

# **Caritas Family Solutions**

## **2024 Annual Implementation Plan**

### Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	2
<b>FOSTER PARENT RIGHTS</b> .....	2
Dignity and Respect .....	2
Training.....	5
Agency Support .....	6
Timely Financial Reimbursement .....	7
Placement Plan .....	9
Investigation of Alleged Licensing Violations .....	10
Additional Information about Children .....	11
Information about Children at or Prior to Placement .....	12
Notification of Meetings and Foster Parent Input.....	13
All Necessary Information on Child/Family .....	14
Notice of Changes of Placement.....	15
Court Hearing Notification.....	15
Placement Option for Children Re-entering Care.....	16
Timely Access to Service Appeal System .....	16
Foster Parent Hotline.....	17
<b>FOSTER PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES</b> .....	18
Open Communication.....	18
Confidentiality .....	18
Advocating for Children .....	19
Treating Children and Families with Dignity and Respect .....	20
Strengths and Limitations of Foster Parents .....	20
Supplemental Support.....	21
Foster Parent Training Needs .....	22
Preventing Placement Disruptions .....	22
Impact of Fostering and Stress Management.....	23
Promoting Foster Parenting Positively .....	24
Roles, Rights, and Responsibilities of Child Welfare Team.....	25
Mandated Reporter Responsibility.....	26
Notification and Participation in Meetings.....	26
Appeal System .....	26
Maintaining Accurate and Relevant Child Records.....	27
Sharing Information with Subsequent Caregivers .....	27
Cultural Sensitivity .....	28

## **Introduction**

The Caritas Family Solutions Annual Implementation Plan describes the agency's proposal for adhering to the Foster Parent Law. This Law defines the rights and responsibilities for all foster families in Illinois. The implementation plan lists each statement of rights and responsibilities and discusses agency specific tasks and obligations to ensure that these rights and responsibilities are met. Foster parents and staff from across the agency come together to review and expand on the implementation plan yearly. The draft is presented for open discussion and then all foster parents are asked to review and accept the plan for the following year. The 2024 Implementation Plan is submitted as follows.

### **Foster Parent Rights**

#### **Dignity and Respect**

*1. Caregivers have the right to be treated with dignity, respect, and consideration.*

Caritas Family Solutions recognizes the value of our foster parents and makes every effort to treat them with respect and dignity as professional members of the child welfare team. The agency understands the significance of including foster parents as members of the professional child welfare team and this practice is embedded in the day-to-day operations of the agency.

Foster parents play a critical role in decision making within the agency. For example, Caritas Family Solutions actively recruits individuals with foster care experience to serve on the agency's board of directors. Board members make decisions for the agency regarding all programs including foster care and adoption. Additionally, Caritas Family Solutions seeks individuals with experience as foster parents to work as employees. Currently, the agency employs several foster care staff who are actively fostering with other agencies or are past foster or adoptive parents. This adds a layer of understanding among staff of the challenges and joys incumbent of foster care.

To ensure consideration of foster parent voice, the agency has formed a Foster Parent Advisory Committee made up of current foster parents from each of its regions. These representatives gather information both formally and informally from their fellow foster parents and report at quarterly meetings. When consistent concerns are identified, members form workgroups to problem-solve and propose strategies directly to agency leadership. This increases the opportunity for effective collaboration of foster parents and staff and promotes respectful relationships.

Caritas Family Solutions also recognizes that including foster parents in decision making surrounding youth placed in their home promotes a general feeling of consideration. Foster parents are encouraged to participate in all Administrative Case Reviews (ACR) and to attend court dates. Foster parents are made aware of the scheduled time and date of the ACRs and court dates by the case manager in a timely manner. Additionally, foster parents are included in Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM) with the agreement of birth parents. Foster care case managers and their supervisors strive to schedule these meetings at times that are convenient to all participants and to make them accessible by phone or virtually when face to face

meetings are not possible. Foster parents are consulted by the case manager when critical decisions are made regarding the youth placed in their home. These consultations can either take place during in-home visit, by phone, or conference call. Case managers and supervisors consider the foster parents' input before fully forming a final decision. Specialized foster parents are included in monthly staffing with the specialized foster care case manager and help to develop the youth's specialized foster care treatment plan. Guidelines regarding confidentiality of the child and family's case are enforced and respected in all communication between the foster parent(s) and other members of the child welfare team.

Caritas Family Solutions believes that one of the greatest ways to show dignity, respect and consideration for foster parents is by educating and empowering them with the knowledge and support they need to advocate for themselves within the system. To that end, the agency has added the position of Foster Parent Resource and Support Specialist to the staff for all offices, for the specific purpose of developing programs and supports for foster parents. Additionally, Caritas Family Solutions is continuously expanding its foster parent mentoring program as well as adding agency sponsored trainings and support groups across all regions. The agency also promotes self-advocacy by keeping foster families informed of policy changes and upcoming events through mailings and emails from licensing staff as well as via social media and on the newly created foster parent portal which is accessed through our agency website.

Foster care employees are trained to cultivate a relationship of open communication with their foster parents such that foster parents feel the freedom to express input and feelings about all matters regarding a child's case. Foster parents receive the support of the child welfare team (case manager, therapist, licensing specialist, and supervisor). Caritas Family Solutions acknowledges that healing occurs in the context of a family, therefore, if a youth is involved in counseling, foster parents receive support and guidance from the youth's therapist when practical and beneficial to the youth in care.

The case manager or licensing specialist ensure that foster parents are aware of the chain of command for seeking assistance within the agency. In the event that foster parents believe they have been subjected to unjust treatment or fostering conditions that interfere with their ability to provide optimal care for the children placed in their home, foster parents may file a grievance by contacting the agency's Director of Quality of Improvement and Compliance. The procedure for filing a grievance is included on the newly created foster parent portal, on the agency website, and in the Foster Parent Folder that is provided to foster parents upon licensure. Foster parents may also contact their licensing specialist or their Foster Parent Resource and Support Specialist for further direction on how to file a grievance. Caritas Family Solutions will not tolerate any acts of discrimination or retributions against foster parents who choose to pursue grievance proceedings.

Caritas Family Solutions strives to develop an atmosphere of trust with the foster parents. All members of the agency are trained to conduct themselves in a professional manner and to establish rapport with the community. Foster care employees make direct attempts to form individual relationships with foster parents through continuous and supportive communication,

taking extra time to help foster parents deal with their own feelings regarding foster care situations. Foster care employees are instructed to refrain from engaging in conversations that are destructive to agency morale to help the foster parents develop a deeper sense of trust with the agency. Foster parents are also invited and encouraged to attend monthly foster parent support groups where they can develop a greater sense of community with agency members and other foster parents.

All Caritas Family Solutions employees are trained to uphold an environment of respect and professionalism regarding communication with the foster parents. All staff are expected to return telephone calls and emails in a timely manner, within 24 hours. Weekends, holidays, and scheduled vacations are taken into consideration. Employees are also trained to ensure that foster parents have an alternate contact available to them in the instance where they cannot be reached directly. This can include the case manager providing the foster parent with their supervisor’s phone number and/or the on-call emergency phone number on their respective “out-of-office” or “away” messages. Inherent in this is the responsibility of the supervisor or the on-call worker to resolve a lack of communication matter with the specific worker. At least one case manager, licensing specialist, or supervisor is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week for emergency consultation. Foster parents are given an on-call number as well as specific directions for contacting the agency in the event of an emergency outside of regular business hours.

