.

- Method and tool for assessing general training needs of foster parents

Licensing workers discuss the training requirement at each monitoring visit per licensing standard 402.12 as listed on the monitoring form that is initialed and signed by foster parents and the licensing worker. The *Foster Home Utilization Assessment completed by licensing workers annually at minimum* can offer ideas on relevant training needs for the foster parent. Specific training may be requested by the foster parent or recommended by the licensing worker based on a child's adjustment and behaviors in that home.

- Process for providing for identified needs

The region's licensing workers can provide class schedules, DVDs and the Lending Library catalog to foster parents. The information is also available on the DCFS website (www.state.il.us/dcfs), in the Department newsletters that are mailed to caregivers and through foster parent support specialists.

Foster families can register themselves for In-Service training by contacting the DCFS Training Unit at 877/800-3393 or ask for assistance from their licensing worker or support specialist.

8. Strategies to Prevent Placement Disruption

Develop and implement strategies to prevent placement disruptions, and to provide support if preventative strategies fail and disruption occurs.

- Method of early identification of children at risk of disrupting or creating disruption in the family

The Integrated Assessment (IA) program identifies clinical and service needs of children and their families at the time of case opening. Recommendations are documented in the IA report, provided to the case management team and incorporated into the service plan.

Proactive and consistent communication between the foster parent and case management team helps identify behaviors, incidents and issues of concern that may lead to disruption. Foster parents should promptly share information of any significance or unusual incident. Behavior Logs, provided by licensing staff and available upon request, help caregivers document behaviors and incidents.

If there are signs that a placement is beginning to disrupt, the caseworker will initiate an immediate referral for System of Care (SOC) services to provide early intervention and stabilization services. Caregivers who are already receiving SOC services can call the SOC hotline (800/345-9049) for crisis intervention 24 hours a day. Other intervention efforts include arranging Child and Family Team Meetings, clinical staffings, and/or Child & Youth Investment Team (CAYIT) meetings.

Foster parents are expected to give a 14-day notice in writing to the case management team prior to the removal of a child/youth from their home. The notice allows time for the team to implement preventative strategies and services in an effort to avoid a placement disruption. If the disruption cannot be remedied, the 14-day period allows time to locate an alternative placement.

Changes in child placements are tracked and reported to the regional teams as are unusual incident reports. The region's awareness of ongoing problems and of placement disruptions facilitates the need to implement strategies and services towards eliminating disruptions.

- Support for foster children and family members if preventative strategies fail

If preventative strategies fail the child will be moved to an alternative placement. The foster parents' licensing capacity, capabilities and preferences are mutually reassessed with the licensing worker in an effort to determine the number, types and ages of children to care for in the future to avoid placement disruptions.

- Training in purpose and availability of stabilization services through SOC

Pre-Service training addresses some of the support services available to children and families and that information can be found in the Foster Parent Handbook provided at Pre-Service training and on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs). In-Service classes and materials provide a variety of trainings on stabilization service resources: *Managing the Fostering Experience* addresses minimizing stresses and what supports are available; and *Working as a Professional Team Member* includes how to advocate for children in your care. Department staff can also be asked about what services are available and how to access them.

9. Acknowledge & Minimize Stress

Know the impact that foster parenting has on individuals and the family and minimize the resulting stress as much as possible.

- Training/methods to recognize and minimize stress factors

Pre-Service training attempts to help prepare foster parents for many of the experiences and stresses of foster parenting. Foster parents need to learn to recognize their preferences and abilities to foster specific types, ages and numbers of children. Caseworkers, licensing workers and support specialists communicate with one another to raise issues of concern and to support foster parents. Foster parents should be comfortable in raising issues of concern to staff's attention in order for these concerns to be addressed and Department support provided.

In-Service classes also encourage discussion and may assist foster parents in learning methods to relieve stress. Module 9 is available in the region or on DVD: *Managing the Fostering Experience* addresses minimizing stresses and what supports are available to foster parents.

Foster parents are encouraged to participate in the monthly Foster Parent Advisory Council meetings for networking, support and to hear and be heard by other caregivers and child welfare staff.

- Respite available

Respite care is available and can be requested by contacting the caseworker, licensing worker or support specialist. The support specialists will assist the foster parent in completing the necessary paperwork. This process is simplified if the foster parent has identified caregivers in advance for potential emergency situations. The region's pool of licensed foster parents can also be used as respite resources.

