Department of Children and Family Services Pre-Service Training: A Journey Home

Building Partners, Teachers and Professional Caregivers

Participant’s Guide
Interested in learning more about becoming a foster parent or adoptive parent?

Contact DCFS for more information:
1.888.LA HELPU
1.888.524.3578

“\ It’s not easy to love a child and let them go but that’s what I have been called to do. The children are innocent and need me to be able to love them and release them as happy and healthy as I can. ”

Kimberly Hernandez, Foster Parent
You will be able to make informed decisions about fostering for your family.

You will understand your important roles and commitments as a member of the DCFS professional foster care team.

You will be prepared to navigate the foster care system.

You will be prepared to provide quality parenting, normal childhood experiences and trauma-sensitive care to the foster children in your home.

You will participate in the mutual selection and assessment process.
Kim’s Story

There are times in every Foster Parent’s journey when a biological family feels the pangs of fear and jealousy that their child will love the Foster Parent more than them. As Foster Parents love, nurture and heal the children in our care it is only natural that they will attach to us and we to them.

I remember the day that a young bio-father, just a teen himself and a foster child, said to me, “My child is getting too attached to you and he doesn’t know me.” How hard that must be as the parent of this precious baby, I thought.

My response to him was to remind him of the importance of attachment in our infants. “When your son cries, I am there to meet his needs. If he is hungry I have the bottle, when he is cold I have the blanket and the arms to provide a loving cradle. If your precious son feels that he is safe in this world and his needs are met, he can then securely attach and trust. If your son can attach to me, he can then securely attach to you when you are ready. Take some comfort in knowing that your son is being loved and well cared for and he is attached.”

His reply to me was, “You will want to keep him and adopt him if you are attached.” I explained that, as a Foster Parent, we must constantly be preparing ourselves for children to return to their parents. It’s not easy to love a child and let them go but that’s what I have been called to do. The children are innocent and need me to be able to love them and release them as happy and healthy as I can. I will then grieve and cry a tear for every child I have cared for.

The success of this story is that this baby is securely attached and knows he will get his needs met. He can experience loving relationships throughout his life because he was attached to his foster mom.
Session One of the Department of Children and Family Services Pre-Service Training: Building Partners, Teachers and Professional Caregivers serves as an introduction to fostering and our system of care. Each member of the team is an important partner in assisting the child and family through this trying time in their lives. As a Foster Parent, you must understand the Louisiana Foster Care System, be honest about why you are here and realistic about your experiences. In Session One, we will introduce the process and partners involved in the Louisiana Foster Care System. The mission and vision of DCFS will be reviewed. Homework designed to support training and to assist you in organizing your home to meet the needs for new children will be introduced.

**Today’s OBJECTIVES**

1. **Family Safety Program Goal.** Demonstrate a clear understanding of the DCFS Family Safety Program goal and how it relates to your role as a Foster Parent.

2. **DCFS Mission and Vision.** Explain DCFS mission and vision and how your role as a Foster Parent fits.

3. **Your Deal Breakers.** Articulate any attributes or issues that children may have that you would not be able to accept in your home.

4. **Certification Deal Breakers.** Identify any issues you may have that would make you ineligible for Foster Parenting.

5. **Mutual Selection.** Explain how the mutual selection process works during the Foster Parent training and licensing process in the Louisiana Foster Care System.

**Plus. . .**

- **Homework.**
- **Scavenger Hunt and homework introduction and assignments.**
- **Assessment and Individual Attention.**
- **One-on-one meetings with the trainer.**
MISSION
Caring for the safety and well-being of all Louisiana’s people.

VISION
Treat all people with dignity, compassion and respect while providing services and integrity.

VALUES

⇒ Quality—providing individualized services with highly skilled staff.
⇒ Efficiency—Ensuring accurate services in a timely manner.
⇒ Respectfulness—treating others with dignity, compassion and respect.

Foster Parents Are Valued and Respected Partners within Our Community
Foster Parents’ RESPONSIBILITIES to the Child

When a child comes into your home, you hold a deep responsibility for that child’s well-being. You must be prepared to treat the child as if he is your own while also providing the care needed for a child who is dealing with trauma or loss. Additionally, you must be prepared for co-parenting and understand that the best outcome for this child, if possible, is reunification with his Birth Parent(s).

