

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Department of Social Services

**An Agreement Between the Massachusetts
Department of Social Services and Foster/Adoptive Parents**

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Department of Social Services strives to strengthen and encourage family life for the protection and care of children. Foster/adoptive families are an important resource for achieving these goals. Foster/adoptive families provide a healthy setting for a child until he or she can either return home or, if necessary, be placed in an alternate permanent home.

This Agreement informs Department foster/adoptive families of their responsibilities. The Department sets forth herein its responsibilities to foster/adoptive families. This Agreement will remain in effect throughout a person's career as a foster/adoptive parent, unless terminated by either party. This Agreement will be reviewed and updated as part of the foster/adoptive family re-evaluation process.

For purposes of this document, the term "adoptive parent" refers to a person with whom DSS has placed a child(ren) for adoption but legalization of the adoption has not yet occurred.

THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES AGREES TO:

1. provide the family with sufficient information about a child who is in DSS care or custody, prior to placement, so that she or he can knowledgeably determine whether or not to accept the child, and to provide the foster/adoptive family with sufficient ongoing information about the child who is in DSS care or custody to enable the foster/adoptive family to provide adequate care to that child and to meet the individual needs of that child.
2. provide the foster/adoptive family with relevant training programs.
3. assign a social worker who will be responsible for providing direct service to the child who is in DSS care or custody (and her/his biological family), supporting her/his placement with the foster/adoptive family, and visiting the child and the foster/adoptive family at least once a month.
4. assign a family resource worker who will be responsible for providing critical support to the foster/adoptive family; conducting evaluations; and preparing documentation as required by policy, including documentation of any significant changes in the home, such as: addition of a new household member; death; serious illness or serious injury of a household member; separation or divorce of the foster/adoptive parents; loss of employment by a foster/adoptive parent or head of household; reduction of foster/adoptive family income; loss of foster/adoptive parent's qualified citizenship status; or changes in the residence. (Any significant change will be immediately communicated to the child's social worker.) The family resource worker will contact the foster/adoptive family monthly during the probationary period [i.e., the first six (6) months after approval/licensing], will visit the home monthly following the placement of a child in the home, and will visit every other month after the probationary period has ended.
5. involve the foster/adoptive family in the planning and implementation of services for the child in her/his care. The Service Plan will identify the goal, outcome/type of changes needed, and tasks/services (with related completion dates) for the family, the Department, and other parties, including the foster/adoptive family. The foster/adoptive family signs and is provided with a copy of the Service Plan.

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6. invite the foster/adoptive family to Foster Care Reviews and other case conferences.
7. inform the foster/adoptive family of the range and frequency of payments she/he will receive for the care of a child who is in DSS care or custody.
8. provide the foster/adoptive family with a Medical Passport for each child who is in DSS care or custody placed in the home and ensure that each child's medical and dental expenses are covered.
9. delegate to the foster/adoptive family the right to arrange for and authorize routine medical and dental care for a child who is in DSS care or custody placed with the foster/adoptive family.
10. delegate to the foster/adoptive family the right to authorize appropriate school-related activities such as registration and field trips for a child placed with the foster/adoptive family.
11. if the parent of a child in DSS care or custody will not be serving as the educational decision maker for her/his child, arrange for the foster/adoptive parent to serve as the child's educational decision maker for special education or early intervention services, including, when necessary, recommending the foster/adoptive parent to the Department of Education or the Department of Public Health, respectively, for appointment as an Educational Surrogate Parent, when it would be in the best interests of the child.
12. recognize the foster/adoptive family's right to maintain the foster/adoptive family's child-rearing practices, as long as these do not conflict with Departmental regulation or policy, or the needs of the child.
13. make available to the foster/adoptive family the Department's reviews or re-evaluations of the foster/adoptive family, upon request by the foster/adoptive family.
14. supply the foster/adoptive family with information on the procedures for requesting review of Departmental decisions, filing a complaint through a grievance, requesting a Fair Hearing, the process for closing a foster/adoptive home, and the process for removing a child who is in DSS care or custody from a foster/adoptive family.
15. provide limited amounts of reimbursement, secondary to other primary insurance (such as homeowner's), for reimbursement on account of theft of or damage to the foster/adoptive family's property that is the result of deliberate, malicious action by a child who is in DSS care or custody.
16. notify the foster/adoptive family if the Department decides to pursue legal guardianship or adoption for a child placed with the foster/adoptive family, and afford the foster/adoptive family adequate opportunity to apply to become the legal guardian or adoptive parent for that child.
17. notify the foster/adoptive family, in writing including the reason(s), at least ten (10) calendar days in advance of a decision to remove a child from the foster/adoptive family, except when the Area Director has determined that the child's physical, mental, or emotional well-being would be endangered by remaining in the home; and within three (3) working days after a decision is made to close the foster/adoptive home.
18. ensure that a plan is developed with the foster/adoptive family for the care of a child who is in DSS care or custody during any extended absences of the foster/adoptive family.
19. make available to the foster/adoptive family a Payment Assistance Line [(PAL) 1-800-632-8218], which the foster/adoptive family can call for help in resolving long-standing payment problems, after the foster/adoptive family has tried to resolve them with the Area Office.
20. make after-hours assistance available to the foster/adoptive family through the MSPCC Kid's Net Connection (1-800-486-3730).

