

Foster Placement and Adoption Readiness Checklist

Family hardships may lead to unsuitable living arrangements for children of all ages. Some parents have unfortunately died in the recent pandemic. Others have lost a job, faced eviction, become homeless, abused their children, dealt with addiction, or been imprisoned. In all these circumstances, their children are the unintended victims.

When children suffer from negative circumstances in the home, state officials may intervene. The goal of home intervention is to protect children from abuse, neglect, and unlivable conditions. In those circumstances, state agencies enter the living situation to assess the conditions. Teachers, neighbors, friends, or relatives often are the ones to contact agencies to make a referral, and the connection between the family and state agencies may last for years. In some cases, the state agency recommends that children be removed from the home and placed with foster parents. In severe cases, it may recommend adoption.

Placing a child in foster care is not without risks. The overburdened foster care system has caused understaffed state agencies to overlook blemished background checks, perform fewer on-site unannounced visits, and place children in overcrowded homes. The risk of harm to children may go undiscovered for weeks, months, and even years.

Determining the risks of foster and adoptive placements is daunting, not only because of privacy protections for information about minor children, but also because many state agencies fear repercussions for underperformance and understaffing.

Problems arise from having too few foster homes, inadequate funding for foster parents, and little or no oversight for group homes or institutional placements.

Some pertinent information for a checklist may include the following:

- The ratio between foster care homes and agency investigators meets state requirements.
- Social workers oversee no more than 15 children each month.
- Foster parents are licensed and undergo relicensing training at least annually.
- The number of children permitted in a foster home is limited by the size of the home.
- The number of cases per agency investigator meets or exceeds state requirements.
- The frequency of on-site unscheduled home visits meets or exceeds state requirements.
- The accuracy of visitation logs is tracked and reported by the appropriate state agency at least monthly and is readily available to outside investigators.
- Disciplinary records of foster parents are available upon request from the state agency.
- State agencies have proof that background checks for foster and adoptive parents are conducted at least twice per year.

- The agency tracks arrest records and driving records for foster and adoptive parents at least biannually.
- Foster parents are trained to manage reunification plans with biological parents.
- Agencies track and investigate allegations of abuse and remove children from abusive or neglectful foster placements.
- Biological parents receive training and counseling for reunification.
- The average separation from the biological parents is less than six months.
- Foster placement percentages are less than 25% for the country.
- The city, state, or nonprofits offer parenting classes focused on prevention at no cost to the foster or biological family.
- Agencies complete quality checks on social workers, investigators, and convene Quality Assurance Committee meetings monthly.
- A hotline phone number to report abuse is made public and provided to biological parents and children.
- Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)/Guardian ad Litem (GAL)volunteers serve as effective as child advocates.

References

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