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CARING FOR YOUR FOSTER CHILD/TEEN



Caring

FOR YOUR
Foster Child/Teen

A HANDBOOK FOR FOSTER PARENTS



A Welcome Note

Dear Foster Parent,

Welcome to our fostering community! Thank you for stepping forward to open your heart and home to children in need of care and protection. Your support has helped them to grow well, feel safe and loved, and have someone there for them in times of need and challenge. You have made an invaluable difference to the lives of the children through your generous giving.

You may face many challenges as you care for these vulnerable children, but we are committed to walk this journey with you. This resource book for Foster Parents contains information, advice and ideas that complement the training and other practical support that you have received. It is a guide to your foster parenting journey, gathered from professionals and fellow foster parents who have shared their practical wisdom over the years. You can get tips on how to settle your foster children into your home, strategies to manage their behaviours and advice on how to engage them as they grow older.

We have also prepared questions to guide your reflection and spaces where you can pen down your thoughts on how to meet the needs of your foster children or teens. There are also colouring sheets throughout the book for you to use, to aid you to practice mindfulness and relax.

Caring for foster children or teens can be a big challenge, but it can also be enjoyable and enriching. We hope this handbook provides you with quick and easy access to the information you need to provide the best support for these children. We wish you a fulfilling fostering journey, and look forward to partner you to provide a safe and loving home that our children deserve.



ALVIN GOH
Director,
Children in Care Service

Rehabilitation and Protection Group
Ministry of Social and Family Development

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On Mindfulness

Being a foster parent may bring about certain stress and pressures. However, these can be controlled through the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness can be achieved through meditation, yoga or breathing which will instil peace and help you relax in this sometimes intense situation.

Another way to practise mindfulness is through creative mindfulness exercises. Included throughout this book are colouring pages. You can calm the mind by focusing on simple tasks through repetitive motion, which in this case, is colouring.

We invite you to fill yourself with peace as you fill this book with colour.

Make this handbook uniquely yours!



INTRODUCTION TO

Fostering



1 Role of the Fostering Service and Foster Parents



Children flourish in a caring family environment. Given the circumstances of the children who come into care, a caring family environment forms the best foundation for them to heal from their traumatic experiences of abuse and neglect. This first segment of the handbook introduces you to the Fostering Scheme, and summarises the key processes leading up to a child's/teen's placement with a foster parent.



FOSTERING SCHEME

The Fostering Scheme aims to provide an alternative care arrangement for children who are below the age of 18 and are in need of a safe, stable and nurturing home. Foster families embrace vulnerable children and provide food, shelter, clothing and love to children who are in need. Fostering is a temporary arrangement that provides these children an opportunity to grow up in a normal family environment. It gives them a positive experience of family life, and most importantly, hope for a better future.



FOSTERING SERVICE

- **Recruit and support foster families** to provide safe, loving and nurturing family-based care for children whose parents are unable or unwilling to care for them.
- **Arrange temporary care** for these children while reintegration plans are being worked out, **or**
- **Provide long-term care** for children whose parents are unable to care for them.



FOSTERING AGENCIES

- Fostering Agencies work together with the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) to provide fostering services.
- Our Fostering Agencies are Epworth Community Services, Boys' Town, Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura (PPIS), and The Salvation Army.

✓ FOSTER PARENTS

- **Provide a safe and loving home** for children who are in need of care and protection.
- **Support your foster child/teen to recover from trauma**, form healthy relationships, and develop positive attitudes toward themselves and others.
- **Help your foster child/teen develop holistically** by ensuring that their needs are met.
- **Respect and maintain your foster child's/teen's connections** to their natural family by facilitating access time with their natural family.
- **Put your foster child's/teen's best interests first** and support their wishes and views.



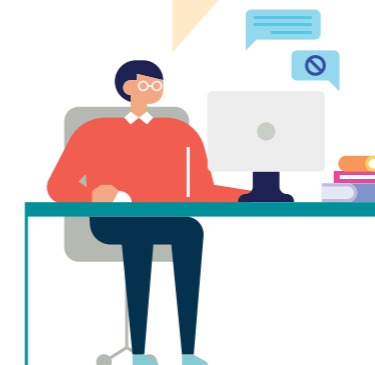
✓ YOUR CASE MANAGER

Every foster family is assigned a Case Manager, either from MSF or a Fostering Agency. Your Case Manager's role is to:

- **Support you** in the day-to-day care of your foster child/teen.
- **Answer any questions** you may have.
- Advocate for **access to services** that you and your foster child/teen need.
- **Facilitate discussions** with other professionals (e.g. teachers, school counsellors). Your Case Manager can represent your views in discussions if you are not present.

✓ CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE

The Child Protective Service provides intervention and supportive services to address the needs of children and young persons who have been seriously harmed or are at high risk of serious harm. **Child Protection Officers** work with the foster child's/teen's natural family and various government agencies to ensure that the foster child/teen can return to a safe and stable environment.



2 Types of Foster Care Placements

Your foster child/teen comes from difficult family circumstances of abuse, neglect and/or abandonment. He or she may be anywhere from 0 to below 18 years of age. As their natural parents have been assessed to be unable or unwilling to care for them, MSF will place the foster child/teen in a suitable out-of-home arrangement, such as foster care, kinship care, or children's home.

Under the Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA), a foster child/teen may be placed in foster care under:

✓ A VOLUNTARY CARE AGREEMENT

Under the CYPA, the foster child/teen may be placed in foster care with **consent from the foster child's/teen's natural parents.**

✓ A COURT ORDER (OR CARE AND PROTECTION ORDER)

If the foster child's/teen's natural parents do not consent to placing the child/teen in foster care, Child Protective Service can petition the Court for a Court Order. If the Court finds that the foster child/teen is in need of care and protection, the Court can issue a Care and Protection Order under the CYPA, appointing a Fit Person (the foster mother) to care for the foster child/teen.

You will usually receive a foster child/teen as a **planned arrangement** where 1 to 3 days would be given for you to find out more about your foster child/teen, and for you to make arrangements in order to take care of your foster child/teen.

In some rare cases, where the child/teen is in a place of safety temporarily, you will have time and an opportunity to get to know your foster child/teen.

If you are willing to receive a foster child/teen into your care on an emergency basis (i.e. less than 24 hours' notice), please inform your Case Manager.



“

We are only able to do so much for our foster children because of the help and support that we receive from all our foster parents.

”

- **Mr Yoganathan Ammayappan**
Senior Director
Rehabilitation and Protection Group
Ministry of Social and Family Development

3 Matching a Child/Teen with Foster Parents

We match foster children/teens with foster parents keeping both parties' interests in mind. As such, when making a match, we will consider:

- The foster child's/teen's **needs**.
- Your **profile, strengths** and **ability** to meet these needs.
- Your family's willingness to **complete the estimated duration of placement**.

Please update us if there has been any change in your family's profile, strengths or availability. This is so that we can find a match that is best for you and the foster child/teen.

When we have matched you with a foster child/teen, we will make a **placement request** to ask if you would like to take them in.



✓ PREPARING FOR PLACEMENT

To help you make a more informed decision about receiving a foster child/teen into your care, we will provide you with the following details about them, if available.



AGE



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS



GENDER



CULTURAL NEEDS



TYPE OF PLACEMENT



EXPOSURE TO UNHEALTHY BEHAVIOURS



HEALTH



SPECIAL NEEDS



BEHAVIOUR



CARE HISTORY



SCHOOLING



While we endeavour to give you as much information about your foster child/teen as possible, we seek your (and your family's) understanding that we may not have all the information immediately. This is because some children may have been abandoned or taken care of by several caregivers, hence their background information may not be readily available.

Please keep in mind that these children will need your **extra attention, patience** and **support** to adjust to their new foster home based on their background.

Going through the following questions may help you and your family decide if you are able and willing to provide the foster child/teen with a safe and caring home.

- What is my **current family situation**? Are we experiencing a crisis or undergoing stress? (E.g. an ill family member, a career change, a change in residence, your children having major educational milestones)
- Are all my family members supportive of having a foster child, and what adjustments are we prepared to make?
- What are the foster child's/teen's needs? Is my family able to **meet these needs**?
- What **childcare arrangements** are required for the foster child/teen?
- Which **school** does the foster child/teen attend? What transport arrangements are required?
- Are there any contact arrangements for the foster child/teen with his/her natural family? What needs to be done to support these contact arrangements?

“ We remove children from their homes with a heavy heart. It is a consolation to know that another family is out there to give them love and warmth. ”

- **Ms Tabitha Ong**
Senior Deputy Director, Child Protective Service
Rehabilitation and Protection Group
Ministry of Social and Family Development





PREPARING FOR COURT ATTENDANCE

When a foster child/teen is placed in your care under a **Court Order**, your **attendance will be required in Court**. This is so that the District Judge can speak with you to confirm your willingness to care for the foster child/teen and appoint you as a Fit Person to care for the foster child/teen.

