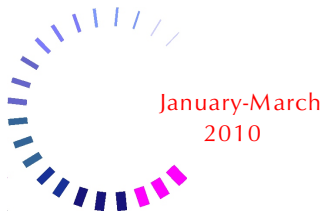


FOSTER CARE JOURNAL



Foster Care Journal, 2010
© American Foster Care Resources, Inc., Jacob R. Sprouse, Jr., Publisher
P.O. Box 271, King George, Virginia 22485
Published Quarterly; AFCR, Inc., A non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization.
FIEN 54-1220248
<http://www.afcr.com>
afcr@afcr.com

The Care (and Feeding) of Your Social Worker

We often focus on the needs of foster families and foster parents to successfully work within the stress-filled, day-to-day realities of the foster care system—there follows just a few suggestions and observations on ways foster parents may better support the “other half” of the caring team.

Know Your Worker's Role: As good team members, you need to know and carry out your own role and function on the foster care team. You also need to be familiar with the role of your social workers and the expectations of their job. Workers are people who, like you, are limited by the boundaries of their job and the mandates of the agency. The better you know exactly what your workers are expected to do and how they are expected to do it, the better you will be able to fulfill your own roles in relation to those of your workers in meeting the needs of the children in your care.

Give Praise And Recognition: Make certain that your workers, your other foster care teammates, and your workers' supervisors know of it when your workers have done an especially good job. A personal note of thanks or recognition of jobs well-done from the foster family association/support group would be valued.

Celebrate Accomplishments: When the team attains the permanency goal, completes a successful visit, or the child in care has a

significant academic or other accomplishment, celebrate these and similar events. These events are really why foster families and workers are in this business of child welfare. When you share your home and these celebrations with your workers, you are ensuring a continuing healthy team relationship.

Invest Time, Energy And Other Resources In Training: Keep yourselves and your workers up to date by sharing journals and books in the area of child welfare. By keeping yourself current in the field you can provide an important service to other foster parents and agency workers. Through your foster parent association/support group you can provide combined worker-foster parent training programs which will ensure team development. Your association can design and provide content for training programs for foster parents and workers.

Help Your Workers Grow And Develop In Their Jobs: Help your workers to assess their own strengths. As good team members you can provide the leadership needed to assist all team members to attain their potentials. As a foster parent you have good assessment skills because you are constantly called upon to help the children in your care to recognize and assess their strengths. The same skills needed to lead children can be used to help

all your teammates make good assessments. These are often listening and feedback skills.

Provide Workers The Opportunity To Share Their Knowledge And Skills With You: Foster families often have more life experience in the child welfare field than their workers. You rightly expect your workers to respect and learn from your experience. Workers, especially those just out of school or new to the social welfare field, bring a dedication, untried enthusiasm, and solid theory with them to the job. This combination, on any team, is one which will assure success, if the leadership is there to blend the best talents and skills of each team member. You can take that leadership role by affording your worker the opportunity to both formally and informally share with you.

Insist That All Team Members Participate In The Decision Making Process: Workers often feel as if they are under a tremendous burden to insure the welfare and safety of the children on their caseload. You can help workers overcome much of their anxiety by showing them how you can share a great deal of their burden. Provide them with well recorded documentation. Participate in service plan reviews and initiate team meetings when needed. Meet and work closely with the workers from other departments, such as Preventive Services, who will also be involved with the children in your care and their families. Work through your foster family associations/support groups to establish the role of foster families within your agencies in a professionally strong position.

Provide Your Workers With Facts, Not Feelings: Foster family care brings forth all sorts of emotions and feelings in all participants. Do not expect your worker to be your counselor, therapist, or someone responsible for restructuring the world to meet your needs. Learn good documentation skills and the requirements of the law

regarding parental rights and responsibilities. The more knowledge you have in these areas, the more effective your team will be. Your team's, and each individual's, success in reaching the permanency goal depends on hard and objective work from energetic hearts.

Do Not Overload Your Worker: Know clearly what decisions you individually can and must make, and those which you cannot and must not make without consultation. Always be direct and to the point when consulting with your worker. It is good practice to schedule a specific time in which you and your worker will have a face to face or phone consultation. Because both of you are busy people, prepare your agenda and stick to it. At the same time never forget the other side of coin. Workers, like you, need the chance to relax and reflect with their peers.

Be A Good Role Model: Know what is expected of you as a foster family by your agency. Then fulfill and exceed these expectations. Study child welfare issues, attend conferences, let your voice be heard. Work as a loyal and capable team member for the attainment of the permanency goal. Respect the children you foster, their families, and your professional colleagues. Empower them to fulfill their roles.

Remember: When people have trouble working together, it is usually not because they are bad, mean-spirited or ineffective people, but because the system in which they are working is ineffective. With your workers, strive to make the system more effective in its goal of serving children and their families. Begin by helping your workers grow and thrive on the job.

