This module explains the expectations of you as a foster parent. You will learn about confidentiality, communicating with your agency, reimbursement, the rights of people involved in foster care, maintaining records for foster children, and responding to allegations of abuse and neglect.

Before you continue, please remember that you have the notepad document to jot notes in as you go!
“All my life I wanted to be a foster parent. I’m not completely sure what drove me, but it would be safe to assume it stems from my own childhood, which found me embraced by a family who did not give birth to me. Through adoption, I was blessed with a family, but, as many adopted children know, there is a restlessness involved in being denied that primal connection with your family of origin.

Shortly after getting married, during my pregnancy with my first child, the first call came to pick up twin girls. Twin babies! They had been left home unattended. I was going to save those poor babies. And the next set of twins, and the baby with the seven broken bones. Don’t forget the moody teenager and the neglected brothers with scabs and scars covering their little bodies. It made me feel good to provide them with the things their parents couldn’t. Or wouldn’t.

As with many dreams, this one came with a strong dose of reality. The children did not immediately blossom and thank me for turning their lives around. Each step forward took unexplainable time and energy and wasn’t necessarily greeted with overflowing gratitude. These children were hurting, and I wasn’t the end-all to their pain. What they wanted most was the one thing I couldn’t provide. They wanted their parents, and their siblings, and the things that were familiar. A healthy meal, a warm bed, and a nurturing environment...while all wonderful things to provide, they did not—COULD NOT— replace what they had lost. I couldn’t save them.

In many ways, they saved me. They saved me from a life of thinking that what I had was so much better for them than what their families could provide. I learned that a parent’s love is priceless and cannot be substituted, so I shouldn’t try. Each child needed me to understand that. I also learned that healing their wounds did not heal their hearts.

Stopping their hunger did not stop their longing. They showed me. I did not become a good foster parent overnight, but I know that I did get there. Sharing some words of wisdom, therefore, comes from years of experience. To any new foster parent, I would like to say: each child is precious and unique and will need something different from you; every child needs you to respect their families and their culture; no child needs you to save them, they just need you to hold them tight until the storm passes.

Lastly, remember to celebrate their little lives for however long you have been blessed to be in them. Good luck...and enjoy!

Kari”
What would you want to know about a child who was going to be placed in your care?

In Wisconsin, agencies are required to give specific forms to you when a child is placed in your home. These forms may be incomplete when the child is placed, but the agency will pass on the information they have and will update you as new information is learned. Click on the “Part A” and “Part B” links to see examples of the paperwork that should be given to you when a child is placed in your home.

You will probably have lots of questions about a child before they are placed in your home. It’s a good idea to keep a list of questions handy for when your agency calls to ask if you’ll accept a child for placement. Some examples of questions to ask might be:

- Why is this child being placed?
- What is the child’s understanding of why he or she is going to move?
- Does the child have any special behavior problems or unusual habits?
- When will the caseworker visit or call?

What other questions come to mind that you might want to ask? Be sure to write them down and share them with your licensing worker. Some agencies have lists of questions already prepared for foster parents; check with your licensing worker to see if this is the case for your agency.
As a foster parent, you have the responsibility to share certain things about the children in your care with the child’s worker and with your licensing agency. This may include things that are shared with you by the child or their families, or that you discover in your interactions with the child or other people involved in the child’s life.

The child’s caseworker, your licensing worker, and the foster care coordinator will all need updated information. (Please note that in some counties or agencies, one person may act as the caseworker, the licensing worker, and the foster care coordinator, and in others, this may be done by separate people). Sometimes they will want the same information and sometimes each will need different information. It’s important to ask your licensing worker how this will work for you, and about when you need to communicate certain information.

Some examples of information you’ll need to share are:
- Your observations on the child’s daily behavior and interactions with family members.
- Positive feedback about the child.
- Any changes in your family or changes in your residence from what is listed on your license.
- Respite care needs.
- Major physical damage to the home.
- Criminal activity by any household member.

