

# ND Child Welfare Supervision

October 2020

This is a very challenging and unique time in child welfare in North Dakota. We are experiencing a tremendous amount of change and restructuring while facing a worldwide pandemic and a myriad of impactful societal and economic factors. These elements place great demands on our child welfare system including our foster families. We are in a constant battle to maintain an adequate number of quality foster homes to meet the needs of the children and youth in care. Our state numbers of incoming newly licensing foster parents barely keep pace with the numbers of foster families choosing not to continue. More than ever, this time requires not only recruitment but retention efforts to be diligent, mindful, and targeted. This is said with a full acknowledgement that this is a trying time for EVERYONE!

We are asking you as supervisors, (who are potentially stressed and overwhelmed) to encourage and support your front line workers, (also who are likely overwhelmed and stressed) to provide even more support and encouragement to foster families all the while doing it in new innovative ways with sensitivity, safety, and social distancing in mind. Not an easy task!

Placing retention at the center of our practice starting with recruitment and throughout licensing, placing youth, supporting placements, and assisting foster families with the transition after a child leaves their home is more essential now than ever.

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## The Importance of Foster Parent Retention

### What does it look like when we place retention at the center of our Practice?

- \*Depicting foster care in its reality in North Dakota.
- \*Use of images and verbiage that clearly reflects who we are serving and who we need to join this effort.
- \*Supporting workers so that they have the energy and enthusiasm to support foster families.
- \*Place priority on developing foster families and encouraging them to grow in their skills and comfort level.
- \* Hold this understanding at the center of everything we do, that providing foster care is a tremendous gift of service. Fostering is 24 hours a day 7 days a week, on top of all the other responsibilities that foster families have in their lives. Foster parents truly share their hearts, homes, family, and all they have to provide care. A truly sacred gift and should always be treated as such.



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# The Top Ten Ways to Lose a Foster Parent

*Taken from The Imprint Youth and Family News*

## 10. Fail to support families after they close their home because their family has been made complete through adoption or they're ready to start a new chapter of their life beyond fostering.

Most families never regret their experience as foster or kinship families. Many enjoy this role for years and end up filling their home with more children than they ever imagined. Some families are no longer able to foster because after adopting one or more children from foster care or other life changes bring the time for fostering to a close. These families can still contribute to foster care by sharing their advice and experience with other families and are often the best recruiters! Maintaining a good relationship with families as they leave the system is just as important as when they are currently fostering!

## 9. Inadequately provide support to foster families experiencing primary or secondary trauma.

Most foster families do not have access to therapeutic support for themselves or their biological children during or after caring for children in foster care. Marriages and healthy family functioning can be greatly impacted by witnessing the effect of trauma on children in foster care. Encouraging all families to access support and gain skills to overcome challenging situations is essential.

## 8. Fail to communicate in an honest, respectful and timely manner.

Everyone is stretched to their maximum capacity when a child is placed in foster care. Foster parents may be desperate for details to help them properly care for a child. They need for dates of visits with parents, meetings with social workers, individualized education program (IEP) meetings, child and family team meetings, therapeutic appointments and court hearings. They would like clarity and full disclosure of important information prior to the placement of a child in their home. Placements are at high risk of failure if a family is not given a true picture of what is needed to best support a child. Over time, foster parents may learn to mistrust all they are told by the child welfare agency.

## 7. Lack organization, lose paperwork and fail to document or misrepresent key information in a case.

There is a great deal of bureaucracy to get approved to foster a child. Many potential foster families do not complete the foster family approval process because of the disorganization, length of time and lack of communication involved in that licensing process. An adoption process can be so lengthy and complicated, that families decide not to continue fostering other children after the adoption is complete. Caregivers can become frustrated when key information is lost or not included in reports. Foster families who have a good working relationship with agencies can support workers by documenting key information, keeping copies of paperwork, and asking for updates.

## 6. Fail to respect the time of resource families.

A foster families' time is best spent caring for children and not on other onerous activities. When foster families are asked for an unreasonable amount of time to supervise visitations, driving or other activities, in addition to the normal parenting that children need, foster families can burn out quickly. It is important to keep a family's overall schedule and well-being in mind to have happier foster families who are often more than willing to go the extra mile to help.

## 5. Fail to show appreciation.

Foster families typically do not foster for awards or acknowledgment, but it is difficult for resource families to continue fostering if they feel unappreciated. Children and biological families involved in foster care should not be expected to show appreciation, though they often do. It falls to the agency to ensure that their foster families feel appreciated.

A supportive community can show appreciation to foster families by providing events and activities to show appreciation. Foster families share that the most effective way of showing appreciation is an ongoing and overall attitude of respect and acknowledgment of what foster families do for vulnerable children and families.

## 4. Retaliate against resource families.

Unfortunately, it can be common for families to experience real or perceived retaliation for disrupting placements, advocating for a child, asking too many questions, and more. Retaliation often comes in the form of removing a child or not placing a sibling or refusing to place in a home again. A child's best interests should always be the top priority when a placement decision is made and should never be made or disrupted to punish or manipulate foster families. In addition to harming children, this has a disastrous effect of overall morale of a fostering community and to resource family retention.

### 3. Failure to provide appropriate support to children with extensive needs and behavioral issues.

Foster families say that they are receiving children with a higher level of needs than ever before. Because of neonatal exposure to substances, and the level of trauma that children are experiencing before entry into foster care, higher levels of support are needed. Although higher rates are provided for families who need to provide advanced levels of care, supervision and behavioral intervention, many times families are not given the types of support that is necessary to care for children placed in their homes.

### 2. Fail to create a community for resource families.

Foster families have a day-to-day life that can only be understood by other foster families. Seasoned foster families may have ongoing secondary trauma and loss to process. Without a community to feel a part of, foster families can feel alone and unable to reach out for the support that they need. Foster families who have been fostering for a long time usually are part of a fostering community that sees them through the highs and lows of foster care.

### 1. Show a lack of respect.

Oftentimes people forget that foster and kinship parents are volunteers. They receive a maintenance payment to cover some of the cost of caring for children placed with them by child welfare agencies. Their time is valuable. They are donating a great deal of time, energy, and heart to care for the most vulnerable children in our communities. They do not expect a badge of honor, but expect to be shown respect. This includes being treated as a stakeholder in the case, and as a partner with the child welfare agency.

<https://imprintnews.org/fostercarecapacity-org/the-top-10-ways-to-lose-a-foster-parent/38245>

#### foster parenting

(verb)

1. loving whomever is entrusted for however long they are entrusted; standing in the gap.
2. risking the protection of one's heart for the protection of a child.



*Support the child, and the family.*



Do you have questions for the Recruitment and Retention Specialist? Are you wondering how we can assist you with your recruitment and retention activities at your local level? Please email [sheila.muus@und.edu](mailto:sheila.muus@und.edu)

Even though we may feel very constricted with recruitment and retention activities given Covid-19, we are here to help craft creative efforts to continue our important work in these areas. Region V Recruitment and Retention Coalition refused to let Covid-19 take away the opportunity to bring awareness to the need for additional foster homes and that foster youth and all families along the child welfare continuum deserve and need support. This display was delayed from May 2020 but was able to be displayed at West Acres Mall in Fargo from September 14 – 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

Did you know that we have a Toll Free Foster Parent Recruitment/Inquiry Line for the state of North Dakota? Individual that are interested in learning more about foster care or adoption options can call 1-833-FST-HOME (1-833-378-4663) Please share this number widely!