
Important Information for Caregivers

Orientation Guide



COUNTY OF VENTURA
HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Dear Caregiver,

Welcome to the Foster Care Team.

When a child must be removed from his or her parents or guardian, extended family members are sought to provide care and shelter. Extended family are often able to provide comfort to the child and a sense of security. The goal is the best possible plan for the child in your family and the most secure placement.

Relative caregivers are part of the Foster Care Team that make sure the child receives health and dental care, educational assistance as needed, visits with parents as allowed by the Court, and other services such as counseling, when needed. The child's social worker will talk with you about the child's needs and how you can help.

There are state and federal requirements that must be met in order to care for a child in foster care. This booklet describes those requirements. In specific circumstances some of the requirements may be modified with an Alternative Plan approved by Children & Family Services. Tell the social worker of any difficulties and discuss whether an Alternative Plan is allowable.

This booklet contains information about:

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1. General Qualifications

- Ability to provide care and supervision for the type of child(ren) to be served including the ability to communicate with the child(ren)
- Knowledge of the requirements in this booklet
- Ability to maintain financial and other records
- Ability and willingness to follow all orders of the Juvenile Court, including specific instructions regarding visitation between the child and his/her parent(s)
- Be educated, trained, or experienced in areas related to the qualifications

Please discuss any difficulties or problem areas with your social worker as Alternative Plans can be made to some of the requirements described in this booklet.

2. Criminal Record Clearance

All caregivers are subject to federal, state, and local criminal review, including fingerprint clearance, and clearance of state and local child abuse records.

3. Emergency Plan

Each caregiver shall post emergency telephone numbers, discuss emergency situations with the child(ren), practice emergency procedures every six (6) months and at the time of new placements.

4. Reporting Requirements

The caregiver **must** report the following to the Children & Family Services department.

Danger to child incidents:

- Death of any child from any cause
- Any injury to any child which requires medical treatment and/or causes bruising/scarring
- Any unusual incident, accident, or child absence with threatens the physical or emotional health or safety of any child shall be reported to the approval agency and child's social worker by telephone, e-mail, or fax within 24 hours after the event occurs or within the agency's next business day.
- Any suspected physical or psychological abuse of any child shall be reported to the approval agency and child's social worker by telephone, e-mail, or fax within 24 hours after the event occurs or within the agency's next business day.

- Communicable diseases as reported to the caregiver by a health professional
- Poisonings
- Catastrophes
- Fires or explosions

Changes:

- Any change in the caregiver's residence or mailing address is to be reported with ten (10) working days following the occurrence or 30 days prior to the move.
- All changes in household composition must be reported to the approval agency and child's social worker within 24 hours by phone, e-mail, or fax to the approval agency. Any additional people moving in to your home required immediate notification and criminal records clearance.

Absences:

When the caregiver intends to be absent from the home for 48 hours or longer, the approval agency must be notified in writing or by telephone and include the following information:

- Dates of intended absence
- Whether the child will accompany the caregiver or remain in the home
- Telephone number where the caregiver may be contacted
- Name, address, and telephone number of approved substitute caregiver

5. Child's Records

The caregiver must maintain a separate, complete, and current record or file in the home for each child placed, including a current placement agreement with the name, birth date, date of placement in the home, educational records, and case plan information. Use the Health & Education Passport Notebook provided by Children & Family Services department.

The file should also contain a written consent which authorizes the caregiver to obtain medical and dental care in an emergency if the Children & Family Services department cannot be reached. You should receive a Court Order authorizing routine medical care.

A record of all medical, dental, and mental health appointments must be maintained in the Health & Education Passport Notebook.

All information and records regarding the child(ren) shall be confidential.

6. Personal Rights

Each child shall have personal rights that must be protected by the caregiver. These rights include safe accommodations, freedom from corporal punishment, freedom to attend religious services of his/her choice, not to be locked in any room, not to be given any medications unless directed by their physician, and many others. These rights are described in detail in the separate "Child's Personal Rights" document (56-12-191) provided to the child and caregiver.

7. Discipline

Caregivers may not use any type of physical discipline including slapping, spanking, hitting, or any discipline that violates the child's personal rights.

8. Telephones

All foster family homes shall have telephone service, unless alternative telephone access is approved and documented.

9. Transportation

The caregiver shall ensure that all transportation provided for children in their care is provided in vehicles that are in safe operating condition and that the drivers comply with all applicable laws. The caregiver shall ensure transportation to medical appointments, school, and extracurricular, enrichment, or social activities unless other arrangements for transportation are stated in the written plan or placement agreement.

10. Food Service

- The caregiver shall provide at least three (3) nutritious meals daily, provide between meal snacks, meet any special dietary needs of the child, afford the same quantity and quality of food available to all household members and invite the child to participate in all household meals.
- The caregiver understands and agrees that an infant (under 7 months) shall be held during bottle feeding using an unbreakable bottle and at no time shall a bottle be propped for an infant.

11. Responsibility for Providing Care and Supervision

- The caregiver shall provide care and supervision as necessary to meet each child's needs.
- The caregiver shall provide the services identified in each child's case plan.
- The caregiver is responsible for ensuring care and supervision of the child of any minor parent in placement and the direct care and supervision of the child of minor parent during the hours the minor parent is unavailable.

- Caregivers are permitted to encourage, but not require, a child as age and developmentally appropriate, to learn meal preparation, which may include the use of kitchen knives and appliances.

12. Activities

The caregiver shall provide opportunity for, and encourage participation in group sports, leisure time, family, special school, and daily living skill activities.