Do not worry about this as your Case Manager will prepare you for the Court session. Your Case Manager will be with you in Court to support you and to clear your doubts and concerns.

Dress in **smart casual** attire and bring along your **NRIC/Foreign Identification Document** for the session. After the session, you will receive a copy of the Court Order.

If you have to present your foster child/teen in Court for the Court hearing review, please ensure that your foster child/teen is dressed in school uniform, if available.



Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.

- Vincent Van Gogh



Settling in



4 Settling your Foster Child/Teen into Care

✓ RECEIVING THE FOSTER CHILD/TEEN INTO CARE

Upon placement, you will receive the following documents belonging to the foster child/teen (if available):

- Birth certificate of foster child/teen (original or photocopy)
- Health booklet
- Letter of identity or Medical Fee Exemption Card (MFEC)
(Letter of identity to be used for medical appointments at polyclinics and restructured hospitals before the issuance of Medical Fee Exemption Card)
- Medical appointment card (if any)
- Medical declaration form (photocopy)
- Medical screening form (the foster child/teen needs to undergo a medical screening within 24 hours of placement)
- Cover letter for medical screening

We will ask you to sign an
Acknowledgement of Receipt
for these documents.





CHECKLIST FOR RECEIVING A FOSTER CHILD/TEEN INTO CARE

Prepare basic toiletries for your foster child/teen (e.g. toothbrush, towel, a set of clothes they can change into).

You may want to prepare an age-appropriate welcome gift for your foster child/teen. This is a good way to break the ice. You could present a toy for a young child or a favourite book for a teen.

Introduce your family to your foster child/teen. Run through a family album when you pick him or her up, and before heading home.

Do discuss with your foster child/teen:

- Who they will be living with, including any pets.
- How he or she would like to address you and your family members.
- Household rules and routines. You may refer to **Annex A** for an activity on **Coming Up with House Rules**.

Find out more about your foster child's/teen's behaviours, such as:

- Likes and dislikes (e.g. favourite foods).
- Routines (e.g. bedtime and sleeping habits).
- What helps them feel safe.
- What makes them feel scared.

Bring your foster child/teen for a medical screening within 24 hours of placement.

You will receive the medical screening cover letter and form upon placement. Knowing his/her health condition and noting any injuries or marks on their bodies will allow you to know how to care for him/her.



HELPING YOUR FOSTER CHILD/TEEN ADJUST TO FOSTER CARE

When your foster child/teen first joins your family, you may notice **a range of emotional responses** such as confusion, fear, anger and anxiety, or they may **even be eager to please you**.

It is important to **understand their emotional responses** as this is a time of adjustment for both them and your family. Help them **identify and express their feelings in a more acceptable manner** as you continue to shower them with love.

Do **spend more time and effort bonding with your foster child/teen**. It is the little things that will help make a difference in the long run!

REFLECTION:

Having grown up in another family, your foster child/teen might have experiences, values and attitudes that are different from yours. What are some of the differences you might expect? What common ground might you share?



REFLECTION:

*Think back to when you had to adjust to a new environment
(e.g. when you stayed in the hostel during your university days, or when you got married).*

What experiences helped you feel welcomed?

How did you learn about and get familiar with the new environment?

*Use your past experiences to understand how your foster child/teen would
feel when he or she is placed in your home.*

✓ Receiving a foster child/teen into your care is exciting, yet it is a period of adjustment for both your family and foster child/teen. What can you do to ease the transition for your family members and foster child/teen? Here are two examples, and you may wish to add on more ideas on your own.

1. Have a family meal together when your foster child/teen first arrives.
2. Familiarise your foster child/teen with his or her new home by giving a house tour and creating the house rules together.

3. _____

4. _____

“ There is satisfaction in knowing that you’ve made a difference in the life of a child. ”

- Mr Gerard Nonis
Foster father since 2000



**Be who
you
needed
when
you were
younger.**

Support
FOR You



5 Support Services for Foster Parents



GENERAL ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Your **Case Manager** will provide you with advice and support, including visits to your home to check in with you and your foster child/teen. You may also contact your Case Manager via their work handphone during office hours.

We also offer a **24-hour MSF Fostering Hotline** if you need help with any urgent matters after office hours. Do call our Fostering Hotline at **9026 6818** if your foster child/teen:

- Needs medical attention or emergency treatment;
- Is injured upon return from access;
- Cannot make it for access; and/or
- Has not returned home on time or has run away from the foster home.

If you are with a Fostering Agency, please call your Fostering Agency's hotline number.

“ Our role is to support, guide and help foster parents manage the day-to-day care of their foster child. ”

- **Ms Jessica Lee**
Assistant Manager
Fostering Service, Children in Care Service

📞 TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND SUPPORT GROUPS

We provide you with **regular training sessions** to help you develop parenting knowledge and skills. Please note that **certain training sessions are compulsory**. We are constantly updating our training programmes to keep them relevant and practical. Do approach your Case Manager to discuss your training needs.

In addition, there are **support groups and other group trainings available** where you can connect with other foster parents and learn by sharing experiences. Do speak to your Case Manager if you are keen to join a support group.



📞 RESPITE CARE

You should never leave your foster child/teen unsupervised. **If you need a short break from fostering or need to travel, you can arrange for respite care.** The respite carer will take care of your foster child/teen during your absence. Remember to discuss with your Case Manager before making any respite care arrangements on your own as all respite carers have to be approved by MSF. The whereabouts of the foster child should be known by the Case Manager at all times.

If you have chosen a **relative** or **friend** to be your foster child's/teen's respite carer, let your Case Manager know in advance. Your Case Manager will then:

- Interview and assess the **respite carer**; and
- Assess the respite carer's **home environment and household members** if your foster child/teen will be staying with them.

If you are able to, and would like to provide respite care for other foster parents, please inform your Case Manager.

“ You must be open to reviewing your parenting strategies and learning new ways of taking care of children. ”

- Mdm Cindy Tay
Foster mother since 2014



6 Fostering Allowance and Financial Matters

2 TIERS OF FOSTERING ALLOWANCE

We will provide you with a monthly fostering allowance from the time a foster child/teen is placed in your care. This allowance is meant to defray the cost of caring for your foster child/teen. **The fostering allowance is not meant to be a salary.**

The fostering allowance is determined by the level of care your foster child/teen needs. There are 2 levels of care:

Level 1 (Standard Care, \$936)

Level 2 (Moderate to High Care, \$1,114)

Your foster child's/teen's medical professional will formally diagnose and report on any condition that may require more intensive support. **Level 2 care** supports children with:

- Special needs such as physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities.
- Learning, behavioural and/or psychological disorders.

Please inform your Case Manager if there is a change in your foster child's/teen's care needs, and provide a medical report or letter from the doctor for verification purposes.

COMPONENTS OF FOSTERING ALLOWANCE

The fostering allowance will cover the whole range of your foster child's/teen's expenses, and will be credited into your bank account every month.

Your foster child/teen is **not eligible** for the **Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS)**, **Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme (KIFAS)** or **School Pocket Money Fund (SPMF)** as the fostering allowance already covers their educational needs.

The fostering allowance will provide your foster child/teen with:

- **Food:** A balanced, nutritious and sufficient diet.
- **Clothing:** Adequate size and age-appropriate clothing.
- **Accommodation:** A personal storage space, bed/mattress.
- **Schooling:** Fees, deposits, stationery, uniforms, textbooks, school-related activities.
- **Pocket money** for your foster child/teen to buy food at school.

Pocket money would vary based on your foster child's/teen's age and needs. As a guide, primary school students could receive \$1 to \$5 a day. Secondary school students could receive \$5 to \$10 a day.



- **Mobile phone and mobile plan** for your foster child/teen. A **prepaid mobile plan** may help you and your foster child/teen to better manage phone bills. Should you decide to purchase a postpaid plan for your foster child/teen, you may incur extra costs for premature termination of an existing mobile plan, or if your foster child/teen leaves your care before the subscription contract ends.
- **Community-based enrichment programmes:** Tuition services (if necessary), such as in Community Centres and Self-Help Groups like SINDA, CDAC and Mendaki; private tuition.
- **Transportation:** The costs for transporting your foster child/teen to appointments and activities.
- **Recreation:** Going to the cinema, playing sports, etc.
- **Optical care:** Spectacles, swimming goggles with prescription, etc.
- **For babies:** baby cot, diapers, milk powder, etc.

Should your foster child/teen require **special equipment** or **specialist services**, please let your Case Manager know.

The fostering allowance may not cover the following expenses:

- Cosmetic items e.g. contact lenses, braces; and
- Private classes e.g. private tuition, swimming classes.