As a Foster Parent you must use your judgement and common sense but you must also adhere to DCFS policy as well as Louisiana law involving:

- Safety and Discipline
- Commitment
- Well-Being
- Comfortable Home Environment
- Health Care and Medication
- Birth Family
- Normalcy
- Education
- Advocacy
- Food and Nutrition
- Religion and Ethnic Heritage

Your job as part of the care team involves among other things the critical role of providing that child with committed involved attentive parenting and advocacy.

The greatest gift you can give the child is to let the child be a normal kid… surrounded by the love of a family.

Youth in foster care should be able to do things that any other child does, within the limits of their abilities, their Foster Parents’ own attitudes and common sense.

- George H. Sheldon, Former Secretary
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>NEEDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Respectful Partnership and Professional Behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Excellent Parenting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Responsible Placement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Supporting School Success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.  

- Vince Lombardi, Football Coach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORKSHEET</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>NEEDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Avoiding Disruption and Providing Smooth Transitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Family Mentoring and Respect for Child's Connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Obtaining and Maintaining Records</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Child Advocacy and Case Planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Full Participation in Child's Mental and Physical Well-Being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Services and Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CASE PLANNING CONFERENCE

Services Needed for Reunification

CASE MANAGER PLANS MEETING

Biological Family, Foster Parent(s), relatives, CPI, Case Manager, others of relevance should attend.

Dependency Adjudication Hearing OR PRE-TRIAL CONFERENCE IS HELD

IF THE CASE GOES TO TRIAL, ALL PARTIES ARE SUBPOENED, FACTS ARE PRESENTED AND THE JUDGE RULES.

Reasonable Evidence to Support Allegations OR Child is Returned to Parents

6 Dependency Adjudication Hearing within 30 Days after arraignment

7 Disposition Hearing within 15 Days after arraignment

DISPOSITION

The case plan is reviewed at the disposition. Judicial approval of case plan—or within 30 days of disposition.

The court conducts an initial review of the case status at 90 days and continues to review the status every 6 months until the child reaches permanency.

WORKING FOR REUNIFICATION

Ultimately, family reuniton is the goal for all families. All parties must do their part to facilitate this outcome. The Case Manager provides services and visits monthly to ensure the child’s well-being in foster care and meets with the Biological Family to promote achievement of the family goal and monitor progress.

Case Manager Visits Child & Families

Biological Parent(s) Completes Tasks on Case Plan

Foster Parent(s) Supports Case Plan & Child’s Well-Being

CONCURRENT GOAL

60 Days after disposition

9 Initial Judicial Review

Within 90 Days after disposition

10 Judicial Review within 12 Months after disposition CAN BE EXTENDED

PERMANENCY GOAL DETERMINED

Adoption

Permanent Guardianship

Reunification

Terminate Supervision (6 Months)
DCFS Team in the FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

- FAMILY
- FAMILY
- COURTS
- COURTS

- FOSTER CARE
- Therapists
- Foster Parent(s)
- Foster Parent(s)
- Foster Care Specialist
- Foster Care Specialist

- Doctors
- 1st Response Team
- Non-Relatives/Supports
- Foster Care Team

- Court System
- Birth Parent(s)
- Child Protective Specialist

- Teachers
- Biological Relatives
- DCFS Management Specialist

- OTHERS
- Attorneys
- Foster Parent Mentors

- CASE PLANNING
- OTHERS
- ECKERD

- PARTNER AGENCIES
- FIRST RESPONSE
- SHERIFF’S DEPT.
DCFS Team in the Foster Care System

FAMILY

CHILD. Once the child has been adjudicated, the court has jurisdiction over the child until his 18th birthday and/or until court releases jurisdiction over the child. He has the right to go to court and should always try to attend. He can also speak to the judge by telephone or through a letter. The child may include feelings and information in the Judicial Review Report.

BIRTH PARENT(S). Birth Parents receive services that allow them to work through tasks on their case plan in order to be reunited with their child. They should be involved in the co-parenting of their child and visit their child. Unless otherwise ordered by the court, Parents are also responsible for the continuous financial support of their child while in out-of-home care. In court, they have a right to be represented by or appointed a lawyer. They must be notified about all court hearings and be present at them.

BIRTH RELATIVES. The extended birth family of a child in foster care should maintain a relationship with the child as long as it is a safe and healthy relationship. The birth family can be a helpful part of the team by giving family health information and helping keep the child connected to their culture.

NON-RELATIVES/SUPPORTS. Often a child will have an extended support system which includes friends and community.