**After Hours On-Call Emergency Numbers**

Belleville/Sparta Region:	618-398-9565
Madison County Region:	618-398-9501
Mt. Vernon/Effingham Region:	618-731-4008
Cartersville Region:	877-934-4315

## **Training**

*2. Caregivers have the right to be provided pre-service and appropriate ongoing training to improve their skills.*

Prior to licensure and placement of children, all traditional foster parents complete Foster PRIDE. This training is conducted by a team of PRIDE certified trainers. Foster PRIDE utilizes a co-trainer model to ensure learned skills. One trainer with professional child welfare experience is paired with an experienced foster parent trainer in order to give the foster parent trainees a multifaceted experience during training. Supplemental trainings are also required to receive licensure including a three-hour LGBTQI+ and Youth in Foster Care Caregiver Training. Licensure is also an expectation of homes where youth are placed as home of relative or fictive kin placements. These homes complete 6 hours of video or Zoom training as a part of licensure. Caritas Family Solutions encourages all foster parents to participate in in-person or Zoom training in all situations for optimal training experience.

As a condition of licensure, all licensed foster parents are required to complete a minimum of sixteen hours of ongoing, Department approved training per four-year licensing period. Foster homes with expanded capacity waivers must complete an additional nine hours of training per calendar year. Licensing specialists consult with foster parents to assess training needs and assist foster parents in choosing trainings that will benefit them in their foster experience. This includes the eight-hour Educational Advocacy Training, and the thirty-minute Normalcy-Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Training, which are requirements for completion during the first renewal cycle. Caritas Family Solutions provides ample training opportunities throughout the calendar year to ensure foster parents the opportunity to meet their training requirements.

In an effort to build foster parent strengths and areas of growth, Caritas Family Solutions considers the following in determining ongoing training needs of foster families:

- Feedback received from Foster PRIDE and in-service trainers
- Foster parent requests for specific training topics
- Feedback from agency training evaluations and suggestions
- Feedback from Caritas Family Solutions Foster Parent Satisfaction Surveys
- Feedback from foster care staff regarding their perception of what trainings would be useful
- New developments in DCFS policy and procedures effecting children and foster parents
- Information gathered from training assessments during monitoring visits

Caritas Family Solutions makes every effort to provide training consistent with the agency's assessment of foster parent training needs as well as foster parents' own assessment of their training needs. Training is based on various childcare topics (parenting skills, behavior management, attachment issues, trauma, sexual abuse, etc.) and rules and procedures regarding foster care. The agency has three TBRI (Trust Based Relational Intervention) Practitioners on staff to consult with team members providing trainings to ensure that developed trainings are trauma informed. Foster parents are encouraged to complete TBRI Caregiver Training, taught by our TBRI Practitioners. Foster parents are also encouraged to take

advantage of training offered by other agencies (DCFS, school districts, hospitals, etc.) and to make use of DCFS on-demand trainings. In addition, Caritas Family Solutions utilizes the expertise of community members-to team with and provide excellent trainings that meet the needs of their families in a monthly support group setting. Each of these monthly support group/training events are pre-approved as in-service trainings. The agency continues to offer virtual support groups to meet the ongoing needs for support and training during the COVID-19 crisis. All training information is communicated to foster parents by licensing specialists through social media platforms, email, and flyer mailings.

Each Specialized Foster Parent must complete an initial specialized training of 16 hours and then maintain a minimum of sixteen hours of on-going training per year. These trainings should be chosen specifically to support the youth in their care.

### **Agency Support**

*3. Caregivers have the right to be informed of how to receive supportive services from their agency.*

At the time of placement, foster parents are provided with a contact list with instruction on the appropriate chain of command for reporting concerns and obtaining services relevant to the case and the youth in their care. The foster care case manager assists foster parents in determining appropriate supportive services for individual children in their home, identifying applicable resources, and securing services as needed in times of crisis. All Caritas Family Solutions foster parents are provided with the on-call telephone number for after-hours emergencies via the foster parent portal, and by both their case manager and their licensing specialist in the Foster Family Folder. The on-call number is directed to a live operator who will contact the on-call case manager if the situation is deemed an emergency or document the concern to give the case manager during the next business day if it is a non-emergency. On-call workers consist of a foster care case manager, licensing specialist, or supervisor who will answer/return the call immediately. If the on-call worker cannot assist the foster parent, then the on-call worker can contact a supervisor for further assistance. This allows foster parents immediate access to a foster care staff member on a 24-hour a day, 365 day a year emergency basis.

#### **After Hours On-Call Emergency Numbers**

Belleville/Sparta Region:	618-398-9565
Madison County Region:	618-398-9501
Mt. Vernon/Effingham Region:	618-731-4008
Cartersville Region:	877-934-4315

In addition, through PRIDE training, specialized training, the Foster Parent Portal, and the Foster Parent Folder, foster parents are provided with the CARES number and instructions on when it is appropriate to use it. All foster care staff are educated regarding the availability of services for youth in care such as Intensive Placement Stabilization services (IPS), Women Infant and Children (WIC), etc. Foster care staff are also knowledgeable of local resources such as the

Foster Family Resource Center of Southern Illinois, The Restore Network, the Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition, and Equipping The Called, and refer families for services as needs arise. Foster parents are also educated on how to access these services and reminded of their availability through training and updates on social media platforms.

Caritas Family Solutions has a foster parent mentoring program which matches newly licensed traditional foster parents with a trained foster parent mentor. Home of relative and fictive kin homes are made aware of the mentoring program and can be referred for mentoring services through self-referral, licensing, or case management. These mentors add another layer of support for our foster parents who are new to navigating the system to assure that all foster parents can access the needed supports.

### **Timely Financial Reimbursement**

*4. Caregivers have the right to receive timely financial reimbursement commensurate with a child's service plan.*

All payments are given a timely assessment with payment commensurate with the type of care provided. When a child is first placed in care, the case manager (or whomever makes placement) must submit the 906 to the foster care coordinator within 24 hours to ensure no lapse in payment. Initial clothing and equipment expenses (ages two and under) are provided by the agency based on the child's age. This is a one-time expense provided to the child while in care. All other clothing expenses will then come from the board payment provided to the foster parent (see chart below). Licensing specialists complete the CFS 578-3 Payment Comparison Worksheet to educate home of relative and fictive kin families on the financial benefit of licensure. When a child is exhibiting characteristics of medical or behavioral special needs, a case manager will request a Clinical Intervention for Placement Preservation (CIPP). If a child is raised to a specialized level of care, payment will likewise be reflective.

Board checks for children in care are mailed to foster parents by the agency's finance department no later than the 25<sup>th</sup> day of each month. If the 25<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend or holiday, checks are mailed on the business day prior to the 25<sup>th</sup>. The amount of the check is based upon the number of nights slept in care for the previous month (e.g., A check issued in October is for September, etc.) as well as the level of care provided. Foster parents who have concerns with payment are encouraged to contact their licensing specialist. Checks cannot be reissued until two weeks after the first check was issued. Unlicensed caregivers are paid at the DCFS standard of need rate. Foster parents are given the option to enroll in direct deposit for their board payment. Their licensing specialist will work with them to enroll in direct deposit.

