



DISCIPLINE POLICY AND GUIDELINES

Purpose: Discipline is an educational process through which children develop the self-control, self-reliance and orderly conduct necessary to assume responsibilities, make daily living decisions and live according to acceptable standards of social behavior. The goal of discipline is to teach children to control their own behavior. Self-discipline is learned by experiencing the natural consequences of one's behavior. With self-discipline, children control their behavior based on rules they believe to be important.

Acceptable Methods of Discipline: Children must be disciplined with kindness, consistency and understanding. Foster parents may use the following methods of discipline:

1. Reinforcement of acceptable behavior—for example, (depending on the age and the likes and dislikes of the child) honest praise, special privileges and treats, extra hugs and kisses (appropriate to age/sex of child) and stars or “smiley faces” on a door or bulletin board;
2. Verbal disapproval of the child's behavior (never disapproval of the child)—for example, “I don't like ball throwing in the house”;
3. Loss of privileges—for example, if the ball throwing continues (see above) then take the ball away and restrict the child from watching television, participating in a special event or playing with a specific toy;
4. Redirecting the child's activity—for example, if a child is playing with a sharp object or other dangerous or restricted object, take the object away from the child and replace it with a safe, appropriated toy;
5. Grounding (restriction to the house, a room or the yard); and
6. Time out (separation from others) can consist of sending the child out of the room and away from the family activity or placement in a special time out area. The area must be an unlocked, lighted, well-ventilated room at least 50 square feet in area that is within hearing distance of an adult. A general rule for time out is one minute for each year of the child's age (again, depending of the severity of the misbehavior). Time outs should not exceed fifteen (15) minutes for any child.

Prohibited Disciplinary Practices. Foster parents **SHALL NOT:**

1. Use derogatory remarks or other forms of verbal abuse toward the child or his/her family members;
2. Place a child in a locked room;
3. Use cruel, severe, humiliating, unusual or degrading punishment which subjects the child to ridicule;
4. Use corporal punishment (which includes: spanking, slapping, pinching, shaking, pulling hair, twisting ears or any other physical punishment which inflicts pain upon the child);
5. Delegate discipline or punishment of the child to another child or to an adult who is unknown to the child;
6. Use group punishment for the misbehavior of an individual child;
7. Withhold or deny meals, clothing, shelter, mail, family visits or contact with family members or caseworkers as discipline;
8. Punish a child for bed-wetting or errors which occur during the toilet training process;
NOTE: Techniques for working with children who are not yet toilet trained should be discussed with the counselor prior to accepting an untrained child. Problems in training should be communicated to the counselor as they occur.
9. Put hot pepper, soap, or other foreign substances in a child's mouth as discipline;
10. Assign chores to a child which involve physical exercise so excessive as to endanger the child's health or so extensive as to impinge upon time set aside for schoolwork, sleeping, or eating;
11. Use threats of removal or reports to the child's counselor, judge or other authorities as punishment.

Special Care Required: After a time, an exceptionally difficult child in care can bring a foster parent to think about asking the Department to remove the child. Although a foster parent would not ask the Department to remove their biological child because of misbehavior, they do have the option of asking for the removal of a child in care.

Older children in care often expect to be told they have to go, and while they may seem troubled by this, they feel they have such little control over their lives that misbehavior becomes inescapable, as does a new placement. Children in care may even tell foster parents they expect to move again, so why should they pay attention to the rules or try to make the placement work?

On the same note, it is natural for foster parents to expect some response, or at least some cooperation on the part of a “detached” newly placed child. When neither happen, foster parents seem to take offense to any misbehavior by the detached child, even more so than they would if they experienced the same behavior from an emotionally attached child who shows absolutely no guilt or remorse when confronted. Threatening the detached child in care with removal plays right into their perception of themselves; that they are doomed to a life of constant turmoil and one of moving from home to home. The first task in these situations is to help identify specific behaviors that are troubling to the foster parent, and with the foster parents and child, make an assessment of what can be done to correct the problem to prevent a disturbance of placement.

If the foster parents are considering removal as a consequence of the child’s persistent misbehavior, then a conference must be held with the child, foster parent and the child's counselor to discuss this possibility. The presence of the counselor, to support both the foster parents and the child, is critical to the outcome and can be helpful in restoring some of the child’s feeling of control over his/her own life.

Violations: Violation of the above policy may result in an investigation and possible closure of the foster home. While it is possible to violate the discipline policy without actually committing child abuse (e.g. spanking), some violations may also be considered abuse and may, therefore, be investigated as such.

AGREEMENT TO ABIDE BY DISCIPLINE POLICY

I confirm that I have had explained to me by the agency representative the State's policy regarding discipline of children in care. I have also received a copy of this policy.

I understand that violation of this policy could result in the termination of my license. I agree to abide by the State policy regarding discipline of children in care, which includes no corporal punishment being used.

Foster Parent

Date

Foster Parent

Date

Agency Representative

Date