This is not a complete list, so if you have information about the child in your home and you’re not sure who to share it with or when you need to share it, talk with your licensing worker. Please refer to DCF 56 for specific requirements about sharing information.
As a foster parent, you will likely experience some emergencies or other crisis situations with your foster children. When a child is placed in your home, you should discuss with your licensing worker and the child’s caseworker how emergencies should be handled in order to create a plan for crises during and after business hours.

DCF 56 explains requirements for reporting such emergencies.

In the event of a fire in your home or on your property that requires the assistance of the fire department, you must report the fire to your licensing agency by no later than the end of the next working day.

If a child in your care has a serious illness or injury that requires medical treatment, you must notify the child’s caseworker as soon as possible.

The following situations require you to notify the licensing agency and the child’s caseworker immediately:

- The death of a foster child
- Any life-threatening, serious illness or injury requiring medical treatment
- A foster child missing from care for longer than 8 hours or a period of time that cannot reasonably be justified by the child’s age, maturity, and emotional capacity
- Any other similar crisis related to a foster child, which can include but is not limited to: contact with law enforcement; problems with the Family Interaction Plan; if a child is suspended or expelled from school; or if the child is making threats of harm to themselves or others.

It is important to remember that if at any time you think that a child in your home (or anyone else in your home) may cause physical violence or harm to themselves or others, call 911 immediately.
Foster care licensing code lays out requirements for the amount and type of contact that must occur between agency workers and foster parents. Each agency may have additional expectations in terms of the type of information to share and the frequency of communication. Check with your licensing worker to see what you can expect from your agency workers as well as what the agency's expectations are of you.

You may find it difficult to get in touch with caseworkers because of their schedules, which is often frustrating for foster parents. It may be helpful to ask the child’s caseworker for the best time and way to contact them.

Remember to keep any notes, emails, or other written information about the child in the child’s case record. Always remember that all communication about the child and the child’s family must be kept confidential and could be included in a court record. More information about case records and confidentiality will be shared later in this module.
Voice of a birth parent:
“The second foster parent, they was very nice, we stayed in contact like if I'm going to be late dropping her off, late picking her up I call and let them know. One of the foster parent I had little issues with her, I tried to work around those things because I feel that they is helped taking care of my child, I used to always was emotional every time me and one of the foster parents had a few words back to back, I learned how to go to my social worker and let her know what's going on and how I feel about the situation, everything started moving forward, we start getting to work with one another for my child, staying in contact and I still stay in tune with them right now till today, whenever something is going on I would like to be a part of that, doctor's appointments, dentist, whatever has something to do with my child I wanted to know about it.”
True or False: You will know everything there is to know about a child before they are placed in your home.

(Click the SUBMIT button after making your choice.)

○ True
○ False
Think for a moment of a secret that you would only share with certain people. Now imagine that this secret is suddenly shared with multiple people that you have not chosen to tell. You would probably feel betrayed, scared, and angry, and that is exactly how children and birth parents in foster care feel when their confidentiality is violated.

Foster parents must respect the confidentiality of foster children and their families, which means sharing details about a child or their family with only those who need to know the information and who have been authorized to receive it. In order for someone to be authorized, the child’s parent must have a signed consent form giving that person authorization to communicate about their child. This means that foster parents cannot share information about the child or their family with friends, neighbors, or even relatives without authorization.

The agency who placed the child should obtain consent forms for medical care, transportation, and school. Talk with your licensing worker about how to get these consents signed for the children in your home.

Laws require foster parents (and others) to respect the confidentiality of children in foster care and their families.

Please listen to some examples given by former foster youth about how their confidentiality was violated.

“My foster mom told me one day, ‘Your bio-mother sent you a letter, so I opened it and this is what she had to say.’”

“My foster mom told me, ‘I read your diary. I didn’t know you hate this place; you shouldn’t leave it in the open for me to read.’”

“I was at the store with my foster dad. A friend of my foster dad’s came up and asked who I was, and my foster dad said, ‘This is my foster kid, Johnny.’” The friend said, ‘Ohhh you’re Johnny, I’ve heard all about you.’”