## DCFS RATES AND CODES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024

### Traditional Foster Care Board Payment Rate

Child's Age	Board	Clothing	Allowance	Total
0-11 months	\$603.00	\$50.00	\$19.00	\$672.00
1-4 years	\$597.00	\$55.00	\$20.00	\$672.00
5-8 years	\$657.00	\$68.00	\$21.00	\$746.00
9-11 years	\$677.00	\$84.00	\$35.00	\$796.00
12 years & over	\$675.00	\$90.00	\$62.00	\$827.00
Unlicensed Foster Care		\$479.00		

### Specialized Foster Care Board Payment Rate

Child's Age	Daily Rate	Days per Month			
	Board	28	29	30	31
0 - 11 months	\$51.30	\$1,436.40	\$1,487.70	\$1,539.00	\$1,590.30
1-4 years	\$51.30	Respite = 15 hours maximum (\$3.33/hour)			
5-8 years	\$51.30				
9-11 years	\$51.30				
12 years & over	\$51.30				

Reimbursement for additional expenses (referred to as Special Service Fees) that have been submitted by the foster parent (i.e., hosting an overnight sibling visit, hosting a daytime sibling visit, supervised activities for family reunification, etc.) must first be approved by the child's case manager and be in accordance with the Authorized Child Care Payment Procedure issued by DCFS. These expenses are then submitted to DCFS by the agency's accounting department. DCFS assesses these reimbursement requests, processes the expenses, and reimburses the foster parent commensurate with the type of care provided.

Respite care for children is reimbursed on an as-needed basis with the intent of ensuring placement stabilization. Homes caring for children at the specialized level are entitled to 15 hours of respite monthly. Foster parents must notify the child's case worker two weeks in advance of needing the respite care.

Expenses incurred which may not fall under the Special Service Fee or respite categories should be discussed with the child's case manager, approved by a supervisor, and will be reimbursed in



a timely manner and on a case-by-case basis in accordance with DCFS and agency guidelines (i.e., camp fees, respite for non-specialized child, graduation expenses, athletic fees, etc.). Expenses may not exceed \$24.50 a month or \$294.00 per year per child.

## **Placement Plan**

*5. The caregiver has the right to be provided a clear, written understanding of the plan concerning the child's placement and how it will support his family relationship and cultural identity.*

Prior to the placement of a youth in care in the home, foster parents read and sign the Caritas Family Solutions Licensed Foster Parent Placement Agreement. Included in the agreement is the expectation that foster parents support the youth's permanency goals as well as activities that promote the child's right to relationships with his or her own family and cultural heritage. The licensing specialist thoroughly reviews the agreement and provides clarification regarding any questions with the foster parent to ensure that they understand the agreement. The foster parents' signatures verify understanding and agreement. This document as well as the CFS 250-A Caregiver's Self-Assessment of Reunification Preparedness become a part of the foster parent's licensing records.

The youth's foster care case manager provides the foster parents with a copy of the child's most recent client service plan. Within the service plan, the permanency goal for the child is clearly stated. If the permanency goal is other than "return home", the goal is thoroughly discussed with the foster parents. For children who are coming into foster care for the first time, foster parents participate in the Integrated Assessment and development of the service plan. The child's case manager explains the foster parents' responsibilities regarding the service plan.

Foster parents are encouraged by the case manager to participate in the development of future service plans in the following ways:

1. Offering their recommendations to the child's case manager regarding revisions to the plan
2. Attendance at Administrative Case Reviews
3. Participation in Child and Family Team Meetings with agreement of birth parents
4. Involvement in the Integrated Assessment
5. Participation in IEP, IFSP, or any other necessary school meetings
6. Participation in other meetings and staffings regarding service planning, treatment, and services provided for youth in care

DCFS and case managers notify foster parents of the date, time, and location for all Administrative Case Reviews. If a foster parent cannot attend the review at the scheduled time, efforts are made to reschedule to a time that is convenient for all parties. If a foster parent cannot physically attend an ACR, efforts are made to include them via speaker phone or a virtual platform. Foster parent's participation in ACRs is strongly encouraged by Caritas Family

Solutions. The child's updated service plan will be provided to the foster parent if they cannot attend the ACR.

In order to facilitate a relationship with the birth family that is acceptable to the foster parents and support the child's permanency goal, foster parents are consulted and encouraged to participate in the development of visitation plans and communication with the youth in care's birth family. When possible and appropriate, foster parents are encouraged to take an active role in supporting reunification through participation in visits and other planned contact with the birth family. Support group topics presented throughout the year focus on the importance of supporting family relationships and reunifications as well as practical ways to establish relationships. Foster families are also encouraged to seek input from the birth family as well as other community resources to help support and develop racial and cultural identity in the children for which they care.

When expected and unexpected changes in case plans are necessary, foster parents are notified immediately by the case manager in writing in the form of a Notice of Decision. Caritas Family Solutions provides foster parents with a Notice of Decision fourteen days prior to movement of a child, except in cases where a child abuse and/or neglect investigation is pending and/or a child is believed to be at imminent risk of harm. Foster parents are advised by the case manager of their right to appeal changes or movement of the child to another foster home when the foster parent does not believe that the change or move is in the best interest of the child. Written instructions for filing an appeal are included in the Notice of Decision.

## **Investigation of Alleged Licensing Violations**

*6. Caregivers have the right to fair, timely, and impartial investigations of licensing complaints.*

Caritas Family Solutions, in accordance with guidelines provided by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services concerning licensing complaint investigations of Foster Family Homes, conducts all such investigations in the manner prescribed by the Department per Rule 383, Licensing Enforcement. Licensing specialists who conduct such investigations are trained in accordance with DCFS guidelines. Licensing specialists are thoroughly acquainted with the rights of the foster parents regarding licensing investigations as well as the rules and procedures for conducting investigations. Licensing specialists uphold and respect the foster parents' rights throughout the licensing investigation.

Once a complaint has been received and all pertinent information has been obtained, the investigating worker initiates the investigation within two business days. Investigations of the complaint is initiated with an unannounced visit to the foster home. At this visit, the licensing specialist explains to the foster parents that they have the right to have a person of their choosing present during the investigation interviews. Foster parents are given the opportunity (up to four hours) to contact such an individual and have them present prior to the initiation of any questioning on the part of the licensing specialist. Foster parents may waive this right by denoting the appropriate box and signing the CFS 596-29.

Investigation of the complaint involves action taken by the licensing specialist that includes information gathering and interviewing to determine the validity of the report. Based on information gathered, the licensing specialist submits a report to Caritas Family Solution's Licensing Director. The investigative report must be dually approved by both the Director of Licensing and the DCFS Agency and Institution Licensing Representative. Foster parents are informed of the outcome of the investigation through a certified letter. If the investigation reveals a substantiated violation of Rule 402 or the Child Care Act, a corrective action plan may be necessary. Foster parents are encouraged to participate in and provide input toward the development of a corrective action plan to address substantiated violations of licensing standards or the Child Care Act.

As part of the notification process, foster parents are invited to contact the Director of Licensing to request a Supervisory Review of the complaint if the foster parent disagrees with the decision. The notification also advises foster parents of their right to request and receive mediation as well as an administrative review of the decisions affecting licensing parameters. In accordance with Rule 340, Caritas Family Solutions will offer training surrounding allegations against foster parents and the investigations process. The training will be offered through monthly support groups and/or be made available on the Caritas Family Solutions website, the Foster Parent Portal, and on social media platforms.

The entire complaint investigation including the licensing review is typically completed within thirty days of initiation of the investigation. When there are extenuating circumstances making it impossible for the licensing specialist to complete the investigation within the thirty-day guideline, the licensing specialist may request one thirty-day extension. Such requests are directed to the Director of Licensing and are granted only when necessary for the fair review of the complaint. The Division of Child Protection (DCP) has sixty days to complete their investigations.

### **Additional Information about Children**

*7. Caregivers have the right to receive additional information to assist in the care of a child while in placement.*

All case managers at Caritas Family Solutions are required to complete the DCFS Foundations Training per licensure. As a part of this training, case managers are educated on information that is appropriate for disclosure according to DCFS confidentiality rules and guidelines. Ongoing guidance in this area is provided through individual supervision as well as continual training updates provided through the agency.