DEDUCTING FOSTERING ALLOWANCE

The fostering allowance will be deducted if your foster child/teen is on:

- **Home leave:** If your foster child/teen is on home leave for more than 7 days in a calendar month (cumulative and not including handover dates), fostering allowance will be deducted from the 8th day of home leave onwards.
- **Respite care with another foster parent:** Fostering allowance will also be deducted for the duration of respite care and paid to the foster parents providing respite care (excluding handover dates).
- **Respite care with your relative/friend:** You may choose to give a token of the fostering allowance to your relative/friend who is the respite carer.



CO-PAYING INFANT/CHILD CARE FEES

To support you, **we subsidise your foster child's infant/child care fees**. You will only have to pay the following per foster child:

Full day infant/child care: \$200

Half day infant/child care: \$150



CO-PAYING STUDENT CARE CENTRE FEES

Through the Student Care Fee Assistance (SCFA), **we subsidise your foster child's student care centre fees**. As such, you will only have to co-pay **\$80** for selected MSF-approved student care centres.



PAYING SCHOOL FEES FOR YOUR NON-CITIZEN FOSTER CHILD/TEEN

If your foster child/teen is a non-citizen, **you will be reimbursed for the difference in school fees between citizens and non-citizens.** Reimbursement will be made at the end of each school term and applications for reimbursement can be made through your Case Manager.

As foster children who are non-citizens do not qualify for Edusave funds annually distributed by the government, you may request for a **reimbursement of up to \$100 per year for school enrichment programmes.**



PAYING FOR YOUR FOSTER CHILD'S/TEEN'S EXAMINATION FEES

If your foster child/teen is taking the PSLE, GCE 'N', 'O' or 'A' level examinations or other examinations conducted by MOE-approved tertiary institutions, you may **claim examination fees for your foster child/teen.** Applications for reimbursement can be made through your Case Manager.



FOSTERING ALLOWANCE FOR FOSTER YOUTH (18 TO 21 YEARS OLD)

Through your guidance and co-operation with social/youth workers, **your foster youth will learn how to live independently and transit into adulthood smoothly.** We will support your foster youth's growing independence through **appropriate adjustments to the fostering allowance.**



IF YOUR FOSTER YOUTH...

Turns 18 and is still studying full time in an MOE-registered educational institution



You will continue to receive the **full** fostering allowance.

Is **studying part-time** in an MOE-registered educational institution



You will receive **half of the fostering allowance.**

Is working **part-time** while waiting to enter an **Institute of Higher Learning / Tertiary Institution**



You will continue to receive the **full** fostering allowance.

Turns 21 or terminates/completes their studies (whichever is earlier)



The fostering allowance will **cease.**

Is in **full-time employment or National Service**



The fostering allowance will **cease.**

Is **unable to be self-sufficient** due to illnesses, disabilities or other mitigating circumstances



You will continue to receive the **full** fostering allowance **until they turn 21.**



FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKER LEVY CONCESSION

Your Case Manager will help you apply for a foreign domestic worker levy concession if **your foster child/teen is below 16 years old**. In this case, you will need to submit the Letter of Undertaking and Court Order (if any) to the Ministry of Manpower.

“ Let vulnerable children enjoy the warmth of family life. As they grow up... they will also bring meaning to your life. ”

- Mdm Choo Kheng Huay
Foster mother since 2003



7 Your Foster Child's/Teen's Case Review

Your foster child's/teen's case will be reviewed regularly. During these case reviews, we **assess the foster child's/teen's needs, evaluate how well these needs have been met, and recommend next steps**.

During the routine home visits, your Case Manager will record your feedback, check in one-to-one with the foster child/teen and check your physical living environment. He or she will then present your feedback at your foster child's/teen's case review. At the case review, the following would be presented and discussed:

- Your foster child's/teen's **safety, stability, well-being and permanency plans**;
- Your foster child's/teen's **progress**;
- Your foster child's/teen's **natural family's progress**;
- The **level of care** you have provided for your foster child/teen;
- Your foster child's/teen's and your **wishes**.



There are 4 case review platforms that consist of professionals from a variety of disciplines. These platforms are:

The Court (for cases with a Court Order)

For cases with a Court Order, the Youth Court will regularly review the case to ensure that the foster child/teen continues to receive the most suitable care arrangements.

Child Abuse Review Team (CART)

CART comprises a multi-disciplinary team of professionals and independent resource persons from the community. They review safety and service plans, intervention goals, and permanent care plans for the foster child/teen and their natural family.

Committee on Fostering (COF)

COF members consist of independent and experienced practitioners from various disciplines. The committee reviews the foster care arrangements of the child/teen, and considers if the foster family is providing good care.

Permanency Planning (PP) Meeting

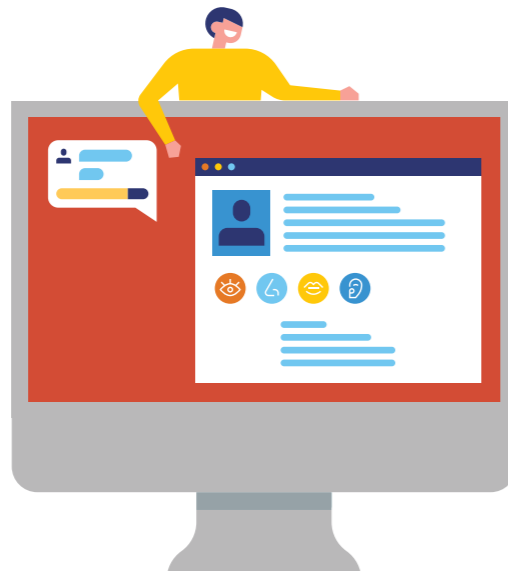
This involves developing a permanent plan to ensure that the foster child/teen is stable and in safe hands. This could be a reunification with their natural parents where interventions will be provided to improve the natural family's ability to care for the child/teen. Steps will be taken to prepare him/her to be reunified with his/her natural parents.



8 Useful Resources

LOCAL GENERAL PARENTING WEBSITES

- theAsianparent
<http://sg.theasianparent.com/>
- Dads for Life
<https://www.facebook.com/DadsforLife>
- Dads for Life Toolbox
<https://dadsforlifeg.wordpress.com/>
- Families for Life
www.familiesforlife.sg/discover-an-article/Pages/default.aspx?articleCategory=Parenting



**Never worry
about
numbers.
Help one
person at
a time &
always
start with
the person
nearest you.**

- Mother Teresa



YOUR Fostering Journey



9 A Foster Parent's Responsibilities

As a foster parent, you play a significant role in helping your foster child/teen heal from trauma and grow well. **The best way you can make a positive difference in your foster child's/teen's life is to take your core responsibilities as a foster parent seriously.** These responsibilities include the following:

Attend training regularly to develop your skills and knowledge as a foster parent

Ensure your child's/teen's **physical well-being** by:

- **Supervising** your foster child/teen daily.
- Ensuring their **needs are adequately met.**
- Checking that they are **meeting their developmental milestones.**
- **Protecting them from harm and abuse**, such as by installing age-appropriate safety devices to create a safe home environment.
- Bringing them for **medical consultation** if they are unwell.



Encourage independence in their teenage years by assigning them household chores, recommending wise educational and career choices, and imparting important life skills like budgeting and maintaining healthy relationships with peers.

Encourage **healthy mental development** by:

- **Ensuring** that they are **enrolled in school** at an appropriate age and attend school regularly.
- **Using non-physical** and **positive** parenting methods to discipline them, such as by setting boundaries;
- **Promoting** and **supporting** the significant relationships in their lives (e.g. natural family, potential adoptive parents) by bringing them to spend time with these people (subject to the Case Manager's approval); and
- **Respecting** and **maintaining the privacy and confidentiality** of your foster child/teen and their natural family.

Work closely with the Case Manager by:

- **Allowing** the Case Manager to **visit your foster child/teen at any time**;
- **Alerting** the Case Manager when your foster child/teen displays **behaviour that may need professional intervention**; and
- **Informing** the Case Manager immediately of **any incident involving your foster child/teen** such as injuries, illnesses and delays in their return from school, home leave or access.

Please refer to the **Foster Care Agreement** for more details on a foster parent's responsibilities.



MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY

As a foster parent, you will have information about your foster child/teen and their natural family. To protect their privacy, **please keep all personal information confidential** unless it is required by other professionals involved in their care (e.g. teachers, therapists, counsellors and medical professionals).

The **Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA)** protects the privacy of your foster child/teen by ensuring the following:

- Restriction on publication of information leading to identification of child or young person who is subject of investigation, etc.
- Restriction on publication of information relating to proceedings involving children and young persons.
- Confidentiality of information relating to children and young persons.

Please remember that publicly revealing the identity of a foster child/teen is prohibited. As such, please do not publish information about your foster child/teen (including their name and/or image) on any media platform, such as newspapers, magazines, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Do also alert your Case Manager if you are approached for any interviews or opinions.