Think for a moment about how these children must have felt. Think about how you would feel if you were the one in these situations. Write down what you’re thinking now as a reminder to yourself when these situations come up in the future. Also consider how your relationship with the children in your home (and their families) could benefit from respecting their confidentiality.
Your friends and family will likely know that you are a foster parent, and will be curious about the children in your care. You will also probably be approached by others in the community wanting to know about the children in your home. It is important to plan how you’ll respond to these situations ahead of time to avoid awkward or embarrassing situations. When someone says things to you such as, “Oh, who is this?” or “Are these all foster children?” How will you respond?

Read through the following scenarios and think about how you would handle these situations. How can you best respond without violating confidentiality? Write down your ideas on how you might respond and discuss these with your licensing worker.

Scenario 1:
You take your foster children to register for school. One of the staff at the school looks up to see you walking in with multiple children and in a shocked voice says, “Are these all foster kids?!”

Scenario 2:
You take your birth children, your foster children, and some of the children’s friends to a local museum. Admission to this museum is expensive, and you’re aware that this museum offers free admission for children in foster care.

Scenario 3:
One of your foster children damages property in your house to the extent that the police must be called. After the police leave, a neighbor comes over and asks you what happened.

What were some of your ideas?

Saying, “These children all live in my home and need to be registered for school”
Getting a family pass to the museum to avoid breaching confidentiality – or asking for the state issued FP ID card.
Telling the neighbor that you can’t discuss the incident.
Telling people “it’s not my story to tell” when they ask specifics about the children.
Real life tips from foster parents:

“My answer to that question took me a little bit of time to think of, I just paused for a moment and I responded that yes all these children live at my home; and it's very difficult when people ask you those kinds of questions and sometimes it's just take a breath and think about what's the correct way to answer and they do all live at my house.”

“I usually just answer by saying that they're my kids and if they keep pushing at me I just say that they're my kids and that's all I can really say about that.”
As a foster parent, you will be asked to share information about the children in your home. When this happens, remember the following things:

Children in foster care cannot be photographed or interviewed by the media without written permission from parents or legal guardians.
Foster parents cannot speak to the media about the children in their home.
If you are asked for information about a child in your home and you are unsure if the person has authorization to receive it, **do not** provide the information. Instead have that person contact the child’s agency.

Media requests can occur for various reasons; for example, to feature a child’s achievements or if the child or their family is involved in legal action.
A woman calls you and says she is the grandmother of a little boy in your care. The family has never mentioned a grandmother to you. She says she wants to visit him at school and asks you where he goes to school.

You can give her the name and address of his school, right?

- Yes, you can give out this information.
- No, you cannot give out this information.
All of the situations you are about to read are common for foster parents to face. As mentioned in Module 1, birth parents and legal guardians retain the right to make major decisions for their children while they are in care -- unless the court has given someone else this authority. This includes medical, school, health, and other decisions regarding their children. Once a termination of parental rights has occurred, parents no longer retain these rights, and a representative of the State of Wisconsin will act as the child’s legal guardian.

If a child has paperwork that requires a signature, this usually means that there is some type of liability attached. As a foster parent, you do not have the authority to sign these papers unless you have legal guardianship of the child or have been given the authority to do so by the court.

If you have questions about what decisions you can and cannot make, talk with your licensing worker!
Let’s look at some common situations you may face as a foster parent. Click who you think has the right to make the decision.
This is an area of personal preference for the family, and is a right that a birth parent (or legal guardian) maintains when a child enters foster care. Some agencies prepare a general consent form for parents to sign regarding standard decisions like haircuts, photos, and travel.
Permission slip from school arrives for a field trip.

Who signs it?

- Birth Parent or Legal Guardian
- Foster Parent

Whose Rights?
Foster parents do not have the right to sign for permission for children in their care, unless given permission by the court. Signing permission slips is a right that birth parents (or legal guardians) retain while their children are in foster care.

Ask if there is one consent the school could use to cover field trips for the whole year.
Child wants ear (or other body part) pierced.

Who decides?

Birth Parent or Legal Guardian
Foster Parent

Whose Rights?
Given that this is a medical issue, and can permanently change a person's appearance, birth parents (or legal guardians) retain the right to make this decision for their children.
Now that you’ve had a chance to think about a few of these questions, please download and print the answers to other situations. Keep it as a reference.