- "Voluntary hold" methods explained and understood

The region offers two types of voluntary hold options for foster parents who may want temporary relief from foster parenting. Foster parents can ask their licensing worker to place them on voluntary hold so that they are not contacted or available for placements until the foster parent wants to be available again. Licensing monitoring visits continue bi-annually.

A foster parent can also ask their licensing worker to put them on voluntary non-active hold status. The home must be in good standing, have no foster children in placement and maintain compliance with licensing standards, but will not receive licensing monitoring visits during the non-active hold. The foster parent can request that their license and availability for placements be reactivated at any time.

- Counseling and other supports available

The region's telephone log (attachment a) lists a variety of supports available to foster parents. The System of Care services can be contacted 24 hours a day for crisis concerns or assessment of a child in care. The Foster Parent Hotline or Advocacy Office is available during business hours to answer questions. Other supportive contacts include the region's nurse and education advisors.

Other services can be requested of DCFS staff to support the foster parent and child in times of need. Supports include counseling, respite care, recreational activities and tutoring or educational activities.

10. Promote Foster Parenting Positively

Know the rewards and benefits of foster parenting and promote the experience in a positive way.

- Foster parents are informed of events/activities that acknowledge and support foster parents and participation is encouraged

The region's Foster Parent Advisory Council members, the advisory council meetings, Local Area Network (LAN) workers, foster parent support specialists and licensing workers are all important sources of information regarding relevant events that acknowledge and support foster parents. The region informs foster parents by mail and/or telephone and invites them to the various activities.

The region's events that acknowledge and support foster parents include the monthly advisory council meetings, annual celebrations of Foster Parent Appreciation month each May, an annual back-to-school event, family tickets to the annual state fair, Thanksgiving turkeys, Christmas gift giveaways, invitations to caregiver and other child welfare-related conferences and on occasion, tickets to professional baseball games, community fairs and other family-oriented events.

The region's 2010 Foster Parent Appreciation month events included a family fun night and an evening dinner with live musical entertainment by an elementary school string ensemble. The region's annual back-to-school event was combined with the two other Cook County regions for a county-wide celebration. Transportation was provided to and from the event that was secured with the assistance of one of our foster parents and one of our support specialists; we are very grateful to both of them.

- Training in the public relations aspect of foster parenting is made available

Foster parents represent themselves and their roles daily to their neighbors, community and the broader child welfare community. They are recognized as being the best resource for recruiting additional foster parents by sharing their knowledge and experience and through expressing the rewards and benefits of foster parenting.

Current foster parents serve as role models to current and future applicants when they represent themselves in various roles: as PRIDE and In-Service training instructors; as members of the child welfare professionals panel during PRIDE training session 9; as regional support specialists; as members of the regional and statewide advisory councils; and as caregivers to children.

11. Roles, Rights & Responsibilities of Child Welfare Team

Know the roles, rights and responsibilities of foster parents, other child welfare professionals, the child and the child's family.

- Training and co-training with staff is required

The region's monthly advisory council meetings are *attended by* foster parents and staff. The meetings serve as a support group where foster parents learn about the roles, rights and responsibilities of foster parents, child welfare professionals, the child and the child's family. Trainings are offered at each meeting that benefits both foster parents and staff.

Teamwork Toward Permanence is one of the PRIDE training sessions. *Working as a Professional Team Member* is one of the In-Service training modules offered in the region available as a class or on DVD. The training addresses team roles and how to advocate for a child in care.

- Regular meetings with other team members are held and encouraged

The region's monthly advisory council meetings are *attended by* foster parents and staff for information sharing, support and training. Foster parents are notified by mail each month of the standing schedule—the 4th Tuesday of each month except December. *This year in particular we struggled with holding the meetings as our beloved Adrienne Welenc, Lead Foster Parent Support Specialist, passed away. Her absence took a toll on the people involved in the advisory council and a few meetings and trainings were not held. We have begun meeting again and revamping the advisory council. We look forward to successful collaboration and productive meetings and trainings with our region's foster parents.*

Foster parents are encouraged to be active participants at meetings, staffings and any other consultations with other team members that involve children placed in their home. Foster parents are notified in person, by mail and/or by telephone.