It is also important to **remind your foster child/teen about the importance of keeping their family background private.** Reassure your foster child/teen that they are not obliged to tell their friends or classmates anything about their family history or foster care if they are uncomfortable with doing so.

Do not hesitate to discuss with your Case Manager if you have any concerns or issues regarding confidentiality.





CONTACT WITH NATURAL FAMILY

Keeping in touch with his or her natural family is **crucial for your foster child's/teen's psychological and emotional well-being.**

Family contact helps your foster child/teen develop:

- A sense of self and identity.
- A sense of stability, continuity, predictability and security.
- Relationships in a safe and supportive environment.
- Appropriate expectations of their natural family and relationships.
- A greater understanding and connection with their natural family and culture.

Your foster child's/teen's contact with their natural family is one of the most important ways for your Case Manager **to assess whether they can be reintegrated with their natural family or if long term care options should be made for them.**



Your Case Manager will discuss with your foster child/teen, their natural family and yourself to decide on the type, frequency and duration of your foster child's/teen's contact with their natural family.



HELP YOUR FOSTER CHILD/TEEN KEEP IN CONTACT WITH THEIR NATURAL FAMILY THROUGH:



SUPERVISED PHONE CALLS



TEXT MESSAGES



LETTERS



VISITS TO THE PRISON OR TELE-VISIT SITES

Help your foster child/teen keep in contact with their natural parents by bringing them for prison visits or to tele-visit sites (centers where they can communicate via video-link contact).



SUPERVISED / UNSUPERVISED ACCESS

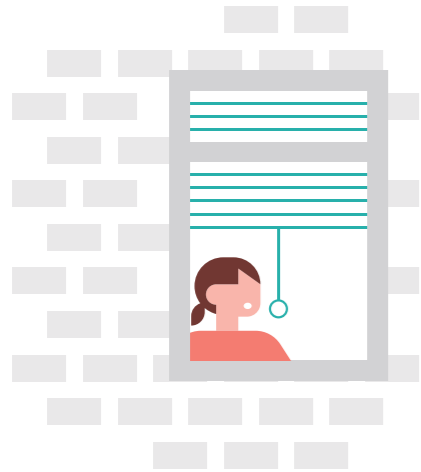
OUTINGS

Spending time with their natural family/relatives, either supervised by an officer or unsupervised

HOME LEAVE

Having an overnight stay with their natural family/relatives, either during weekends, festive seasons or school holidays





Contact between the foster child/teen and their natural parents is regulated under the **Children and Young Persons Act**:

Where the Director or a Protector is of the view that any contact or access between the child or young person removed under subsection (1) and any other person is not in the best interests of the child or young person, the Director or Protector may order that the other person concerned may only have contact or access to the child or young person subject to such conditions as the Director or Protector may impose.



PREPARING YOUR FOSTER CHILD/TEEN FOR CONTACT WITH THEIR NATURAL FAMILY

- **Support** your foster child's/teen's contact with their natural family.
- **Tell** your foster child/teen positive things about their natural family.
- **Be honest** with your foster child/teen.
- **Prepare** your foster child/teen in advance. Help them think of things to do and talk about with their natural family.
- **Expect** that contact with their natural parents may stir up feelings of anger, sadness, and/or confusion in your foster child/teen.
- **Be prepared** that your foster child/teen might misbehave before, during, or after access.
- **Allow** your foster child/teen to express their feelings before and after access, and understand and accept these feelings. Reassure them that you are always ready to listen when they feel like talking to you.
- **Encourage** your foster child/teen to bring things to visits (e.g. drawings, school work) and wish their natural parents well on special occasions like Mother's and Father's Day, birthdays and festive celebrations.





YOUR FOSTER CHILD'S/TEEN'S QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR NATURAL FAMILY

Your foster child/teen may ask you questions about their natural family so that they can better understand their situation. **Give your foster child/teen a listening ear and respond to them kindly and honestly.** Some frequently asked questions are:



Please do not hesitate to talk to the Case Manager if you are unable to answer any of your foster child's/teen's questions or are uncomfortable with doing so.



YOUR COMMUNICATION WITH THE NATURAL FAMILY

You may also need to communicate with your foster child's/teen's natural family. Here are some tips on how you can **maintain a positive relationship between your foster child/teen and their natural family.**



- **Share updates, stories and photos** with natural parents through the Child Protection Officer about special events in their child's/teen's life (e.g. graduation, performance, school sports day).
- **Keep your contact number and address confidential from the natural parents** to protect your privacy.
- Focus on telling the natural parents **positive things** about their child/teen, such as their progress and development.
- **Be patient and understanding** if your foster child/teen acts up before, during or after a visit with natural parents.
- Ensure that you know these details before access:
 - Location** of access
 - Duration** of access
 - Who** will be with your foster child/teen
 - Who will **supervise** your foster child/teen
- **Keep written records** of what goes on, including your foster child's/teen's behaviour before and after contact with their natural parents.
- If the natural family does not return your foster **child/teen more than 30 minutes after the appointed time**, immediately inform your Case Manager or call the Fostering Hotline (**9026 6818**). If you are with a Fostering Agency, please call your Fostering Agency's hotline number.
- **Share any concerns** you have with the Case Manager.



YOUR COMMUNICATION WITH THE NATURAL FAMILY

Do not arrange contact with the natural family directly.

Do not criticise or blame the natural family.

Do not voice out your expectations of how the natural family should behave with your foster child/teen.



Do not prompt or pressure your foster child/teen for information.

Do not let your anger, anxiety or bitterness towards the natural family affect your foster child/teen.

Do not make promises you cannot keep to your foster child/teen.

Do not give or accept money or expensive items from your foster child's/teen's natural family. (If your foster child/teen receives such valuable items from their natural parents, do inform your Case Manager).



FOSTER CHILD'S/TEEN'S CONTACT WITH NATURAL SIBLINGS WHO ARE IN OTHER FOSTER FAMILIES

In the case where your foster child's/teen's siblings have been placed with a different family, it is good to ensure they keep in regular contact to maintain their bonds.

Here are some ways you could strengthen the relationship between your foster child/teen and their sibling(s).

- Make time to bring your foster child/teen to meet with their siblings as arranged by your Case Manager.
- Keep in close contact with the family that is fostering your foster child's/teen's siblings.
- Arrange joint outings for both families to allow the fostered siblings to spend time together.
- Encourage your foster child/teen to maintain contact with their sibling through messages, calls and social media.
- If you are able to, offer respite care for your foster child's/teen's siblings to give them more chances to bond.



WORKING WITH THE CASE MANAGER AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

You will be collaborating with the Case Manager, teachers and other professionals involved in your foster child's/teen's care. **They will support you in helping your foster child/teen reach their best potential.** Having a strong support network behind you makes the fostering journey rewarding and satisfying.

To facilitate this, please update your Case Manager on any changes to your family/life:

- Changes in the **people living in your household.**
- Changes in your **address** and/or **contact number.**
- Changes in **personal circumstances** that would affect your ability to care for your foster child/teen (e.g. marital status, health, financial situation).
- Changes in **care arrangements** for your foster child/teen.
- **Overseas trips** that include/exclude your foster child/teen.



KEEPING RECORDS



It is a good and safe practice to **keep proper and detailed records** of your foster child/teen, as this will help you **keep track of their progress and any concerns you may have.**



During home visits, your Case Manager will go through these records with you. Do record the **dates, times and details** of:



- Issues faced (e.g. challenging behaviour)
- Incidents (e.g. accidents)
- Medical or therapy appointments
- Information of your foster child's/teen's contact with natural family

Here is an example of how you could record these details:

● DATE	● TIME	● ISSUE	● DETAILS	● TO FOLLOW UP ON
19 June	10am	Medical appointment at Pasir Ris Polyclinic	Foster child/teen had the flu so we visited the doctor. Doctor prescribed medication and advised us to return if the flu did not get better within one week.	Inform my Case Manager about this. Make sure foster child/teen takes the medication, and monitor whether the flu gets better within one week.