Click the play button below when you’re ready to continue.
Voices of foster care:
“Biological parents rightfully get to make so many decisions because they're still the legal parent and that's one of our you know foundations of our countries is parenthood and that's a right we take seriously and terminating parental rights it's difficult as it should be.”

“The biological family is still important for that child and remember when children first go into foster care the goal is reunification and the children needed to see that their parents are still a part of their life and that they care about them and that they're going to be there for them. The biological parents really still need to be an important part of the decision making process for the life of that child.”

“They're the mom or the dad and we want parents to be parents, we want them to stay involved in their child's life so if they get to make decisions about whether or not they have a hair cut or whether or not they go to a church, that keeps them acting as a parent while were helping them make the changes necessary to keep their children safe. We take a lot of power away from birth parents and there's a lot of things that go on with birth parents when they're involved in the child welfare system, that they don't get choices about, they don't get decisions about so when we can give them as many choices and decisions about the care of their children that hands back over some of that authority and power to them.”
Foster care licensing code requires you to maintain records on the children in your care. A portion of licensing code, 56.09(11), explains the minimum requirement of what must be included in these records. Agencies may have additional requirements on what must be a part of a child’s case record. Licensing agencies and the department can request to see the case record at any time during the placement, and foster parents are required to make the record available when the request is made.

Case records must be kept in a secure place, which means a file cabinet, drawer, or other location that is locked or inaccessible to the child or others in the home who are not authorized to view the information.

The record must include at least the following information for the entire duration of the child’s placement:

The child’s name, nickname, and any alias by which the child is known
The child’s birthdate
The names, addresses, and telephone numbers of persons to be notified in an emergency involving the foster child
The date of placement in your home, and
The name, address, and telephone number of the person or agency placing the child
The name of the physician to be called in an emergency.
Medical information about the child, including known allergies, dates of medical exams, immunizations, illnesses and accidents since the time the child was placed in your home.
The name and address of the child’s dentist and the dates the child received dental care since being placed in your home.
The name of the child’s school and the grades the child received while in your home.

All of this information should have been given to you as part of Part A & B. It is your responsibility to keep it updated.

In addition to the required information, any notes that you may keep about your child in foster care must be kept in that child’s record. The court can also request to see the record or any notes, so keep this in mind when keeping such notes. For a refresher about what should or should not be included in information that is submitted to court, please refer back to Module 1.

When a child leaves your home, you are required to give the case record to their caseworker. The caseworker may not always request the record, but it is your responsibility to give the record to the caseworker.

Click on the link to read a Tip Sheet on documentation from the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center:
You have worked hard to maintain the case record for the child in your home, so you can keep a copy of that record on your computer once the child leaves.

- True
- False
The Uniform Foster Care Rate is designed to offset costs of caring for additional children in your home. The Uniform Foster Care Rate is broken down into four components: The Initial Clothing Allowance, the Basic Maintenance Rate, the Supplemental Payments, and Exceptional Payments. Only foster parents certified as a level 2 or higher are eligible for the supplemental or exceptional payments.

The Initial Clothing allowance is a one-time payment for a child as they enter foster care and is determined by the child’s age when placed with a foster parent certified at or above level 2. When a child is placed into your home, this payment may have already been made to previous foster parents.

The Basic Maintenance Rate is meant to cover the basic needs for the children in your care, including food, clothing, housing, and other personal care.

Supplemental Payments are additional payments meant to cover costs for a child whose needs exceed normal limits of care and supervision for what is developmentally and age appropriate for that child. The supplemental payment will be determined on a case-by-case basis by completing an assessment, called the Child Adolescent Needs and Strengths tool (usually just called “the CANS”) for each child. The CANS looks at the strengths of a child and their family, as well as at the needs for the child in lots of different areas of their lives, like school, development, behavior, and trauma. The CANS will be done by a child’s team on a regular basis. More information about the CANS tool can be found here: (link ref: http://www.praedfoundation.org/About%20the%20CANS.html). You can also talk with your licensing worker or the child’s caseworker about the CANS.
Exceptional Payments are additional payments for a child whose needs are so extreme that basic maintenance and supplemental payments do not provide sufficient funding to ensure the child’s placement in a foster home and to prevent placement in a more restrictive setting. The eligibility for these payments is determined on a case-by-case basis, and the criteria can be found in DCF 56.