At the time of initial placement, it is the responsibility of the case manager to provide all information required by CFS 600-4 Sharing Information with the Caregiver including case information and history such as permanency goal, legal status, reason for coming into care, and medical and health information including known medical problems, hospitalizations, and diagnosis. This document is signed by both the case manager and the foster parent and becomes a part of the youth in care's file. Over the life of the case, relevant information

essential for foster parents to support the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of the youth in care will be provided through the monthly face to face contact between the foster parent and the case manager or through phone calls with the case manager or other foster care staff as the need arises. These contacts will be noted in case notes in the DCFS Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) to accurately track all communication. SACWIS entries are reviewed by supervisors and discussed at supervision.

All information shared with foster parents must fall within appropriate boundaries of confidentiality. Foster parents are trained in the parameters of confidentiality in PRIDE training. In addition, confidentiality is reviewed during support group meetings, and all foster parents discuss and sign the Caritas Family Solutions Confidentiality Agreement as a part of the licensing process. This document is a part of each licensed foster home's licensing file.

### **Information about Children at or Prior to Placement**

*8. Caregivers have the right to receive specific information from DCFS and private agencies listed in the Children and Family Services Act and the Child Care Act of 1969.*

Upon placement, or prior to placement whenever possible, the child's case manager provides the foster parent or prospective adoptive parent with a copy of the CFS 600-4, Sharing Information with the Caregiver. Case managers are trained to release information regarding children and families in compliance with laws regarding confidentiality in the CFS 600-4. This responsibility is conveyed to case managers as a part of their pre-licensure Foundations Training as well as continually emphasized throughout supervision and agency sponsored trainings. Information released to foster parents via this document includes:

1. Case Information and History – the child's SACWIS Service plan; reason the child came into care; permanency goal; legal status; and other pertinent information
2. Health and Medical History – known medical problems; communicable diseases; hospitalizations; mental health/emotional disorders; current medications/prescriptions including instructions on when and how to administer; immunization status; medical or insurance; and other pertinent health/medical information
3. Educational Information and History – current placement or grade level; IEP; IFSP; 504 Accommodation Plan; or other pertinent educational information
4. Placement History – dates of previous placement; reasons for placement changes; and other pertinent placement history information
5. Behavior/Social Information – criminal background; substance/alcohol abuse; destructive behavior; sexual behavior; physical aggression; fire setting; runaway; eating disorders; truancy history; any other known behavior/social history

If the placement is an emergency placement, all current known information is provided to the foster parent verbally. Written documentation via the CFS 600-4 must be provided to the foster parent by the case manager within 10 business days. Both the case manager and foster parent signs the CFS 600-4 as verification that the information has been provided to the foster parent. The original document is placed in the youth's file. A copy of the document remains with the

foster parents for their records. Additional documentation for the sharing of information is written in a case note and entered into SACWIS for supervisory review.

Requests for additional information by the foster parent that is not clearly relevant to the care of the child will be evaluated on an individual basis by the foster care supervisor, recognizing that trauma informed parenting is best achieved when foster parents are equipped with historical knowledge. Supervisors review confidentiality practices in accordance with policy during one-on-one supervision and during regularly scheduled foster care staff meetings. Caritas Family Solutions releases such information to foster parents in compliance with laws regarding confidentiality. Foster parents are acquainted with the confidentiality laws during PRIDE and as part of the pre-licensure screening process. During the licensing process, foster parents are provided with written documentation regarding confidentiality laws for future reference. Foster parents also sign the Caritas Family Solutions Confidentiality Agreement which becomes part of the foster parents' licensing record.

Upon initial placement, each child in foster or adoptive care is assigned a copy of a Life Book. The Life Book provides the foster or adoptive parent and child an opportunity to track important information about the child from birth through their stay in foster care and beyond. The Life Book is the property of the child and travels with them when the child changes placement or returns home. The case manager ensures that the child receives the book at initial placement and that it follows them to subsequent placements including the child's return home.

### **Notification of Meetings and Foster Parent Input**

*9. Caregivers have the right to be notified of scheduled meetings and staffings in order to participate in care planning and decision making.*

Caritas Family Solutions recognizes that foster parents are an integral part of the child welfare team. Foster parents are encouraged to attend and participate in all meetings concerning the youth in care. At the time of licensure, foster parents receive a Foster Parent Folder which includes a form entitled, "What to Expect When You Get the First Call." This form explains the placement process, the casework process, as well as what actions the foster parent will need to take to ensure a successful placement.

Foster parents are notified of meetings in many ways by the foster care case manager—personally at visits, via telephone conversations, and/or in writing by mail or email. The case manager notifies the foster parents at least fourteen days prior to any scheduled administrative case review, staffing, individual service plan meeting, court hearing, individual education plan meeting (IEP), family visit, etc. In the event of emergency staffings, hearings, etc., foster parents are notified verbally by the case manager immediately. A follow-up letter or email is sent to the foster parent as further documentation of the communication whenever possible. Since emergency staffings occur only on an emergency basis, the case manager will make every effort to schedule a mutually convenient time for all parties to meet. If it is not possible for the foster

parent to be present in person for an emergency meeting, the case manager will attempt to make the meeting accessible for the foster parent via speaker phone or video conferencing.

Upon receiving notification of a staffing and/or administrative case review (ACR), foster parents may contact the case manager with any questions or request additional information. Administrative case reviews are vital to understanding the status of a child's case. Foster parents have the right to participate in these reviews for the child's portion only due to confidentiality. Foster parents are strongly encouraged to attend in person or via telephone. Foster parents are asked to contact the case manager prior to the meeting dates so that appropriate arrangements can be made for the foster parent participation when they cannot attend in person. When foster parents are unable to attend the ACR, case managers will relay appropriate information to the foster parent at the following face to face meeting.

Through Educational Advocacy Training, foster parents are trained to become advocates for their youth in care in the educational system. Foster parents are encouraged to become active members in the youth in care's educational team and to attend all educational meetings including parent teacher conferences, RTI meetings, IFSP and IEP meetings. Foster parents can make many decisions regarding the youth's educational needs and have the right to sign consents for all educational evaluations.

All input from foster parents is considered in the same manner as information/recommendations presented by other members of the youth's team. Foster parents are required to complete documentation such as medication logs and encouraged to complete behavior logs to assist in providing information for the team. The child's case manager notifies the foster parents immediately of all decisions made by the courts, DCFS, or the agency concerning the child and advises foster parents of their right to appeal decisions when appropriate in keeping with Rule 337, Service Appeals.

### **All Necessary Information on Child/Family**

*10. Caregivers have the right to be provided, before placement, with any information a caseworker has that is pertinent to the child's care and permanency plan.*

In compliance with laws regarding confidentiality, it is the policy of Caritas Family Solutions that the case manager continually makes an effort to disseminate any and all relevant information prior to and during placement. Upon placement, or prior to placement whenever possible, the child's case manager provides the foster parent with a copy of the CFS 600-4, Sharing Information with the Caregiver. When additional information is requested, the child's case manager obtains the information for the foster parent within the parameters of the Department's confidentiality guidelines. Foster parents are encouraged to review the child's referral packet prior to accepting a child for placement whenever possible. In addition, staff carefully review all available child-specific information with foster parents during the initial call for placement of the child. Disclosure of information to the foster parents concerning the child's family is limited to the information that is essential to providing for the physical,

emotional, medical, spiritual, and educational needs and rights of the child. The privacy and rights of the child's family is respected by both the foster parents and the agency.