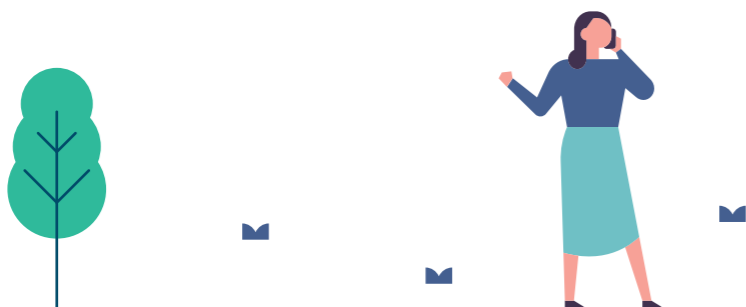
“ I remind myself that what matters most is that they are doing well. ”
 - Mdm Thiravingadam Sembugavale
 Foster mother since 1974

10 Safe Practices & Minimising the Risk of Allegations

While it is not possible to avoid an allegation of abuse or neglect, doing the following will help to **minimise this risk and prepare yourself for the foster child's/teen's temperament and behaviour**:

- **Find out as much information as possible** before deciding to foster a child/teen. This includes the foster child's/teen's:
 - **History of abuse or neglect** at home and in out-of-home placements.
 - **History of making allegations** against caregivers. Such a history does not mean the foster child/teen is lying but could indicate a need for additional services and precautions in the foster home.
- **Participate in training for foster parents** about caring for foster children/teens who had been abused or neglected.
- Keep a **record** of:
 - **Unusual** events, behaviours, comments, or reactions before or after interactions with natural or foster family members.
 - School, medical, dental, or therapy **appointments**.
 - **All discussions with professionals** about the foster child's/teen's progress and needs, including specific and important details.

- Set, and be firm about **family rules and expectations**, such as:
 - **Be fully clothed** in the common areas of the house.
 - The foster parents' bedroom is **only** open to foster parents.
 - If the foster child/teen has been sexually abused, they **must not be left alone** with anyone of the same gender as the perpetrator.
- Closely supervise your foster child/teen if they demonstrate, or have a **history of sexualised behaviours**.
- **Work with your Case Manager** to ensure that your foster child's/teen's needs are identified and met.
- If your foster child/teen meets with any **unusual incident or injury, let your Case Manager know immediately**.
- **Maintain appropriate boundaries** when working with your foster child's/teen's natural parents, Case Manager and other professionals involved with your foster child/teen.



INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES OF AN ALLEGATION OF ABUSE

If an allegation of abuse is made against a member of the foster family, the following may be carried out immediately:

- Your Case Manager and Child Protection Officer may conduct a **joint home visit** to inform you about the allegation and **obtain a preliminary account** of the alleged incident.
- If the foster child/teen is **injured or at risk of injury**, your Case Manager/Child Protection Officer will bring your foster child/teen to see a medical professional for **medical attention**.
- If the doctor assesses your foster child's/teen's injuries to be **non-accidental**, a **police report will be lodged by the hospital**. The police will then carry out an investigation by interviewing all the relevant persons.
- Your foster child/teen may be **hospitalised** to facilitate investigations.
- Your Case Manager and Child Protection Officer will carry out a **detailed interview with you and your family**.
- Your Case Manager and Child Protection Officer will assess if your foster child/teen and/or other foster children/teens in your care should be **removed immediately**.
- Foster parents may be **suspended from fostering** until all investigations and assessments are complete.
- Foster parents **will be kept informed** of investigations and assessments.



11 Self Care



Caring for vulnerable children/teens may leave you with little space or energy for other activities, making it difficult to do your best for your own children or your foster children/teens. Here are some **signs of stress** to look out for:

- Stomach aches or headaches
- Poor eating habits
- Not sleeping well
- Feeling irritable and having mood swings
- Feeling overwhelmed, being unable to sort out thoughts and feelings
- Loss of interest, empathy or hope
- Re-experiencing your own history of trauma
- Feeling upset with abusive natural parents and unhappy with their rights to access their child/teen

“ I will not lie to them and say that it is easy. You need patience. You cannot give up halfway through. ”

- Mdm Chua Siew Gek
Foster mother since 2015



STRESS MANAGEMENT TIPS

It is important to recognise signs that you are stressed out. If you notice yourself experiencing some of the above signs, do seek help from your family, friends and your Case Manager. Prolonged stress can cause the placement to break down and leave you with a sense of failure as a foster parent.

Remember that **you are not alone** in your fostering journey and **you have a strong support system** of professionals to walk with you every step of the way.

Here are some steps you can take to reduce stress:

- **Set realistic goals and expectations.**

For example, if your foster child/teen has poor concentration and a short attention span, adjust your expectations on how much homework he or she can complete in one sitting.

If your foster child/teen is functioning at a younger emotional age, do not expect them to be able to spend long periods of time with a child/teen they cannot get along with.

- **Do not blame yourself when things go wrong.**

- **Look at the big picture.**

Look beyond the stressful situation. Is it really worth getting upset over? Is it helping your foster child/teen?

Ask yourself how important the issue at hand will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month or a year? Focus your time and energy on the things that matter.

- **Know your limitations.**

For example, if Tuesdays are your long work days and you often have to deal with your foster child's/teen's tantrums after work, think about alternative kinds of support you can put in place.

- **Ask for and accept help.**

It is okay to seek help and it is important to do so before things get too overwhelming.

Do not hesitate to talk to your Case Manager and other relevant professionals if the need arises.

- **Increase your knowledge on caring for your foster child/teen.**

Attend training to better understand your foster child/teen and develop your competence in taking care of your foster child/teen.

Join foster parent support groups so that you do not feel alone in your fostering journey.

- **Make time for fun, relaxation and exercise.**

Spend time with positive people who enhance your life.

Take up a hobby or recreational activity that you find enjoyable. This will help you relax.

Have a sense of humour and be able to laugh at your mistakes and yourself!



Maintain Physical Health

Get **enough rest** and **eat healthily**.

Exercise regularly.



Get Support

Know when to say no.

Seek help when needed.

Talk to your spouse, children, family and friends about things that worry you.

Write or **share** about one good thing you experience each day with a family member or friend.



HERE ARE
MORE TIPS
ON SELF CARE

Relax

Do simple relaxing and calming activities such as deep breathing, listening to music, taking walks and having a warm bath.

Slowly repeat a calm word or phrase while you focus on your breathing.

Use your imagination - visualise a relaxing experience.

Take short breaks throughout the day to quieten your mind.



Think Positive

Be hopeful and have a **positive outlook**.

Identify negative thoughts and **replace them with positive ones**.

Develop **positive problem-solving skills**.

Focus on the **good things**.

Celebrate small achievements and personal accomplishments.

Learn from each experience.



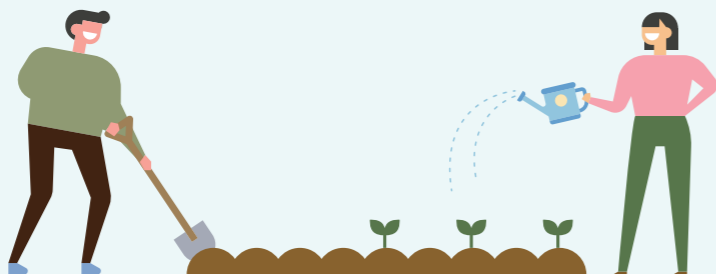
SELF CARE

Along your fostering journey, remember to take breaks for yourself.

Savour the joyful moments, and process any issues that have been bothering you.

Stop occasionally to reflect on what has happened.

What is one activity that you could do to relax and refresh yourself?



**Rise above
the storm
and you will
find the
sunshine.**

- Mario fernandez

CARING FOR YOUR FOSTER

Child/Teen



12 Your Foster Child's/Teen's Health



MEDICAL FEE EXEMPTION CARD

Every foster child/teen will be issued a Medical Fee Exemption Card (MFEC).

Before the MFEC is issued to your foster child/teen, you will be given a **Letter of Identity** (issued at the point of placement). You can use this for medical fee exemptions at **government polyclinics and hospitals** until the MFEC is issued to you.

Your foster child's/teen's MFEC is funded by Medifund through the Ministry of Health. **The MFEC covers standard medical/dental treatment charges and compulsory immunisations/medication at government polyclinics and hospitals**, but does not cover optional and non-standard vaccinations, drugs, treatments and special equipment. If you need any of these, please **discuss with your Case Manager**. A medical memo must be submitted to the Case Manager to assist with the funding application.

For medical fees not covered by the MFEC, MSF will either use **e-invoicing to pay the service provider directly**, or a reimbursement will be **made to your bank account** after you submit the appropriate medical payment receipt.

SPECIALIST APPOINTMENT REFERRALS

If your foster child/teen needs to see a specialist, please get a referral through a **polyclinic**. The **MFEC only covers** the cost of specialist appointment referrals made by **government polyclinics**. Self or General Practitioner (GP) referrals to government hospitals are not covered by the MFEC as your foster child/teen would be considered a private patient.

INJURY/ILLNESS

If your foster child/teen is injured or unwell, promptly **contact your Case Manager (during office hours) or the Fostering Hotline at 9026 6818 (after office hours)**. If you are with a Fostering Agency, please call your Fostering Agency's hotline number.

Immediately **seek medical attention** and remember to **obtain a medical memo from the doctor**.