Foster care payments are made on a retrospective basis, which means that payments are made to foster parents after the end of the month that a child was in care.

Children in foster care may be eligible for fee waivers as well as free and reduced lunch at school. In addition, many children’s museums and other activities throughout the state are free or available at a reduced cost for children in foster care. Talk with your licensing worker about how to explore these options in a way that does not breach the child’s confidentiality.

Click on the link to read the Uniform Foster Care Rate Brochure: http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/publications/pdf/dcf_p_pfs0142.pdf
Real life tip from a foster parent:
“The financial aspect of fostering, sometimes can be a little challenging but we've learned to do things a little bit differently, I like to go garage selling and we buy things that way and kind of keep tubs of different things that are there so if we get a child of different size we have clothing for them. We do things as a family, we do a lot of outings, you know we have a campfire in the back yard and we go to the parks together so there are inexpensive ways to enjoy each other.”
As a foster parent, you will be assigned a level of care certification. There are five levels of certification for foster care, and your level will be assigned based on training, level of experience, references, and they types of children you will be caring for. You heard earlier in this module about the CANS assessment, which will assign a level of need to a child. This level of need will help the child’s caseworker to figure out which placement will be most appropriate for a child. Your level of certification will help to decide which children will be most appropriate for your home. Your level of certification does not necessarily have to match the level of need of the child; talk with your licensing worker about this if you have more questions. You can also learn more about the requirements for the different levels in DCF 56.

Level I foster parents have a pre-existing relationship with the children that they are caring for. This includes relatives of the child, but also people who have another relationship with a child, for example if they were the child’s teacher or coach. Individuals who have a pre-existing relationship with a child can also be certified at higher levels if they choose to complete the additional requirements for those levels. If you have a pre-existing relationship with a child who you are caring for and you want to be certified at a higher level, talk with your licensing worker about this possibility and the requirements.

Level II foster parents are required to complete more training than Level I foster parents and submit three positive letters of reference as part of their licensing process.

Levels III and IV are considered to provide treatment service levels, and those foster parents care for children who have higher treatment needs than children in Level II foster homes. These foster parents may care for children who have more significant mental, behavioral, emotional, physical, or medical needs, and can also care for specific populations of children, such as youth who have children of their own or youth who are sexual offenders. Levels III and IV must meet additional training, experience, and qualification requirements in order to have a Level III or IV certification.

Level V is a certification level that is for a specific type of foster home, called a shift-staffed treatment foster home. These homes provide care for children who have exceptional treatment or medical needs and who would be in an institution or other long-term setting if they were not placed in one of these foster homes. Level V homes have staff members who work in shifts and do not have “parents” who live in the homes full-time.
Depending on your level of certification, you are required to attend a specific amount of training each year and each licensing period. Training is necessary to prepare you and help you continue to develop as a foster parent. There are three types of training: Pre-Placement, Initial Licensing, and Ongoing training. Your level of certification will determine the amount of training you will be required to complete. When you have questions, talk with your licensing worker about your training requirements.

The training requirements are as follows:

**Level I:** 6 hours of Pre-Placement Training

**Level II:** 6 hours of Pre-Placement Training, 30 hours Initial Licensing Training, and 10 hours of Ongoing Training in each 12-month licensing period.

**Level III:** 36 hours of Pre-Placement, 24 hours of Initial Licensing, and 18 hours of Ongoing.

**Level IV:** 40 hours of Pre-Placement (4 of which must be child-specific), 30 hours of Initial Licensing (6 of which must be child-specific), and 24 hours of Ongoing.

Pre-Placement Training, which is the training you’re currently participating in, is meant to be completed prior to having any children placed in your home. This training provides an overview of the child welfare system and the foster care program.

Initial Licensing Training is the next step in Foster Parent training, and it is meant to provide a solid foundation of education on issues relevant to foster care and the children involved in the child welfare system. Initial Licensing Training digs deeper into issues that are introduced in the Pre-Placement Training, such as permanence, culture, child development, family connections, abuse and neglect, attachment, discipline, and the effects of fostering on your family.