13. Building and Grounds (Alternative Plans may be available)

Bedrooms:

Bedroom arrangements in the home must, at a minimum, meet the following requirements for everyone in the home including adults where relevant:

- No more than two (2) children shall share a bedroom.
- Children of the opposite sex shall not share a bedroom unless each child is under five (5) years of age.
- Except for infants, children shall not share a bedroom with an adult.
- In bedrooms shared by adults and infants, no more than two (2) infants and no more than two (2) adults shall share the room. An infant is a child under two (2) years of age.
- If two (2) children have been sharing a bedroom and one of them turns 18, they may continue to share the bedroom as long as they remain compatible and the agency has granted an exception.

Beds:

The caregiver must provide each child with an individual bed, which is to be equipped with a clean, comfortable mattress, clean linens, blankets, and pillows, all in good repair.

- Linens shall be changed at least once per week or more often when necessary to ensure that clean linen is in use by children at all times.
- Beds shall be arranged to allow easy passage between beds and easy entrance into the room
- The caregiver shall provide each infant with a safe and sturdy bassinet or crib, appropriate to the child's age and size.
- Bunk beds of more than two tiers shall not be used
- Bunk beds shall have railings on the upper tier to prevent falling.
- Children under five (5) years of age, or those who are unable to climb into or out of the upper tier of a bunk bed unassisted, shall not be permitted to use the upper tier.

Home Hygiene and Safety Standards:

- The home shall be safe and sanitary.
- All outdoor and indoor passageways, stairways, inclines, ramps, open porches, and other areas of potential hazard are to be kept free of obstruction.
 - » The caregiver who accepts a child with a disability is expected to make special provisions, including changes to the buildings and grounds to protect and assist the child and maximize the child's potential for self-help.
 - » Additional equipment, aids, and/or conveniences shall be provided in homes with children who need such items.
 - » The caregiver shall maintain at least one toilet, sink, and tub or shower, in safe, sanitary operating condition.

Pools:

The following rules apply to homes with swimming pools (or other 'bodies of water' such as hot tubs, fish ponds, etc.) who have children under ten (10) years of age or a child who is developmentally disabled, mentally handicapped, or needs special care and supervision.

- The water must be inaccessible when not in use by having a pool cover or by surrounding the pool with a fence. Pool covers shall support the weight of an adult and be placed on the pool and locked when not in use.
- Gates shall swing away from the pool, self-close, and have a self-latching device located no more than six (6) inches from the top of the gate.
- Fences shall be at least five (5) feet high and must not obscure the pool from view
- Where an above ground pool structure is used, the ladder must be removed when pool is not in use.
- All in-ground pools, and above ground pools which cannot be emptied after each use, shall have a working pump and filtering system.
- An adult must provide supervision at all times when children are using a pool or body of water; the adult must be able to swim if swimming would be necessary to rescue a child.

Other Safety Standards and Regulations:

- The home shall be maintained at a safe temperature.
- The caregiver shall ensure the safety of the child in homes with fireplaces and open faced heaters and wood stoves.

- The caregiver shall provide lighting in all rooms and other areas to ensure the comfort and safety of all persons in the home.
- Faucets shall deliver hot water at a safe temperature.
- Garbage shall be stored, located, and disposed of in a way that will not permit the transmission of disease or odors, create a nuisance, or provide a breeding place or food source for insects or rodents.
- All containers used for storing garbage are to have tight fitting covers, be in good repair, be leak proof and rodent proof, and shall be maintained in a clean condition.
- Garbage containers, including movable bins, receiving rotting waste shall be emptied at least once per week or more often if necessary. Each movable bin shall provide for suitable access and a drainage device to allow complete cleaning of the storage area.
- All caregiver homes shall have an indoor sprinkler system or functioning smoke detector(s) installed in the hallway(s) of each sleeping area **audible in each bedroom** or sleeping room.

14. Outdoor Activity Space

The caregiver must provide access to yard or outdoor activity space which is free from hazards to life and health.

15. Storage Space

- Medicines, disinfectants, cleaning solutions, poisons, firearms, and other dangerous items shall be stored where they are inaccessible to children.
- Storage areas for firearms and other dangerous weapons shall be locked. Alternatively, use trigger locks or remove the firing pin from each firearm.
- Firing pins shall be stored and locked separately from firearms.
- Ammunition shall be stored and locked separately from firearms.

16. Court Orders

The Juvenile Court has made (will be making) specific orders regarding visitation, such as with the parent(s), siblings or grandparents. The Court will also order services, such as counseling for the child. It is critical to maintaining the child in your home that the orders be followed. Review the Court orders with the social worker.

17. Planning for the Child's Future

The goal is the reunification of the child with the parent(s) whenever possible. If

the child cannot be returned home after twelve (12) months (six months if the child is under three (3) years old or if a child in a sibling group that includes a child under three (3) years), the law requires that a permanent plan for adoption, guardianship or long-term placement be made for the child. Adoption is the preferred plan because adoption provides the most permanency. You may be given the option of providing a permanent home for the child or assisting the child to move on to a permanent home.

I 8. Role of the Social Worker:

The Social Worker is:

- The case manager for the child and his/her family
- Responsible for ensuring the safety of the child
- Responsible for arranging and assessing services for the child
- Your link with the agency and the court

To report suspected child abuse or neglect,
contact the Children & Family Services
24-hour Hotline at (805) 654-3200
or 1-800-754-7600



COUNTY OF VENTURA

Toll-Free (866) 904-9362

www.vchsa.org