FIRST RESPONSE

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES (CPS). The Child Protective Service is the first responder on the team. It is their job to determine if a child is in immediate danger in their home environment and if they should be removed. The CPS worker will try to put any supports that they can into the home to help prevent having to remove a child from their home due to the fact that the removal of a child from their home can be a very traumatic experience. If removal is necessary, the CPS worker conducts a diligent search to find a placement at the home of a relative or close friend (pending background approval). If not, CPS finds a foster home match. CPS attends the Arraignment Hearing and Case Planning Conference. The CPS case must be closed within 60 days of the initial removal.

CASE PLANNING

FOSTER CARE SPECIALIST. The Foster Care Specialist provides and coordinates services in the child’s case. He/she maintains regular contact with the family and sees the child alone. The Foster Care Specialist provides the direct service to the child in care. The Foster Care Specialist’s primary role is to be the advocate for the child in court and the source for referrals should the child need therapeutic or other related services.

The Foster Care Specialist attends all hearings and tells the court what kinds of services the child and family needs. The Foster Care Specialist prepares the reports for the court, including the Judicial Review Report.

CASE MANAGEMENT TEAM.
While developing and managing the case plan, the Foster Care Specialist, and in turn the child, family and foster family, is supported by a team of professionals including supervisors and managers.

FOSTER CARE

FOSTER PARENT(S). Foster Parents are trained and licensed adults who care for youth and must keep them safe until they can return home or live elsewhere. The Foster Parent’s role includes providing a safe and caring environment for the child, meeting the child’s developmental needs and working with the rest of the team to help the child stay connected to their family, culture and identity. The Foster Parent must be prepared to work as part of a care team, including the Birth Parents, to provide the child with normalcy and trauma sensitive care. The Foster Parent has the right to and should attend Judicial Review Hearings, the case planning conference and should advocate for the child.
HOME DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST. The Home Development Specialist’s role is to be a support for the foster family. The Home Development Specialist works with families around certification activities. These dedicated staff members are your support system in the certification arena. They will assist you with coordinating for the children in your home with the Foster Care Specialist assigned to them as well as ensure that your home is meeting all necessary certification standards. This is the person that the Foster Parent can call when they need help.

JUDGE. The judge decides what is in the best interest of the child and how to keep the child safe. After listening to everyone involved in the case and reading the reports, the judge determines if removal is in the best interest of the child, if the child should be adjudicated, if supervision should be terminated and if parental rights should be terminated. The judge approves the case plan and conducts a judicial review every 6 months to review the status of the case plan until permanency is achieved.

OTHERS

DOCTORS/ THERAPISTS. This role is to help determine the physical and mental health of a child and help improve or maintain that health.

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE (CASA). They are appointed by the court.

TEACHERS. Teachers are an important part of the team. Teachers can help with identifying behavior developmental problems. By having open communication with your child’s teacher, you can work together to help the child adjust to their new surroundings. If your foster child struggles in school, their teacher is the best person to link you to the help that they need in a school setting.

OTHER COMMUNITY RESOURCES. When preparing a case plan and identifying services for the family and the foster family, the Foster Care Specialist will look to other community resources such as the Louisiana WIC, churches, training classes, etc.

KEY AGENCIES

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS). The state agency responsible for child protection and many services for families and children.

COURT SYSTEM. The court system’s job is to oversee the Birth Parents case plan and the placement needs of the children. The court system will hold hearings with the Birth Parents to oversee progress on the case plan and reunification. The court system will oversee the permanency planning. If reunification is not possible, the court will move towards TPR for the child.
Journey Through

FOSTER CARE

START HERE
Abuse or Neglect is reported

Agency Investigates

Agency Recommendation

Substantiated

Unfounded

Preliminary Protective Hearing

Adjudication & Dispositional Hearing

HOME

MAY INCLUDE SERVICES:
- drug/alcohol treatment
- counseling
- find housing
- mental health treatment
- find employment
- other

Child’s Family works on plan to be reunited with child AND...

Agency works with child’s family to develop an alternate permanency plan

FOSTER CARE

Foster Home

Group Home, Shelter, Residential Treatment

Relative or Kinship Home

Change of Placement

Court Review (at least every 6 mo.)

Permanency Hearing (12 mo.)

INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES
Age out of foster care (age 18-21)

ADOPTIVE HOME
# Deal Breakers Checklist

## Licensing Requirements

- **Age**
- **Financial Security**
- **Background Checks**
- **Clean/Safe Home**
- **Adequate Space/Privacy**
- **Transportation**
- **Medical**
- **Motivation/Willingness to Co-parent**
- **Moral Character**

The following are deal-breakers for me (explain):

## Sex, Age, Number of Children

- **Male**
- **Female**
- **One Child**
- **Two Children**
- **Three Children**
- **Four or More Children**
- **Teen Parent with Child**
- **Siblings**
- **Sibling groups that include Teens**
- **Child Parents Siblings**
- **Accept Placements 24/7**
- **Difference Age Ranges**

The following are deal-breakers for me (explain):
**HEALTH of CHILD** (check all you would accept)

- [ ] No Significant Health Problems
- [ ] Allergies or Asthma (may require treatment)
- [ ] Hyperactivity (may require treatment)
- [ ] Speech Problems (may require treatment)
- [ ] Hearing Problems (may require treatment)
- [ ] Legally Deaf
- [ ] Vision Problems (may require treatment)
- [ ] Legally Blind
- [ ] Dental Problems (may require treatment)
- [ ] Orthopedic Disorder (may require treatment)
- [ ] Seizure Disorder (may require treatment)
- [ ] Other Medical Conditions that May Require Treatment
- [ ] Mental Health Diagnosis
- [ ] Traumatized Child

The following are deal-breakers for me (explain):

---

**EDUCATION of CHILD** (check all you would accept)

- [ ] High Achiever
- [ ] Achieving at Grade Level
- [ ] Achieving Below Grade Level
- [ ] Needs Special Education
- [ ] Needs Emotionally Handicapped Education
- [ ] Needs Tutoring in One or More Subjects
- [ ] Has Serious Behavior Problems at School

The following are deal-breakers for me (explain):

---
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS and BEHAVIOR of CHILD (check all you would accept)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generally Quiet and Shy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a Tendency to Reject Father Figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Difficulty Making Friends and Relating to Other Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently Soils Him/Herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a Problem with Lying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tends to Abuse Animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Frequent Temper Tantrums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Sexual Identity and/or Trans-Gender Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Sexually Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ungrateful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally Outgoing and Noisy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a Tendency to Reject Mother Figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently Wets Bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masturbates Frequently and/or Openly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a Problem with Stealing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tends to Be Destructive of Personal Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Difficulty Accepting and Obeying Rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a History of Running Away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in Sex Trafficking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Emotional Issues Requiring Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tends to Form Mostly Superficial Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently Wets During the Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Poor Social Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent Physical Altercations with Other Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently Uses Language You Would Consider Inappropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a History of Inappropriate Sexual Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a History of Setting Fires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children who Hoard Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tattoo’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### FAMILY HISTORY/CULTURE (check all you would accept)

| ☐ Has Strong Ties to Birth Family | ☐ Has Strong Ties to Former Foster Family | ☐ Will Need Continued Contact with Siblings in Adoptive Placement |
| ☐ Has Had a Previous Adoption Disruption | ☐ Has Been Sexually Abused | ☐ Has Been Physically Abused |
| ☐ Has Been Exposed to Promiscuous Behavior | ☐ Was Conceived as a Result of Rape | ☐ Was Conceived as a Result of Prostitution |
| ☐ One or Both Biological Parents Has Alcohol Addiction | ☐ One or Both Biological Parents Has Drug Dependency | ☐ One or Both Biological Parents Has a Criminal Record |
| ☐ One or Both Biological Parents Is/Are Mentally Handicapped | ☐ One or Both Biological Parents Has a Mental Illness | ☐ Agency Has No Information on One or Both Biological Parents |
| ☐ Different Ethnicity Than Your Own | ☐ Different Language Spoken At Home | ☐ Different Religious Beliefs Than Your Own |

### YOUR FEELINGS TOWARD OPENNESS (check all you would accept)

| ☐ Willing to Meet Biological Parents | ☐ Willing to Have Contact with Biological Parents through Intermediary | ☐ Willing to Send Correspondence to Biological Parents |
| ☐ Willing to Receive Correspondence from Biological Parents | ☐ Willing to Have Child Continue Visitation with Siblings | ☐ Willing to Have Child Continue Visitation with Extended Relatives |
| ☐ Willing to Have Continued Visitation with Biological Parents | ☐ Willing to Receive Demographic Info. about Biological Parents | ☐ Willing to Distribute Demographic Info. to Biological Parents |
| ☐ Willing to Meet Birth Parents in the Birth Parent Home Once Deemed Safe | ☐ Willing to Invite Birth Parents into the Foster Parent’s Home Once Deemed Safe |  |

The following are deal-breakers for me (explain):