Ongoing Training is just like it sounds, and is offered on a continual basis to provide education on topics relevant to the specific children in your care. Ongoing training is an opportunity for you to explore areas of interest to you as a foster parent and to learn more about how to meet the needs of the children in your home. Ongoing training can be completed in various ways; talk with your licensing worker on different ways that you can complete your ongoing training hours.
You may notice suspicious marks, injuries, or bruises on the children in your care, or they may indicate to you that they have been harmed in some way. As a foster parent, you are required to notify the agency immediately if you believe that a child in foster care has been abused or neglected, has been threatened with abuse or neglect, or you have reason to believe that the child will be abused or neglected. This applies to any child in foster care, not just those in your home.

The children in your care may disclose past or current abuse. The next slide will give you some ideas on how to have these difficult conversations.
If a child has been abused or neglected or is currently being maltreated, it will take a great deal of courage for them to tell you. It will also probably be a difficult conversation for you to have. You must be able and willing to engage with the child on their level. Please listen to these ideas to help this conversation be more comfortable for you and the child. Do not solicit this information from a child unless they approach you about it.

- Find a safe and quiet place to talk and put yourself at eye level with the child (but also understand that they may not be able to make eye contact with you during this conversation).
- Listen without judging and choose your words carefully. Do not interrogate or coach the child! You are not investigating the situation, so just listen.
- The child will probably feel some shame or embarrassment, and will need to feel safe and be able to tell you their story in their own words.
- Be honest about the responsibility that you have to share this information with someone who can help. **Do not** tell the child that you won’t tell anyone. You are required to share this information.
- You will probably have strong reactions to their story. Try to remain calm and not show the child your reactions, especially disgust, fear, or anger, as the child may interpret this to mean that you are disgusted or angry with them. Be clear with the child that you care for them.
- Support the child in telling you their story, thank them for telling you, and let them know that they are safe.
- Let the child know that this was not their fault. Children will often blame themselves.
- Outline what steps you’ll need to take to share this information, and explain that you’ll be sharing with someone who can help.
Did you know? Foster parents are reported for allegations of child abuse and neglect at a higher frequency than the general public, however, the substantiation rates for the general public are higher than those for foster parents.

Licensing agencies and tribes have a responsibility to ensure that foster parents are providing a safe environment, and they must assess any allegations of abuse and neglect of the children in foster care.

You are encouraged to talk with your licensing worker to learn what the agency will do if an allegation is made against someone in your home. The agency assessing the allegation should give you information about appeal rights if you are substantiated for abuse or neglect.

There is no guaranteed method for avoiding allegations, but there are ways to minimize your risk. The next slide will explain some of these preventative strategies.
Suggestions for Minimizing the Risk of an Allegation

To minimize the risk of an allegation, there are things that you can do prior to accepting a child for placement and once the child is placed in your home.

Click the first button to learn about strategies to use before placement.
Suggestions for Minimizing Allegation Risk Before Placement

Before placement you can:

Find out as much as you can about the child’s history of abuse or neglect (both at home and in previous placements).
Ask the caseworker if the child has a history of making allegations against caregivers.
Do not accept placement of a child that you do not feel you can care for adequately.

Minimizing the Risk of an Allegation
Before Placement

- Know the child’s history
- Ask caseworker if child has history of making allegations
- Do not accept placement of a child you do not feel you can care for adequately

During Placement
During a child’s placement you can:

Work with the child’s team to ensure that the child’s needs are identified and sufficiently met.
Follow all foster care laws, licensing rules, and policies.
Create house rules and ensure that all household members follow them.
Keep a record of the child’s behaviors, interactions, school issues, medical appointments, discussions with other professionals or team members, especially behaviors, comments, or interactions that seem unusual or out of the ordinary for that child.
As stated earlier, promptly report any unusual incident or injury.
Work as a member of the child’s team in a professional manner, and
Attend training to learn about caring for children who have been abused or neglected.
In addition to the considerations just discussed, the following precautions should be taken when fostering children who have been impacted by sexual abuse. It is important to recognize that any child coming into foster care may have been sexually abused, and that some of these children have not yet disclosed this abuse. Children who have been sexually abused will need patience, flexibility, support, additional supervision, and may disclose information about their abuse to you. You will need to be comfortable discussing sex and sexual abuse without becoming upset, judgmental or insecure.
Possible precautions to take when fostering children who have been impacted by sexual abuse can include:

Modifying house rules to provide a safe and comfortable environment, including always being clothed in common areas of your home and restricting the parents’ bedroom to parents only.