The child's parent also completes the "Let Me Tell You About My Child" questionnaire (CFS 458-C) with their case manager in order to help the foster parent and the case manager learn more about the child and to help ease the transition into foster care. When a positive relationship exists between the foster parent and the child's family, the child's family may consent to disclosure of additional information at their discretion.

### **Notice of Changes of Placement**

*11. Caregivers have the right to receive written notice of any change in a child's case plan or of plans to terminate the child's placement, along with the reasons for the change or termination.*

Because foster parents are crucial members of the child welfare team, they are consulted prior to any changes in a child's case plan. Foster parents are informed of plans to terminate the placement of a child with the foster parent and reasons for the change or termination in writing via the CFS 151-A/CFS 151-B, Notice of Change of Placement. Foster parents receive this notification at least fourteen days prior to a placement change except when a child is at imminent risk of harm or in accordance with a court order. In such instances, verbal notification regarding placement change is followed by the Notice of Decision from the foster care case manager and supervisor. Foster parents are advised by the case manager of their right to appeal the move of a child in their home and given information surrounding appealable moves. Such appeals must be filed by the foster parent within ten days of their receipts of the Notice of Decision. Directions for filing an appeal are included on the CFS forms.

Caritas Family Solutions strives to implement a transition plan when a placement change is needed for a youth in care whenever possible to reduce the impact of trauma on the youth and the foster family. Caritas Family Solutions also provides support for families who might be struggling with grief post placement by providing mentors and support groups.

### **Court Hearing Notification**

*12. Caregivers have the right to timely notification of court hearings and right to intervene or request mandamus.*

Foster parents are notified by the case manager prior to all court hearings. Depending on the county where the case is heard, foster parents may also receive written notification from the court itself. This notice includes the date and time of the court hearing, the name of the judge or hearing officer hearing the case, the location of the hearing, and the court docket number of the case. The case manager explains the purpose of the hearing and expected procedures and provides the foster parent with the name and contact information for the child's Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). Foster parents are advised that they have the right to contact the GAL with any questions or concerns they may have regarding the progress of the child(ren) placed in their home. A list of GALs for each county is also available on the Foster Parent Portal.

As part of PRIDE pre-service training, foster parents are trained on their rights in court, court related issues, and legal representation. Foster care case managers receive training regarding the foster parents' rights regarding court-related issues through staff in-service training as well as through supervisory consultation and on-going training and updates in regular foster care staff meetings.

### **Placement Option for Children Re-entering Care**

*13. Caregivers have the right to be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parents re-enters DCFS care.*

When a child returns to foster care, the DCFS Placement Unit reviews the child's placement history, and the previous placing agency is notified that the child has returned to care. In such an instance, the Caritas Family Solutions foster care supervisor is responsible for reviewing the record and accepting the case. The supervisor also ensures that the previous foster parent is considered as the first placement option. Caritas Family Solutions always attempts to place the child with their previous foster parents providing that the placement is in the best interest of the child. Such placement, however, is dependent upon:

1. Licensing regulations regarding capacity
2. The foster parents' ability and desire to care for the child/children in question
3. A review of the child's previous progress and adjustment in the home as documented in the child's case file

If the child is not placed in the previous foster home, a Critical Decision is completed which documents the reason. The Critical Decision becomes a part of the child's permanent case file.

### **Timely Access to Service Appeal System**

*14. Caregivers have the right to access the existing appeals process with the assertion that the appeal will be free from acts of harassment and retaliation.*

Caritas Family Solutions strives to reduce adversarial relationships between all members of the foster care team including foster parents and staff. To achieve this goal, Caritas Family Solutions seeks to ensure that foster parents are aware of appropriate contacts within the agency who can assist with conflict resolution. If a disagreement cannot be settled between a foster parent and case manager, the foster parent is encouraged to contact the case manager's supervisor. If tension still exists, the Assistant Program Director of Foster Care can be contacted.

A committee composed of foster parents representing each Caritas Family Solutions' regions reviewed and agreed to adopt the standardized grievance procedure. This policy is included in the Foster Parent Folder, is included in part of the annual Foster Parent Law Training, is attached to this implementation plan and is accessible to foster parents on the Caritas Family Solutions website and via the Foster Parent Portal. Members of the Foster Home Advisory



Committee serve as a part of the grievance panel who review foster care grievances to ensure foster parent voice is represented. If foster parents feel that their concerns have not been adequately addressed, they are encouraged to contact the Advocacy Office at 1-800-232-3798 and/or the Office of Caregiver and Parent Support. Caritas Family Solutions will not tolerate any harassment of or retaliation against foster parents who choose to participate in grievance proceedings.

Upon initial licensure, all Caritas Family Solutions foster parents are provided with CFS 1050-32 The Service Appeals Process. Licensing specialists and other staff assist foster parents in understanding the appeals process by providing agency sponsored training, one-on-one consultation with foster parents, and support from foster parent mentors and/or a Foster Parent Resource and Support Specialists. Caritas Family Solutions will not tolerate any harassment of or retaliation against foster parents who choose to participate in appeals proceedings.

### **Foster Parent Hotline**

*15. Caregivers have the right to be informed of the Foster Parent Hotline and the rights for foster parents when reporting misconduct by child welfare personnel.*

Foster parents are encouraged to utilize the agency chain of command in reporting concerns to Caritas Family Solutions as well as the Foster Parent Hotline. All contact information is presented to foster parents in writing upon licensure in the Foster Family Folder. In the event that a foster parent believes they have been subjected to unjust treatment or fostering conditions, the foster parent may file a grievance with the agency's Director of Quality Improvement and Compliance.

Caritas Family Solutions provides each foster parent with a copy of the CFS 1050-66, Office of the Inspector General Brochure. In the event that the foster parent is not satisfied with the outcome of an internal investigation of misconduct by staff, these brochures provide foster parents with necessary information to assist them in requesting an investigation of the matter by the Office of the Inspector General. Foster parents can contact the Foster Parent Hotline at 1-800-722-9124.

## **Foster Parent Responsibilities**

### **Open Communication**

*1. Caregivers have the responsibility to communicate and share information with the child welfare team.*

As a member of the foster care team, foster parents are trained and expected to be honest and open about any details related to the youth in care's life, adjustment issues, emotional well-being, physical well-being, education, behavior, etc. Foster parents should be prepared to discuss the youth in care's school progress, any behavior issues, emotional changes, medical concerns, and success and achievements at each monthly in person visit. This collaboration helps case managers assess possible service needs. In addition, foster parents should immediately report unusual incidents such as runaways, injuries, hospitalizations, accidents, etc.

Caritas Family Solutions child welfare staff assist foster parents in meeting this responsibility by providing the following:

1. An atmosphere of open communication and personal rapport
2. Frequent contact between foster parents and members of the foster care team via phone, email, in-home visits, etc.
3. Encouragement of the foster parents to share all pertinent information regarding a child's case
4. Behavioral logs (when applicable)
5. Contact information for all members of the child's foster care team

Caritas Family Solutions surveys foster families quarterly to measure efforts and enhance the quality of our communication.

Prior to placement of children in the foster home, foster parents read and sign the Caritas Family Solutions Licensed Foster Home Placement Agreement which outlines in detail the responsibilities of the foster parents regarding communication about children placed in their home. Foster parents receive the support of the child welfare team (case manager, therapist, licensing specialist, and supervisor). In addition, at least one member of the foster care staff is "on-call" 24 hours a day, seven days a week for emergency consultation. Foster parents are given an on-call number as well as specific direction for contacting the agency in the events of an emergency outside of regular business hours.