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THE FOSTER/ADOPTIVE FAMILY AGREES, FOR EACH CHILD PLACED IN HER/HIS HOME, TO:

1. promote the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of the child as well as assist the child in maximizing his or her potential.
2. meet the child's individual needs related to her/his racial, ethnic, linguistic or cultural background, encouraging an understanding and appreciation of this heritage.
3. support the reunification of the child and family, or an alternative permanent plan as indicated on the Service Plan.
4. permit and support visits between the child and the child's parents and/or siblings as recommended by the Department, both within and outside the foster/adoptive family home.
5. not use any physical punishment upon any child who is in DSS care or custody.
6. participate fully in the implementation of the child's Service Plan, including goal development, and tasks for the child and foster/adoptive family, and participate in Foster Care Reviews and other case conferences.
7. maintain confidentiality in all matters concerning the child and his/her family. (Foster/adoptive families are bound by the same standards of confidentiality as the Department and its employees.)
8. participate in pre-service and in-service training programs as required by the Department.
9. schedule appointments for the child's routine health care and dental care and any needed follow-up and ensure that these appointments are kept.
10. advise the child's social worker of changes in the child's health status, of medical and dental care received, and of recommendations made; any recommendation regarding the use of restraints by medication or artificial means must be brought to the attention of the family resource worker in addition to the child's social worker.
11. hold the child's Medical Passport; request written documentation from medical providers for inclusion in the passport; and submit encounter forms to the child's social worker. Ensure that the Medical Passport is available at the Foster Care Review.
12. arrange for emergency medical treatment when necessary.
13. provide, or support the provision of, needed specialized medical or dental care as specified in the Service Plan.
14. authorize appropriate general school-related activities such as registration and field trips and notify the Department of educational activities authorized for the child.
15. when requested by DSS, or appointed by the Department of Education or Department of Public Health, serve as the child's educational decision maker for special education or early intervention services, respectively.
16. immediately report to the Family Resource Unit all significant changes in the home, such as: addition of a new household member (other than the placement of a child who is in DSS care or custody); death, serious illness, etc., of a household member; separation or divorce of the foster/adoptive parents; loss of employment by a foster/adoptive parent or head of household; reduction of foster/adoptive family income; loss of foster/adoptive parent's qualified citizenship status; and any other change that affects the ability of the foster/adoptive family to conform to DSS standards.
17. immediately report to the Family Resource Unit any new individual who will care on a regular basis for a child who is in DSS care or custody.
18. advise the Area Office of the foster/adoptive family's affiliation with any other child-placement agency.

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19. ensure that additional placements of foster/pre-adoptive children by another agency will not be undertaken without the clear understanding and approval of the Area Office.
20. notify the Department of a change in the structure or location of the foster/adoptive family's residence at least sixty (60) days in advance, or at the earliest possible time.
21. notify the Department of a change in the home telephone number.
22. notify the Department of any vacation or trip that would result in the foster/adoptive family's overnight absence from their usual place of residence.
23. obtain Department consent before taking a child who is in DSS care or custody out of the state.
24. give up care of the child to no one other than the Department, or a person or agency designated by the Department, unless ordered to do so by a court of competent jurisdiction.
25. give the Department at least ten (10) working days' notice if removal of the child from the foster/adoptive family is desired, except when immediate removal is necessary to ensure the life, health, or emotional well-being of the child or of foster/adoptive family household members.
26. notify the Department immediately if he/she knows, or reasonably believes that a child placed in the home intends to run away, and notify the Department and the local police immediately, if the foster/adoptive family learns that the child has run away or is missing. The foster/adoptive family should call the Department's HOTLINE (1-800-792-5200) after hours, if necessary.
27. notify the Department of any overpayment made on the child's behalf by DSS to the foster/adoptive family. Any overpayment will be deducted from a future payment. If there is no future payment, the foster/adoptive family is required to contact the PAL Line (1-800-632-8218) to arrange for return of the overpayment.
28. ensure that any firearms located in the home are registered and licensed in accordance with state law; are trigger-locked or fully inoperable and stored without ammunition in a locked area; and that ammunition is stored in a separate, locked location.
29. maintain insurance (homeowner's, etc.) to cover damage to or loss of the foster/adoptive family's property, caused by a child who is in DSS care or custody. Such insurance shall be the foster/adoptive family's primary insurance.
30. make efforts to maintain the child's personal belongings.
31. comply with Department regulations and policies, including the standards for serving as a DSS foster/adoptive family.

Please note any additional agreements and/or responsibilities:

The Department of Social Services has designated this foster/adoptive family as a/an:

- approved kinship home
- approved child-specific home
- licensed unrestricted home

and agrees to the terms set forth herein.

As a foster/adoptive family approved by the Department of Social Services, I understand the above statement of responsibilities and agree to the terms listed herein.

This Agreement is to be reviewed and signed at each re-evaluation.

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Department of Social Services and Foster/Adoptive Parents**

SIGNATURES

Foster/Adoptive Parent	Date	Family Resource Worker	Date
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Foster/Adoptive Parent	Date	Family Resource Supervisor	Date
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