Providing a high level of supervision, as some children who have been sexually abused develop sexualized behaviors. Know what the safety plan is and what the supervision expectations are.

Do not leave a child who has been sexually abused alone with anyone of the same gender of the abuser.
Working with the birth family and maintaining a respectful and empathetic relationship. This can be difficult if members of the birth family contributed to the abuse. Talk with your licensing worker or the child’s caseworker if you have concerns about maintaining a positive relationship with the child’s family.

Talk about your feelings with your licensing worker or the child’s caseworker so that your feelings do not interfere with your interactions with the child.
Undergoing an allegation of abuse and neglect is an emotional and challenging process. When allegations are made, the case is turned over to another county to determine if an initial assessment is necessary. If an initial assessment is warranted, the other county will conduct an independent investigation. If you are the subject of an initial assessment, having support from other foster parents who have experienced allegations will be incredibly beneficial.

The Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parents Association, Inc. (called “WFAPA”), is a statewide support association for foster and adoptive parents. WFAPA has a program called Foster and Adoptive Support and Preservation Program (called “FASPP”), which is a collection of phone numbers for foster and adoptive parents to call when they are experiencing allegations of abuse and neglect. Please visit WFAPA’s website (www.wfapa.org) for more information on accessing the support of other foster parents.
Consider the following suggestions for getting through the initial assessment process.
There are additional tips in your Foster Parent Handbook:

Maintain a professional attitude.
Ask for help in understanding the assessment and investigation process.
Document your conversations or meetings and ask for copies of all of the documents.
Read documentation carefully and ask questions.
Connect with local foster parent support groups for support and guidance.
Maintain your family’s routine; do not isolate yourselves from loved ones.
Check Your Understanding - Allegations

If you have allegations brought against you, the investigation into the allegations will be completed by:

- The child’s caseworker
- Your licensing agency
- Another county
- None of the above
During your time as a foster parent, there may be occasions when individuals either within or separate from your licensing agency have concerns about situations, behaviors, or decisions made in your home. These concerns will need to be addressed even if they do not rise to the level of allegations of abuse or neglect or licensing violations. When general concerns exist, caseworkers will usually contact you to discuss the concern and will assist you in addressing and resolving the concern. The process of resolving these issues is an opportunity for you and the caseworker to build trust and respect, and will result in better, more positive outcomes for the children in your care.

Licensing concerns or violations may be communicated to licensing agencies through complaints or concerns raised about the foster home. These concerns may relate to the physical environment of the home, general care of the children, disciplinary procedures, or other concerns that would violate licensing code. The Foster Care Coordinator will generally handle alleged licensing violations by coming to your home to address the violation.

The most effective way to avoid licensing violations is to review foster care licensing code, DCF 56, and to talk with your licensing worker if you feel you cannot meet the code.

To understand licensing requirements:

Keep a current copy of DCF 56 handy so that you can read through it and be familiar with its expectations.
Ask your licensing worker for documentation about how your agency handles licensing violations.
If violations arise, work with your licensing agency to resolve the concerns and immediately comply with the plan to resolve any issues.
If licensing violations are found, there are several possible consequences:

Your agency may decide that you can maintain your license as long as you correct the licensing violation. The Foster Care Coordinator will provide instructions (either verbally or in writing) on how to correct the violation, sometimes this is an agreement called a “corrective action plan.”

Agencies can decide to revoke a license if the violation is severe enough, if there are a number of violations, or if there is an inability or unwillingness to correct the violation. When a license is revoked, agencies must provide documentation about the basis for the revocation and the appeal process in writing. The next slide will explain the process of grievances and appeals.
As a foster parent, you have the ability to file grievances and appeals regarding decisions made about your home or the children in your care.