### **Confidentiality**

*2. Caregivers have the responsibility to respect the confidentiality of information about the child and his family.*

During foster parent PRIDE pre-service training, foster parents are thoroughly educated by PRIDE trainers regarding confidentiality laws and regulations concerning youth in care.

Additionally, as a part of the licensing process, a licensing specialist reviews the Caritas Family Solutions Licensed Foster Home Placement Agreement and the Caritas Family Solutions Foster Home Confidentiality Agreement with the foster parents to ensure that they understand stated directives regarding confidentiality. Foster parents sign and date these documents as testimony that they have read and understand all information within the agreement which is witnessed by the licensing specialist. These agreements become a part of the family's licensing record.

Confidentiality is reviewed semi-annually with foster parents during licensing monitoring visits conducted by licensing specialists. Caritas Family Solutions staff always adhere to the highest confidentiality standards as an example to foster parents. Agency sponsored training for foster parents are available as refreshers and foster care staff including case managers, supervisors, and licensing specialist are available for consultation in the event that foster parents have questions surrounding confidentiality.

### **Advocating for Children**

#### *3. Caregivers have the responsibility to advocate for children in the care of the foster parent.*

Caritas Family Solutions recognizes that the foster parent is the primary caregiver of the youth in care. As such, the foster parent not only provides day-to-day care of the child in an atmosphere of love and acceptance, but also acts as a "voice" for the child to ensure that necessary services such as special education, therapy, etc. are requested and evaluated by the child welfare team and other necessary consulting professionals. Foster parents are responsible for ensuring that the child actively participates in services deemed necessary by the child welfare team in consultation with the foster parents. As advocates for the child, foster parents are required to attend the DCFS mandated Educational Advocacy Training, LGBTQI+ and Youth in Foster Care Caregiver Training, and Normalcy-Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Training. Educational Advocacy Training provides foster parents with information needed to secure necessary educational services for youth in care and is offered monthly throughout the year online, free of cost. The LGBTQI+ and Youth in Foster Care Caregiver Training, and Normalcy-Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Training are offered online through DCFS. Additionally, foster parents are encouraged to utilize a Foster Parent Resource and Support Specialist in their area and/or the DCFS Education Specialist to answer questions or address concerns regarding educational needs. A Foster Parent Resource and Support Specialist is also available to attend educational meetings with the case manager and foster parent.

Members of the child welfare team assist foster parents in meeting their responsibility as advocates by providing an atmosphere of open communication, frequent contact between foster parents and other team members, and training to assist foster parents in understanding their rights and responsibilities regarding court hearings as well as protocol for testifying in court. The Caritas Family Solution's case manager also encourages foster parents to be involved in all administrative case reviews and communicates updated contact information for the foster parent to DCFS to ensure that the foster parents receive appropriate notification of these meetings. Case managers and licensing staff make every effort through mailings and discussion, to inform foster parents of their ability to request a Clinical Intervention for Placement

Preservation (CIPP) if they feel that a child might require more intensive case management and services.

Written information regarding the appeal system is given to foster parents when they have the right to appeal, including but not limited to: the notice of decision, investigations, complaints or when a service plan is distributed. When foster parents are given the appeal brochure, agency staff explain how the appeal process is implemented and answer any questions regarding appeals. Training surrounding the appeals process is offered annually.

### **Treating Children and Families with Dignity and Respect**

*4. Caregivers have the responsibility to treat the child and his or her family with dignity, respect, and consideration.*

Caritas Family Solutions assists foster parents in understanding the importance of treating all members of the child's family with dignity and respect through pre-licensure (PRIDE) and on-going training regarding issues of separation and loss as well as the complex nature of the child's relationship and attachment to their birth family. These trauma aware trainings also address the significant impact foster family's response to the birth family has on the overall emotional development of the child in care, and ultimately, successful reunification and/or permanency. Caritas Family Solutions provides agency sponsored trainings including: TBRI (Trust Based Relational Intervention), reunification, trauma as experienced by youth, birth parents and foster parents, and co-parenting through the support group format on a regular basis.

Case managers conduct monthly visits to the home to ensure that foster parents are treating children with dignity, respect, and consideration and to discuss strategies for likewise ensuring such dignity and respect carry over to birth families. Additionally, licensing specialists conduct monitoring visits of the foster home twice yearly during which this responsibility is further discussed. All staff involved with Caritas Family Solutions are trained to understand the importance of supporting and maintaining the dignity and respect of all youth in care, their family members, and their relationships and adhere to policy which promote such considerations.

### **Strengths and Limitations of Foster Parents**

*5. Caregivers have the responsibility to recognize their individual and family strengths and limitations and to utilize appropriate supports as appropriate.*

In an effort to promote placement stabilization, Caritas Family Solutions makes every effort to "match" children with foster parents and families who possess the necessary strengths to provide the best available care for each individual child. Foster parents are also encouraged to consider their own strengths and limitations when accepting or rejecting placement. Foster parents are given all available and important information known about the potential placement and are encouraged to take time to consider the information before making a decision

whenever possible. Licensing specialists maintain an open line of communication with foster parents in order to best understand the foster parents' preferences, strengths, and weaknesses in their role as a foster parent.

As a part of semi-annual monitoring visits, foster parents are evaluated by their case manager and licensing specialist regarding their compliance in terms of this responsibility. In an effort to build on foster parent strengths and develop areas for growth, Caritas Family Solutions considers the following in determining on-going training needs of foster families:

1. Feedback received from Foster PRIDE and in-service trainers
2. Foster parent requests for specific training topics
3. Feedback from agency training evaluations and suggestions
4. Feedback from Caritas Family Solutions Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey
5. Feedback from foster care staff regarding their perception of useful training topics
6. New developments in DCFS policy and procedures effecting children in care and foster parents

Caritas Family Solutions strives to provide training consistent with the agency's assessment of foster parent training needs as well as the foster parents' own assessment of their training needs. Foster parents are also encouraged to take advantage of services such as respite care, training offered by DCFS and other agencies, DCFS digital training, therapy, support groups, and other community services as resources in order to optimally meet the needs of the youth in care in their home. The rejection of a placement based on the foster parents' own assessment of their strengths and limitations is not held against foster parents regarding future placement requests by Caritas Family Solutions.

Case managers strive to maintain open communication with caregivers and providers regarding the child and their needs. In addition, foster parent mentors have been trained to work as first responders to promote stabilization and retention of foster parents by offering immediate peer support to foster parents. Foster parent mentors assist foster families in identifying their strengths and limitations while offering support and identifying needs in the home.

### **Supplemental Support**

*6. Caregivers have the responsibility to be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations.*

Foster parents are encouraged by the child welfare team (case manager, therapist, foster care supervisor, and licensing specialist) to attend foster parent support groups where they may attain support in their role as foster parents, as well as tips, advice, and skills for providing the best possible care to youth. Caritas Family Solutions offers monthly support groups for foster parents scheduled during both daytime and evening hours. Foster parents assist heavily in the development of these groups providing input and requests for training topics relevant to their own experiences. A Caritas Family Solutions Foster Support Group Facebook page assist foster parents in connecting on a social media platform. The agency also developed a Foster Parent

Law Implementation Committee composed of foster parents from each region who volunteered or were recommended by licensing staff who met virtually to review and plan for changes to the implementation plan prior to initial distribution for review.