MEDICALLY INVASIVE PROCEDURES

If your foster child/teen needs to undergo any invasive medical procedure, their natural parent's consent is needed in order to proceed. Please consult your Case Manager if your foster child/teen needs to undergo a medical procedure. **Your Case Manager will help you to obtain the natural parent's consent.**

CIRCUMCISION

Circumcision for religious purposes requires the consent of the foster child's/teen's natural parents. **Your Case Manager will obtain the natural parent's consent** if this procedure is required.



13 Your Foster Child's/Teen's Education

If your foster child/teen continues to study in the same school after being placed in your care, **the Case Manager will inform the school that you are his/her new caregiver. The school will liaise with you directly** on day-to-day school matters after your Case Manager passes the school your contact details.



PRIMARY ONE REGISTRATION

The **Primary One Registration Exercise** is conducted from **August to September** every year. If you feel that your foster child is not ready to be admitted into Primary One and should be deferred, please discuss with your Case Manager.

You may register your foster child in the school of your choice. Before the exercise, do let your Case Manager know which school you plan to enrol him/her in. During the eligible phase, please register your foster child at the school of choice. If your foster child cannot be admitted into the school of your choice, please approach another school for registration.

You will need the following documents for registration:

- **Letter of Authorisation** (provided by your Case Manager)
- Your foster child's **birth certificate**
- Your foster child's **immunisation certificate** and **health booklet**
- Foster mother's **NRIC/Foreign Identification Document**
- **Birth Certificate** of foster siblings and the foster parents' natural children **currently studying** in the school (if any)
- **NRIC** of the foster parents' natural children who are **ex-students**

Visit the Ministry of Education website at www.moe.gov.sg for more information about the school.



WORKING WITH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND COUNSELLORS

Share with your foster child's/teen's school teachers and counsellors your foster child's/teen's schooling needs. Let the school teachers and counsellors know about any behavioural, emotional or academic difficulties your foster child/teen might have so that they can give your foster child/teen the support that he or she needs. Do share with your Case Manager about your foster child's/teen's academic performance and conduct in school.



TRANSFERRING SCHOOLS

If you would like to transfer your foster child/teen to a school closer to your home, **please discuss this with your Case Manager.** If a school transfer is necessary, your Case Manager will work with the Ministry of Education to find a suitable school for your foster child/teen.



If your foster child/teen has been neglected or abused, they may have **cognitive delays or psychological problems** which may show in their behaviour and ability to focus on learning.



WHAT TO EXPECT OF YOUR FOSTER CHILD'S/TEEN'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Do have **realistic expectations of your foster child's/teen's academic performance**. It is important to start where they are and help them grow at a manageable pace. While you should urge your foster child/teen to do their best in school, be careful not to stress them out, especially if they struggle with trauma or self-esteem issues.

However, the good news is that **their potential can be achieved through your encouragement and guidance!**

What strengths and abilities does your foster child/teen have? Build their self confidence by giving them opportunities to develop their strengths. Their strengths could lie in activities such as the arts, music or sports.



Encourage your foster child/teen to join a co-curricular activity (CCA) that they like, or look into enrolling them in programmes/activities they are interested in. Many children/teens find these activities helpful in their recovery process. Ask your Case Manager if you need advice on enrolling your foster child/teen into suitable programmes.



ADJUSTING TO SCHOOL LIFE

Adjusting to school can be a scary experience for your foster child/teen, but your support to smoothen their transition from home to school, or school to school will make a world of a difference to them. **Your support will help your foster child/teen develop a sense of security and confidence to embrace new experiences.**

Here are some practical tips on adjusting your foster child/teen to school:



Get your foster child/teen interested in starting school by engaging them in age-appropriate reading and learning activities. For example, you could bring your foster child/teen to the Science Centre for an outing.



Bring your foster child/teen to get their schoolbooks, stationery and uniforms. You could let them pick the stationery they like, and get them excited about using it.



Visit the new school together and introduce your foster child/teen to the new teacher in advance. If the school allows, you could accompany your foster child/teen for their school orientation.



Involve your foster child/teen in preparing for school (e.g. packing snacks, preparing school uniforms).



Get your foster child/teen used to daily routines that will help them adjust to school life (e.g. set an earlier bedtime several weeks before school starts).



Note your foster child's/teen's reaction to separation. Prepare in advance coping strategies (e.g. ways to say goodbye, be firm but friendly about separating, and make supportive statements such as "I will see you after school!").



TUITION

Many of our foster children/teens are educationally disadvantaged because of their difficult family background. This means that **they may need extra educational support, such as individual or group tuition, to reach their academic potential.** Do approach your Case Manager to find out what free or subsidised tuition services are available for your foster child/teen.



REFUSING TO ATTEND SCHOOL

Your foster child/teen may refuse to attend school for various reasons.

This could include:

- Fear of teachers.
- Fear of being bullied.
- Unable to make friends.
- Unable to follow lessons in class.



Understanding your foster child's/teen's reasons behind their refusal to attend school will enable you to better manage the issue.

You could help your foster child/teen willingly return to school by doing the following:

- **Discuss with your foster child's/teen's teacher to better understand** the reasons why they refuse to go to school.
- **If your foster child/teen experiences physical problems** (e.g. stomach upset) and symptoms persist after treatment, your foster child/teen may be referred for a psychological assessment.
- **Stay calm, rational, and be firm that they need to attend school.**



BULLYING

Observe your foster child's/teen's behaviour and check in with them to see if they are being bullied in or outside of school. **If they reveal bullying incidents,** be attentive to their feelings and approach school teachers and your Case Manager for assistance needed to keep your foster child/teen safe at school.



DISCIPLINARY MATTERS

Inform your Case Manager immediately if the school reports any disciplinary matters regarding your foster child/teen.

A school conference may be organised if necessary to discuss how to help your foster child/teen. This conference may involve you, the school teachers, school counsellor, staff from the Discipline Committee as well as your Case Manager.



With love, you can work things out.

- **Mdm Norlia bte Mohd Ali Marican**
Foster mother since 2003



14 Managing Your Foster Child's/Teen's Behaviour



If your foster child/teen behaves in a way that you find difficult to understand or manage, keep in mind that **their behaviour may have been caused by a range of problems** – from traumatic events in their past, to instability in the present. **However, with your guidance in their lives, your foster child will be able to grow up well and have a brighter future.**

One of the most crucial ways to guide your foster child/teen is to manage their behaviour. You can do this by:

- **Understanding the reasons behind their behaviour; and**
- **Helping them to manage their emotions.**



UNDERSTANDING YOUR FOSTER CHILD'S/TEEN'S BEHAVIOUR

Your foster child's/teen's behaviour may be a result of their:

- **Developmental age:** Their cognitive, emotional and motor abilities may not correspond with their actual age. For a foster child, some signs of concern are:

Not sitting without support at 10 months.

Not walking at 18 months.

No single words at 18 months.

Not using two-word phrases by 2 years.

Does not imitate actions or words at 2 years.

No alphabet or number recognition by 4 years.

Has lost any behavioural, language or social skills (e.g. was fully toilet trained at 3 years but has now started bed-wetting).

Does not point to show things that he or she is interested in.

Does not follow when someone is pointing something out to him or her.

Does not respond to affection.

Prefers to play alone.

Please see the **Useful Resources** at the end of this section for a link to child development guidelines that would explain in detail what milestones children should be attaining at every age range.

If your foster child/teen is not displaying age-appropriate abilities, **please consult your Case Manager and seek medical help.**



- **History** of trauma and unhealthy, insecure attachment with caregivers.

Attachment is a deep and emotional bond shared between the child and the primary caregiver. Children are more balanced emotionally and behaviourally when they experience **secure attachment**.

Cultivate a secure attachment with your foster child/teen:

Comfort them when they are distressed.

Be warm and interested when they wish to speak or play with you.

Give them empathy and accept their point of view.

- **Role models:** Your foster child/teen may have picked up such behaviour from their previous caregivers.
- **Difficulty adjusting** to a new lifestyle and foster home.
- **Grief and loss** from leaving their natural family, friends, neighbourhood, or school. Things that would help your foster child/teen deal with feelings of grief and loss include:

Opportunities for them to remember and talk about the things and people they miss.

Photos of their natural family, friends and pets.

Life story work to help them understand their lives and create new memories

Cultivate connections to their culture and community (especially if your foster child/teen is of a different cultural background from you).

Understand their triggers and help them find appropriate emotional outlets.

Access time with their natural family.



POSITIVE PARENTING METHODS

It is important to be **sensitive and flexible to your foster child's/teen's unique needs and personality**. Consider their developmental age and care history when deciding on an appropriate discipline method.

Ultimately, **build a positive relationship with your foster child/teen**. This will help you lay the foundation for effective behaviour management.