Your licensing agency and the child’s caseworker’s agency will have a policy about how individuals can communicate concerns, complaints, or file grievances. Ask your licensing worker or the caseworker for a copy of their agency’s child welfare complaint procedure.

When communicating a concern or filing a grievance, be specific about your concerns so that the agency has accurate, detailed information, and consider what outcome or resolution you are hoping for.

Every public agency has a Child Welfare Complaint Procedure, and has a staff member identified for individuals to contact. This information can be found at this link: [http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/CWComplaint.htm](http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/CWComplaint.htm).

You also have the power to appeal decisions made about your license, your rate of reimbursement, the children in your home, and anything else that affects you as a foster parent. When an agency notifies you of a decision made about your home or the children in your care, they should also supply you with the information about your ability to appeal the decision. This will include time limits and who you can appeal the decision to. Pay close attention to these time limits and who to appeal to. Some appeals are handled by the Division of Hearings and Appeals in Madison, and others are handled by the Circuit Court with jurisdiction over the child.

This information about appeals is for decisions about your license and the children in your care, not about substantiations of child abuse and neglect. If you have allegations substantiated for child abuse or neglect, you will receive specific instructions on how to appeal those decisions.

You can find additional information about what decisions you can appeal and the procedures to request an appeal in DCF 56.10.
In certain situations, foster parents, agencies, or tribes may decide that a child needs to be moved from a foster home, which is called a change of placement.

Foster parents are required to give agencies 30 days notice when requesting that a child be removed from their home. In particularly challenging situations, you may request that the child be moved sooner than 30 days, but your agency may not be able to locate an appropriate placement option in a shorter time period, unless an emergency situation exists.

If the agency decides to remove a child in your home, they are required to provide you with a written 30-day notice if that child has been in your home for more than six months. If the child has been in your home for less than six months, if the agency determines that the child is not safe, or if other emergency conditions exist, the agency is not required to give you a written 30-day notice.

You can appeal an agency’s decision to remove a child from your home if that child has been in your home for more than six months. When the agency notifies you that they intend to remove the child, they should provide you with information about how to appeal the decision. You only have the right to appeal when the agency decides to remove a child from your home; you cannot appeal a court’s decision to remove a child without a 30-day notice.
The Foster Parent Insurance Program is designed to assure that foster parents are reimbursed for damages or loss that are caused by children placed in their homes and are not covered by insurance policies. This program is also meant to cover injury or damage caused by foster parents to the foster child or for acts done by foster parents for which they are sued by the child’s parent, if not caused by negligence of the foster parent. This program is an “insurer of last resort,” which means that it can only be used once a private insurance company denies coverage for damage or loss. Claims to the Foster Parent Insurance Program must be submitted to the department within 90 days after the loss or damage occurs or is discovered. The forms required to complete a claim can be provided to you by your licensing worker.

Click on the link for the Foster Parent Insurance Program brochure to learn more about what must be included in a claim. http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/publications/pdf/dcf_p_pfs2010.pdf

The department cannot pay claims if there is not sufficient documentation of the loss or damage. There are no appeals to a decision on a claim to the Foster Parent Insurance Program.
You now have an overview of the expectations placed on you as a foster parent and the rationale behind those expectations.

You have learned about the importance of communication and confidentiality, and how communicating openly and respecting confidentiality can improve your relationships with the children in your care, their families, and the other members of the child’s team.

You heard a lot about disclosing abuse and neglect and allegations of abuse and neglect. You now have the tools to talk with children about abuse and neglect as well as to deal with allegations that may be brought against you.

You also learned about options that you have to respond to decisions made about your home and the children in your care, and that you can and should advocate for yourself and the children in your care.

You’ve been given information about the foster care rates that you are reimbursed and the ability to be reimbursed for loss or damage in your home.

There are a lot of expectations placed on you as a foster parent because you have the responsibility to keep these children safe in your home. If you have additional questions or concerns about the material in this module, talk with your licensing worker!