Foster parents are encouraged to join the Restore Network, a nonprofit independent organization that strives to support foster parents in whatever capacity necessary. Foster parents are encouraged to utilize the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Policy to find alternate support within their own communities. They are given a copy of the policy in the Foster Parent Folder which is reviewed with them at the time of placement or licensure. Finally, foster parents are made aware of opportunities to participate in the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council as well as the Regional Advisory Council. Caritas Family Solutions Foster Parent Advisory Committee members participate in monthly support groups in order to stay abreast of foster parent concerns and to take those concerns to the larger committee.

### **Foster Parent Training Needs**

*7. Caregivers have the responsibility to assess their ongoing training needs and take action to meet those needs.*

Through the use of quarterly foster home surveys conducted by Caritas Family Solutions Department of Quality Improvement, foster parents are invited to request training to meet their ongoing individual training needs. Foster parents are also polled regularly during support groups to provide feedback for future training planning. Additionally, recommendations are made to foster parents by evaluators (licensing specialists, case managers, therapists, etc.), regarding appropriate training to be completed by the foster parents. The agency offers in-house training opportunities, including quarterly specialized foster parent training, based on a collaboration of requests from foster parents and observations by the child welfare team. Foster parents are encouraged to provide honest feedback to improve the quality of foster parent training and to ensure that foster parents are receiving the information they need for success. In the event that a training is needed which is not offered by Caritas Family Solutions, the child welfare team makes every effort to ensure that foster parents attain the training from another appropriate resource. Foster parents are informed of both agency and community training events via social media and foster care staff. Foster parents are also encouraged to assess their own skills and to make requests for training that they believe will enhance their ability to provide care for youth in care. As part of semi-annual monitoring visits, foster parents are evaluated regarding their compliance with this responsibility.

### **Preventing Placement Disruptions**

*8. Caregivers have the responsibility to strategize with agency representatives to avoid placement disruptions and support the child if disruption occurs.*

In an effort to maintain stable placements, all foster parents are encouraged to take advantage of respite as needed. Because Caritas Family Solutions acknowledges that foster parents are often best supported by their peers, the agency has established a foster parent mentoring

program with the distinct goal of stabilization. Newly licensed foster families as well as families in distress will be matched with trained foster parent mentors who can offer one-on-one specific support to families at risk for disruption. Additionally, foster parents are invited and encouraged to attend monthly foster parent support groups which often focus on the impact of trauma and equip foster parents with strategies for successfully de-escalating difficult situations and parenting youth in care. These groups also offer an opportunity for foster parents to meet and develop relationships with other foster parents and expand their network of support.

Additionally, foster parents are encouraged to take specific concerns regarding a child's behavior or overall care to the child's case manager. It is recommended that foster parents not only express their concerns verbally to the child's case manager, but also follow-up by putting their concerns in writing. The case manager, supervisor, and other members of the child welfare team, work with the foster parents to establish strategies to make the concerns more manageable for the foster family and thereby reduce the risk of placement disruptions within the format of a Child and Family Team Meeting. Intensive placement stabilization services are provided to foster parents as an additional effort to avoid placement disruption. Foster parents are informed that they have the right to request such services. Foster care staff are trained to identify children whose needs may rise to a level of specialized care and how to refer such cases for a CIPP review. In such cases, foster parents are offered specialized foster care training to assist them in better meeting the specific needs of the youth. In the event a placement disrupts despite efforts at stabilization, counseling is available to youth in care and the foster family.

Case managers learn skills regarding placement stabilization during supervision and through other agency trainings. Because children who have been in multiple placements are more likely to disrupt future placements, case managers often make referrals for foster parent mentors for families who are accepting placement of children who have been in prior placement. Recognizing that violent behaviors or explosive outbursts frequently lead to instable placements, case managers and supervisors work with foster parents on de-escalation strategies and help to frame behavior through the lens of trauma. Case managers and foster families are offered trainings regarding understanding children and their family's needs such as trauma, attachment, and development. These trainings are provided by Caritas Family Solutions, DCFS and through community resources such as counseling centers.

### **Impact of Fostering and Stress Management**

*9. Caregivers have the responsibility to recognize the impact of foster care on relationships and take steps to minimize stress as much as possible.*

During the foster home licensing study, the strengths and limitations of the foster family regarding characteristics of their family relationships is assessed thoroughly by the licensing specialist. Strengths and concerns resulting from the assessment are discussed with the applicants on a personal level prior to licensure. Additionally, education regarding family dynamics and the effects a placement will have on the foster family's own family is discussed as part of the pre-licensure PRIDE training required of all licensed foster parents. Case managers

as well as foster parents are offered and encouraged to participate in “Caring for Children who have Experienced Trauma” to educate and help alleviate unnecessary moves. Case managers work with foster parents to assess and identify behaviors, needs, or resources to reduce the risk of placement disruptions.

Foster parents are encouraged to discuss their personal concerns regarding the effects of foster parenting on the foster family with their licensing specialist. Foster parents are encouraged to participate in foster parent support groups and to seek the assistance of other foster parents and licensing specialists as needed. Caritas Family Solutions strives to schedule speakers and trainers for these support group sessions that specialize in topics requested by foster parents as needed areas of training, so that foster parents can get the best benefit from these sessions.

Foster parents are encouraged to request respite care for youth in care in order to minimize stress on the foster family. Caritas Family Solutions will provide respite care for foster parents as needed and on a case-by-case basis. The agency understands that certain children with more challenging behaviors and intensive needs may take an emotional toll on the foster home environment. Families who care for youth at the specialized level are entitled to 15 hours of respite care monthly as a part of their contract. Foster parents are also encouraged to utilize their own support system as a means of respite in alignment with the Prudent Parenting Standards.

Caritas Family Solutions also encourages foster parents to utilize our Foster Parent Mentoring Program, and seek outside counseling services to learn coping skills to alleviate stress that can occur from fostering. The Foster Parent Resource and Support Specialist is also available to help. The agency also requests Intensive Placement Stabilization (IPS) services for the youth in care and family when appropriate to minimize stress.

In the event that foster parents feel the need to take “a break” from foster care but do not wish to close their license, they may request that the agency put their license on “Voluntary Inactive Hold.” This means that the license will remain in place, however licensing activities will be discontinued (no monitoring visits) and children may not be placed in the home until the foster parents request that the license be returned to active status. During the period of inactive status, foster parents must continue to meet all licensing requirements per Rule 402. The process for requesting a license be placed on Voluntary Inactive Hold is thoroughly explained to foster parents at initial licensure and upon request by the foster parent for additional information.

### **Promote Foster Parenting Positively**

*10. Caregivers have the responsibility to positively promote the benefits of foster parenting.*

During pre-licensure activities and Foster PRIDE training, foster parents receive education about the important services that foster parents provide to children, parents, families, and society in general. When possible, foster care alumni speak at agency sponsored training about their experiences in the foster care system. Individual recognition of services provided by foster



parents is noted publicly at agency Foster Parent Appreciation functions, as well as through social media. Foster parents are encouraged to be proactive and bring any concerns directly to their foster care case manager or licensing specialist so these issues can be addressed by the agency in a timely and appropriate manner.

Caritas Family Solutions recognizes that foster parents are the best source of recruitment of new foster parents. As such, foster parents are invited to participate in recruitment of new homes at agency recruitment functions, as well as by word of mouth to others who might be an asset to the children served by the agency. Foster parents are encouraged to share positive foster parenting experiences with one another and to act as positive supports.