- Foster parents have a recognized voice within the agency's management organization

The region also has foster parents that currently serve on the Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council and actively participate in those meetings and activities. The council is mandated by the Foster Parent Law and provides foster parent input to DCFS. The regional advisory council facilitates communication to the statewide council. Foster parent attendance is always welcome to the regional and statewide meetings.

Foster parents are invited and encouraged to participate in the development of the region's annual implementation plan by attending the weekly workgroup meetings. All foster parents were contacted by telephone and invited to the October 26, 2010 advisory council meeting for their input and review of this year's implementation plan. They were all asked to provide written comments regarding the meeting and plan.

Additionally, foster parents are encouraged to use the region's telephone directory (see attachment a) to contact DCFS management staff as necessary.

12. Mandated Reporter Responsibility

Know their role as a mandated reporter of suspected child abuse/neglect. Know the policy regarding allegations against foster parents.

- Training—initial and ongoing—including mandated reporter responsibilities

Pre-Service PRIDE training addresses mandated reporter responsibility as a legal obligation for all licensed caregivers.

Mandated Reporter training is currently available online training through the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs).

- Written foster parent acknowledgement/contract

All foster parents must sign the Acknowledgement of Mandated Reporter Status form for their licensing worker during the initial licensing process and with each license renewal. Licensing workers explain that foster parents are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Foster parents should read and sign the form acknowledging understanding of this requirement.

A signed Acknowledgement of Mandated Reporter Status form is required to be in each licensing file in the region for every 4-year licensing period. Completion of the form is reviewed by the supervisor prior to approving licensing recommendations such as initial licensure and renewals and during quarterly peer reviews.

- Training involving allegations against foster parents and the applicable rules and regulations which govern the investigation of the allegations

Pre-Service training informs foster parents of the rules and regulations that govern investigations of alleged child abuse/neglect and alleged violations of rule against foster parents. The professional panel members that participate in session 9 of the Pre-Service training usually include a licensing worker and a DCP investigator; first-hand information is given to foster parents at this time and questions answered.

Also, licensing workers and foster parent support specialists can answer questions regarding complaint investigations at any time. Additional information on complaint investigations can be found in the Foster Parent Handbook.

13. Administrative Case Reviews and Court Hearings

Understand the purpose of and participate in administrative case reviews, service plans and court processes, according to their designated role.

- Training on the importance of participating
- Emphasis on foster parents taking an active role in planning for permanency goal through court hearings, Administrative Case Reviews, Integrated Assessments, etc.

Pre-Service training focuses on foster parents being a member of the professional child welfare team and session two of PRIDE training is *Teamwork Toward Permanence*. Teamwork includes active participation by the foster parents in the service planning, meetings, staffings and court processes for the child. *Working As a Professional Team Member* is one of the In-Service trainings available as a class or on DVD.

The region informs foster parents in trainings, at the advisory council meetings and at other child-related staffings about the importance of their participation as a professional team member. Regional trainings are provided annually to foster parents and staff at the Advisory Council meetings on Administrative Case Reviews (ACRs) and juvenile court processes. Other In-Service training available in the region includes *Integrated Assessment and Foster Parents* and *Child and Family Team Meetings for Caregivers*. The trainings address the expectation that the caseworker inform the foster parent of scheduled ACRs, Integrated Assessments, meetings and court hearings in an ongoing manner.

Cook Central's Foster Parent Visit form lists various topics of discussion that the foster parent should inquire about if the subject is not covered by the caseworker during in-home visits or telephone contacts (attachment i). Inquiring about administrative case reviews and court hearings are two of the topics that foster parents should actively pursue.

Caseworker accountability is dictated by policy guides and is reviewed during supervisory review and approval of forms, reports and case notes. Accountability is also demonstrated through preparation, documentation and information sharing during case reviews and court hearings.

14. Appeals Systems

Know the child welfare agency's appeal procedure for foster parents and their rights.

- Awareness of the Department's internal appeals systems and its utilization

Service appeals are addressed in Pre-Service training and in the Foster Parent Handbook. If foster parents do not agree with a decision made or action taken by DCFS, they can challenge the decision or actions by filing an appeal. The most common service appeals in the region address removal of a child from a foster parent, denial of services or permanency goal changes.