## **Roles, Rights, and Responsibilities of Child Welfare Team**

*11. Caregivers have the responsibility to know the role, rights and responsibilities of foster parents, other professionals in the child welfare system, the child and the child's own family.*

Prior to licensure, Caritas Family Solutions provides foster parents with education concerning their roles, rights, and responsibilities as foster parents. The roles and responsibilities of each member of the professional child welfare team is heavily addressed as part of PRIDE pre-service training. Experienced foster parents and child welfare professionals participate as co-trainers of PRIDE. Staff and foster parents also partner to continue training on roles, rights, and responsibilities during monthly foster parent support groups. Foster parents receive written documentation of the roles and responsibilities of all members of the child welfare team including foster parents prior to licensure and as a part of the licensing study. The foster parents' signature on the Caritas Family Solutions Agreement of Understanding is accepted by the agency as verification of the foster parents' understanding of the child welfare team. Documentation of the rights of the birth family is provided to foster parents prior to licensure on the Caritas Family Solutions Foster Parent Placement Agreement. Foster parents are expected to be familiar with this document and verify that they have read and understand it by their signature. Foster parents are also encouraged to ask questions of their case manager or licensing specialist to help familiarize and educate them with each team member role. Additionally, foster parents are encouraged to hold other members of the team accountable for their responsibilities. Foster parent concerns are addressed in the same manner with which concerns of any other team member are addressed.

Caritas Family Solutions encourages foster parent case involvement through attendance at court, administrative case reviews, Child and Family Team Meetings, school meetings (IEP), counseling, and any additional services that the child may require. Likewise, foster parents are encouraged to participate in reunification by supporting the return home goal, cooperating with the scheduling of visitation, ensuring child attendance at those visits, and participating in the visit when the situation allows.

Caritas Family Solutions support groups allow foster parents to build relationships with one another and establish rapport with all members of the child welfare team. Foster parents are invited to request topics for training that will assist them in caring for the child(ren) in their

care. Staff members are available to answer questions and provide additional information. The Foster Parent Implementation Plan is reviewed periodically during the support group meetings giving foster parents the opportunity to add valuable input. Caritas Family Solutions has also created a Foster Parent Implementation Planning Committee to review the Foster Parent Implementation Plan and offer suggestions for creative and empowering ways to implement the Foster Parent Law. All foster parents are informed of the updated Caritas Family Solutions Foster Parent Implementation Plan each calendar year. In addition, Caritas Family Solutions recognizes the voice of foster parents through the formation of a Foster Parent Advisory Committee which meets quarterly addressing concerns and offering recommendations to agency leadership.

### **Mandated Reporter Responsibility**

*12. Caregivers have the responsibility to know and fulfill their role as mandated reporter and know policies regarding allegations that foster parents have committed abuse or neglect.*

Prior to licensure and as a part of PRIDE training, foster parents are trained regarding their role as mandated reporters of child abuse/neglect. Specific information on “what to report” and “how to make a report” is thoroughly presented. Foster parents are required to sign the Acknowledgement of Mandated Reporter Status form (CANTS 22B) prior to licensure. Agency training is provided to ensure that foster parents understand the reasons for investigations as well as the responsibility of the Department and Caritas Family Solutions to investigate allegations of abuse/neglect by foster parents. In the event of a licensing investigation, foster parents are given written documentation regarding the rationale and procedures for conducting investigations. Foster parents may also access this document on the agency website as it is included with the agency’s annual Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan.

### **Notification and Participation in Meetings**

*13. Caregivers have the responsibility to know the purpose of and to participate in Administrative Case Reviews, client service plans, and court proceedings.*

As part of PRIDE pre-service training, information is provided to foster parents regarding their responsibilities for participation in administrative case reviews (ACR), client service planning, the court process, etc. The importance of foster parent involvement in such meetings/staffings/proceedings is emphasized by case managers and licensing specialists, as well. A brief outline of court proceedings is included in the Foster Parent Folder for review for foster parents. Foster care staff and foster parent mentors are available to provide information regarding the court process and other pertinent information regarding the life of the case.

The child’s case manager notifies the foster parents of all decisions made by the courts or the agency concerning the child. Documentation of notifications and decisions are maintained in the child’s case file. Foster parents are encouraged to keep a copy of all documentation regarding the child(ren) in care.

## **Appeal System**

*14. Caregivers have the responsibility to know the child welfare agency's appeal process.*

Upon initial licensure, all Caritas Family Solutions foster parents are given a Foster Parent Folder which includes a copy of the Foster Parent's Rights and Responsibilities, including the grievance process as pertains to these rights. Additionally, Foster Parent Law training is provided annually to ensure that foster parents have a working knowledge of their rights and responsibilities and the grievance process. When the Foster Parent Folder is presented to the foster parents, they sign the Caritas Family Solutions form, Foster Family Folder Sign-Off Sheet stating that they have received the information. In addition, the grievance procedure is located within the implementation plan which is distributed annually and can be located on the agency website. Foster parents are informed of their ability to contact the advocacy office in the event they feel that their grievance has not been addressed adequately.

## **Maintaining Accurate and Relevant Child Records**

*15. Caregivers have the responsibility to maintain accurate records.*

As a part of the licensing study, the Caritas Family Solutions licensing specialist thoroughly explains the importance of keeping relevant records to remain in compliance with Rule 402, Licensing Standards for Foster Family Homes. Foster parents are required to keep accurate records of receipts for clothing purchased for the child and distribution of allowance money for each youth in care placed in their home. Forms are distributed to foster parents to assist them in keeping these records. Foster parents also keep accurate records regarding, but not limited to: administration of medication, school and education related records, medical records, and an inventory of the child's belongings.

Compliance of record keeping is monitored by the child's case manager at monthly visits, and by licensing specialists during semi-annual monitoring visits. Foster parents are also encouraged to keep a Life Book documenting achievement of developmental milestones and special events in the child's life for each child in care. The Life Book is given to the foster parent by the case manager upon the child's initial placement in foster care. When the child is returned home to their birth parents or leaves the placement for any reason the Life Book follows them as well.

## **Sharing Information with Subsequent Caregivers**

*16. Caregivers have the responsibility to share information about the placement with subsequent caregivers/parents.*

In compliance with laws regarding confidentiality, Caritas Family Solutions encourages foster parents to disclose with the child welfare team all information relevant to the child which may help enhance the child's adjustment and ensure placement stabilization in subsequent placements. When a child is moved to a new placement, whether home to the birth parent or to another foster home, the child's folder is provided to the new caregiver by the current foster parent. When possible and appropriate, Caritas Family Solutions encourages foster parents to

dialogue with the parent or new caregiver regarding the child's needs, preferences, schedule, habits, and other information that may make the new placement easier for both the child and the caregiver. In addition, the Life Book should accompany the youth in care to their subsequent placement. These expectations are included in both PRIDE pre-service and agency sponsored trainings.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

*17. Caregivers have the responsibility to provide care that respects the child's cultural needs and supports the relationship between the child and his or her own family.*

During PRIDE training, foster parents are introduced to the unique challenges youth in care face surrounding positive development of sexual, cultural, and racial identity when growing up in foster care. Foster parents accepting the placement of children from races and cultures other than their own are provided with on-going training regarding the child's cultural needs and the importance of finding outlets to meet those needs. The importance of supporting the relationship between the child and their family and their cultural background is stressed through on-going cultural awareness and reunification training, along with LGBTQI+ training. Additionally, through the mentoring program, foster parents are connected with peer support to address issues such as skin and hair care and strategies to develop positive sexual, cultural, and racial identity. Foster parents are provided a copy of the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard which encourages them to connect their youth in care to various cultural events and activities in their communities. Caritas Family Solutions assists foster parents in locating such resources and advertises them through social media. Licensing specialists review the residual rights of birth parents to religious choice and how foster parents support this right prior to licensure and at semi-annual monitoring visits. Interpreters are requested and utilized when needed.