The appeal should be a written request and submitted to: Administrative Hearings Unit, DCFS, 406 E. Monroe, Station 15, Springfield, IL 62701, 217/782-6655. The request should include your name, address, telephone and a statement about your desire to appeal and what you are appealing.

The service appeals brochures (attachment d) are *distributed annually to foster parents along with the implementation plan, provided at the conclusion of each Administrative Case Review (ACR)*, available in the region's office lobbies, available on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs) and by request. *Foster parent support specialists are available to assist foster parents with obtaining and filing service appeals information.*

- Rights of foster parents are spelled out

The rights of foster parents are included in the annual implementation plan. Foster parent rights are discussed at the region's advisory council meetings during the months the plan is being revised. The rights can also be found in the foster parent handbook and on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs) *or by request to Department staff.*

15. Maintain Accurate & Complete Records

Maintain accurate and relevant records regarding the child's progress and history and follow agency procedures and regulations.

- Training is provided on the importance of maintaining complete records

The need to maintain complete records as one of the licensing standards and

expectations is addressed in Pre-Service training. The region's licensing workers also regularly address this need as part of the initial licensing process and ongoing at each annual and semi-annual monitoring visit with foster parents.

- Regulations/expectations are available in writing

Maintaining records of each child is a licensing standard (section 402.26) that is required of foster parents and is discussed during the initial licensing process and at each licensing monitoring visit. *Records to be Maintained* is one of the standards listed on the Family Foster Home Licensing Monitoring Record signed by the licensing worker and foster parent at each monitoring visit. Discussion of this topic is confirmed by the foster parent's initials and signature on the monitoring form during monitoring visits. The region's licensing workers may physically confirm that records are being maintained during visits.

The expectations are detailed in Part 402 Licensing Standards for Foster Family Homes that is provided to foster parents with their application for licensure and is part of the Pre-Service training materials. The information can also be found on the DCFS web site (www.state.il.us/dcfs) or by request to Department staff.

- Agency provides folder, notebook or case record for the storage of records

The Cook Central region's licensing workers provide an expanding file folder to each foster parent applicant during the licensing process to reinforce the importance of keeping a child's records together and organized. The folder also includes an insert to encourage the foster parent to keep important contact numbers in the folder such as caseworker, supervisor, foster parent support specialist and licensing worker (attachment c).

16. Communication with Subsequent Caregiver

Share information about the child's adjustment, through the child welfare team, with a subsequent caregiver, whether it is the parent or another substitute caregiver.

- Training on this expectation is offered

Information sharing is addressed in the Pre-Service PRIDE training. Foster parents are expected to share information on a child's daily living, behavior, education and other relevant information during contacts with DCFS staff and other child welfare team members. Staff is then equipped to share adjustment and needs information with subsequent caregivers based on what has been learned about the child.

The PRIDE training encourages foster parents to help the child create a life book with photos and other items that are reflections of the child's past and present.

Organized record keeping is a licensing standard addressed in training and routinely discussed at licensing monitoring visits.

All relevant documentation about the child, including his life book, should follow him to subsequent placements whether it is another foster family or a return home to the parent.

17. Cultural Sensitivity

Respect and maintain a child's cultural needs and support relationships with his own family.

- Initial and ongoing training is encouraged and made available

Learning how to support a child's cultural identity and connections to family, community and culture are addressed in the Pre-Service PRIDE training as these are foster parent obligations related to licensing standards and vital to a child's well-being.

Two In-Service trainings are regularly offered in the region that address cultural sensitivity: *Transcultural Parenting* and *Promoting Children's Personal & Cultural Identity*. The lending library catalog also offers training materials about cultural diversity and supporting relationships.

- Internal and external resources are made accessible or available

The Pre-Service PRIDE training promotes exposing a child to their culture at every opportunity. A primary factor to this exposure is through supporting family relationships. Much of this is done through active participation in child-family visits and other in-person contacts such as shared parenting activities: attending medical appointments, school conferences and Child & Family Team meetings together.

Foster parents can use external methods to develop cultural sensitivity as well. Learn together about the child's culture through books, museums, music and food. Expose the child to members of his community of origin. Opportunities to develop foster parent cultural sensitivity and a child's cultural identity are many.