Positive Parenting Methods include:

Helping your foster child/teen **identify feelings**

Using behaviour management tools and **logical** consequences

Teaching your foster child/teen **healthy coping mechanisms**
e.g. engaging in hobbies that they enjoy

Being aware of **your own limitations**

Staying **calm**

Looking at the **bigger picture**

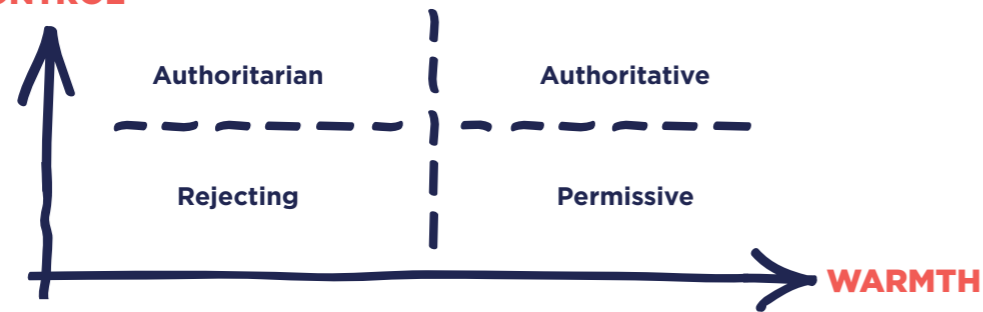




UNDERSTANDING YOUR PARENTING STYLE

Knowing your own **Parenting Style** is also important as every parent-child relationship is different. Each parenting style will also bring about different reactions in the children/teens:

CONTROL



WARMTH: The way a parent shows love and concern with a lot of smiling, praising and hugging/touching.

CONTROL: The extent to which you expect or demand the child to follow certain rules.

Research has shown the Authoritative style of parenting to be the most effective in creating a healthy environment for the child. The authoritative parent enforces rules but also emphasises the reasons for having these rules. At the same time, he or she shows love by praising, smiling and being warm to the foster child/teen.



REFLECTION:

What is your parenting style? How does your parenting style influence your interaction with your natural children and foster child/teen?



UNACCEPTABLE PARENTING METHODS

MSF's policy states that foster children/teens cannot be disciplined through:

- **Physical** punishment.
- Inducing **shame, anxiety or fear** in your foster child/teen.
- Denying your foster child/teen their **needs and rights**.

Managing your foster child's/teen's behaviour may be a huge challenge. However, support is always available – join our **training sessions and support groups**, and regularly **seek advice** from your Case Manager.

Please also refer to the **Foundation Course for Foster Parents – Learner's Guide** for more positive parenting strategies.

REFLECTION:

Managing your foster child's/teen's tantrums is a challenge that parents often face. In the past, how did you manage your foster child's/teen's tantrums? What worked for you? Brainstorm some ideas you could try out the next time your foster child/teen has a tantrum.





IF YOUR FOSTER CHILD/TEEN REVEALS PAST ABUSE

Over time, your foster child/teen might share experiences of being abused, or you might observe behaviour in your foster child/teen suggesting that they have been abused.

In such cases, it is natural to feel confused or disbelieve what they say. However, do not brush off your foster child/teen. **Build trust** by listening to them, especially if they fear the consequences of sharing about being abused.

Here are other appropriate ways to respond:

- Allow your foster child/teen to share at a pace that they are **comfortable** with.
- **Remain calm** and **listen attentively**. Do not probe or interrupt.
- **Accept** what your foster child/teen has to say and **acknowledge** their feelings.
- **Thank** your foster child/teen for sharing and **assure** them that it is not their fault.
- **Do not promise that you will not tell anyone**. Tell your foster child/teen that you have to share this information with your Case Manager.
- **Record** the information in your foster child's/teen's **own words**.
- **Inform** your Case Manager immediately.

Refer to Annex C for a tip sheet on Responding to Disclosure.

15 Fostering Teens



Teenagers, due to their young age and developing brain, will need their parents and other significant adults to help them in achieving these universal needs. For teenagers with early trauma experiences, there is significant impact on their brain development, which makes this period of growth even more challenging for them.



- Adapted from Social Service Institute's Elective Course **Parenting Adolescents Learner's Guide**.

Adolescence can be a challenging period for both foster parents and foster teens. Even though adolescents prefer to establish their own identity and independence by resisting conformity, they may not be able to fully understand the consequences of their actions. This chapter provides some understanding of the issues teenagers face and how the presence of foster parents can help guide them and reduce the adverse impact on them.





SETTING RULES AND CONSEQUENCES FOR YOUR FOSTER TEEN

- **Set rules to teach**, not to punish or control your foster teen. The following are some tips for setting rules:

Be Clear And Concise

Write down short, easy rules such as setting a specific curfew.

Set Age-Appropriate Rules

Include your foster teen in the process of setting rules so that a balance of independence, freedom and discipline can be achieved.

Be Reasonable

Allow negotiation on the rules according to the situation (e.g. when your foster teen has co-curricular activities that end in the evening).

Explain Your Decisions

Ensure your foster teen understands that your decision was made considering their needs and views. They will be more likely to follow a rule if they understand its purpose.

Be Flexible

Give your foster teen more freedom or impose more restrictions according to their behaviour.

Be A Good Role Model

Your foster teen looks for guidance on how to behave in various situations.

- **Encourage your foster teen to develop problem-solving and leadership skills** by letting them make decisions, bear responsibilities and think for themselves.
- **Too little discipline is not helpful** as teens still need a clear structure and rules to live by.



WHEN YOUR FOSTER TEEN BREAKS RULES



Keep to your word.

Stick to the consequences that were set beforehand which both of you have agreed on.

Find out why your foster teen broke the rules.

If it seems like your foster teen is staying out late because they are mixing with bad company or are unhappy at home, talk to them and find out more.

Never use physical punishment.

As your foster teen is likely to have come from an abusive background, physical punishment is likely to do more harm than good. MSF does not allow physical punishment to be used at any time.

Direct comments at your foster teen's behaviour rather than his or her character.

For example, say "yelling at me is rude" rather than "you are rude."

Be calm and respectful.

Before you speak, ask yourself, "is what I am about to say true, necessary and non-judgmental?"

Your foster teen will make many mistakes, but do not always criticise them.

The more you criticise them, the less likely the criticism will have any effect on them, and the more they will feel like you do not love or care about them.





MANAGING TRICKY TEEN ISSUES

How to Have Tough Conversations with Your Foster Teen

Your foster teen may confide in you about the problems they encounter at school or with their friends. Here are some tips on how you can respond supportively to your foster teen's worries.

- **Show your concern by listening attentively and being supportive when your foster teen speaks to you.** Here is an example of attentive versus inattentive listening:



INATTENTIVE listening (The focus is on you):



ATTENTIVE and SUPPORTIVE listening (The focus is on your foster teen):



- **Look for your foster teen's strengths, and see how you can build on them.** Focus on the strengths and resources of your foster teen, rather than being preoccupied with the problems and difficulties they have. How can your foster teen's interests, motivations and abilities be harnessed to solve their problems?
- **Try not to be too personally affected** by your foster teen's behaviour. When your foster teen mentions that you do not understand them, try to see it from the perspective that your foster teen does not feel understood, rather than it being about you.
- **Be patient.** Building trust is a slow process, so it takes time to grow the foster parent-foster teen relationship.
- **Acknowledge your foster teen's perspective,** even if you may not agree with it. This allows your foster teen to feel that their opinion matters to you, which will, in turn, make them more comfortable with sharing their thoughts with you.

Refer to Annex D for a tip sheet on Helping Teens Thrive in a Foster Home.



PUBERTY

Experiencing **changes** in their **bodies** during puberty can cause stress, anxiety and mood swings in teenagers due to their **changing hormone levels**. It is **important for the foster parent** to discuss and share correct information about puberty with your foster teen.

Assure your foster teen that it is alright and **safe** for them to talk to you about this and **encourage** honest and open **conversations** about it. It is ideal for a family member of the **same gender** as your foster teen to initiate the topic. Find suitable ways to provide information about puberty and sex education to foster teens.

Be a source of **constant assurance** for your foster teen while they are in this process of development. Do seek advice from a doctor if you are worried about your foster teen's development.

Besides valuing your support and teaching, educating your foster teen on the process of puberty is great for building the parent-teen bond. Let your teen know it is common to experience the following changes during puberty. If you would like to have information on how to talk to your foster teen about puberty, please refer to Useful Resources on page 104.



SELF-ESTEEM

- **Show respect to your foster teen.** Compliment the good that is exhibited by your foster teen, as this allows him/her to know that they are valued by you. You can affirm him/her for their taste in fashion or music, their admirable characteristics and physical appearance.
- **Remind your foster teen occasionally of his/her unique personality,** as this will help to boost his/her self-esteem.
- **Celebrate and compliment your foster teen's small successes or accomplishments,** to make him/her feel appreciated and valued.





TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Ask to be their friend on social media.

It is a great way to understand parts of their life but it is advisable not to embarrass them by commenting or overreacting to their posts.

Discuss cyber-safety.

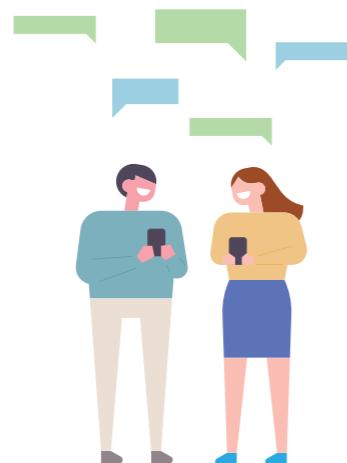
Educate your foster teen on the kind of information they download online. Advise them to stay away from unfamiliar websites and ignore unsolicited messages.

Encourage your foster teen to build real-life friendships.

Ensure that they do not allow online friendships to replace real-life ones.

Protect mealtimes and bedtime.

Strengthen family bonds by restricting the use of technology during meal times and before bed time. If your foster teen's screen time causes their lack of sleep, consider restricting their use of phones and other devices 30 minutes before bedtime. If required, a discussion with your Case Manager can be organised to help your foster child/teen.



PEER PRESSURE AND FRIENDS

Take time to connect and talk with your foster teen. Lend an empathetic ear to your foster teen when they require your attention to help them overcome their anxieties.

The rules that you impose on your foster teen **set the structure for their understanding of the world**, even if they may protest.

Teach relationship skills.

It is essential that you take what your foster teen confides in you about their relationship problems seriously as this is the stage where they require friends as a form of support in their life. You will have to be their pillar of strength and understanding.

Observe and tactfully comment to your foster teen.

Be impartial and fair should you need to talk to your foster teen about the type of friends they are hanging around with.

Help your foster teen practise saying “no”.

Teach them how they can get out of peer pressure situations through visualisation and role-playing.

Help your foster teen learn from their mistakes.

Regardless of the severity of their mistakes, you will need to support your foster teen and help them understand that they need to take responsibility for their actions and move on with life.

Draw from your own experience.

This will help you relate to your foster teen. You were once a teen too!

✓ THRILL-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS

Teenagers are in the midst of **exploring their identities** and are often unsure of how they should behave. They **enjoy experimenting and testing boundaries**, leading to more thrill seeking behaviours. Generally, they are more **impulsive** and are not used to reflecting on their behaviour and its consequences.

Be a Good Role Model for your Foster Teen.

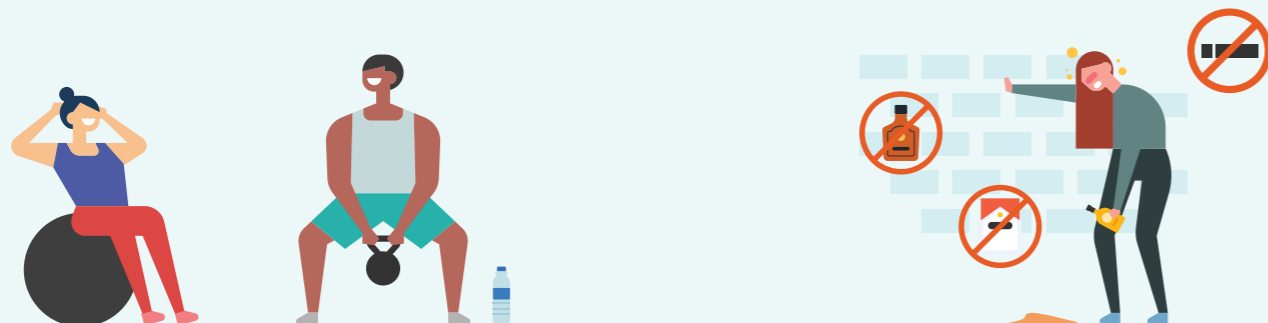
If you smoke but would like to prevent your foster teen from picking up the habit, try to quit smoking even though it may take a lot of determination and a few attempts. Your foster teen may be more encouraged if he/she sees you trying to overcome your smoking habit. If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation, and never drink and drive.

Explain the Dangers and Consequences of Smoking, Alcohol, and Drug Use.

Tell your foster teen about the effects of addiction and withdrawal symptoms, as well as other consequences of these vices.

Teach your Foster Teen to Manage Stress in Healthy Ways.

Help your foster teen get involved in sports, the arts, music, volunteer work and other activities that they may enjoy. This may deter them from finding solace in unhealthy habits such as excessive computer use.



✓ SEX, RELATIONSHIPS AND INFLUENCE FROM OLDER PARTIES

- Your foster teen may have their own ideas about relationships and sex, formed with information from the media or what they hear from their friends. They could also be starting to explore romantic relationships and sex.
- It is important to educate your foster teen about safe touch – let them know it is wrong for adults to touch them inappropriately or for them to engage in sexual activity. Teach your foster teen that they can say no to anyone who touches them inappropriately. Teach them to inform you immediately if they come across such encounters and reassure them that you will always be there to help them.
- Encourage your foster teen to openly communicate with you, including any worries or concerns about their relationships. Stay calm, be open and empathise with what they have to say.
- Be aware of who your foster teen is spending their time with. Look out for clues that indicate something may be troubling them, or that they may be in the company of someone with ill-intentions.

For more information on this topic, please refer to the Useful Resources on page 104.



✓ SCHOOL, HOMEWORK AND STRESS

Check with your foster teen regularly to understand how they are doing in school.

Teach your foster teen time management and how to be focused while studying. For example, encourage your foster teen to come up with their own study schedule. You could also arrange a study space in your home that is distraction-free and quiet.

Communicate actively with your foster teen's teachers, coaches, or the school to have better insight of their progress in school.

Support your foster teen by offering them help with their assignments and studies. You can coach them personally if you are familiar with what they are studying, or can provide them with external tuition.

Encourage your foster teen to relieve stress.

Here's a list of activities that you could do with your foster teen to destress:

- Physical activity such as taking a stroll or doing sports
- Deep breathing
- Stretching
- Drawing and colouring
- Meditation
- Doing anything that your foster teen enjoys!

Refer to Annex E for a tip sheet on Fostering Teens.



✓ PREPARE YOUR FOSTER TEEN FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

As teenagers mature into adulthood, they need to learn how to take care of themselves and live independently. Foster teens may be excited to age out of care at the age of 21; however, they will need lots of preparation and support prior to this.

Foster parents play a crucial role in guiding foster teens to become independent young adults.

For advice and resources on how you can prepare your foster teen for independent living, please see the section on **Leaving Care: For Your Foster Teen Aging Out of Care (page 111)**.



REFLECTION:

Find out about the latest trends among teenagers so you have common topics to talk about with your foster teen. Can you think of some topics you can chat with your foster teen about?

Set aside half an hour a week to check in with your foster teen, find out how he or she is doing, and do something fun together. What would you like to do with your foster teen?

Encourage your foster teen to have aspirations and hobbies. What is your foster teen interested in?

16 Caring for Your Foster Child/Teen with Special Needs

We need foster parents who are willing to support, love and care for children/teens with special needs.

Special needs include the following aspects:

- Physical/Medical (e.g. heart defects, cerebral palsy)
- Sensory (e.g. being blind or deaf)
- Learning/Intellectual (e.g. dyslexia)
- Behavioural (e.g. autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder)

Caring for foster children/teens with special needs requires a high level of commitment.

Foster parents will need to:

- Bring your foster child/teen for regular medical and therapy appointments.
- Learn about your foster child's/teen's medical conditions, needs and treatment.
- Advocate for your foster child's/teen's needs.
- Assist your foster child/teen with daily living and self-care needs.
- Prepare them for independent living by teaching them how to care for themselves.
- Be extremely patient with your foster child/teen as it may be difficult for them to perform everyday tasks.
- Engage them in activities to improve their abilities and well-being.
- Guide and supervise your foster child/teen closely to ensure their safety.
- Keep the house free from clutter, move furniture to the side, etc. to allow for easy access of the wheelchair.



STRATEGIES FOR TAKING CARE OF YOUR FOSTER CHILD/TEEN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Tips for taking care of your foster child/teen with physical/medical special needs

- Be proactive in finding information to understand their condition and speak with your foster child's/teen's doctor/nurse on treatment and care options.
- Learn how to administer emergency medical procedures for your foster child/teen and find out the fastest route to the nearest hospital.
- Use heavy, stable furniture that cannot be toppled easily if your foster child/teen has physical disabilities.
- Provide tools to make it easier for your foster child/teen with motor disabilities to manoeuvre.
- Partake in activities with your foster child/teen that are appropriate for their condition. You may bring them to the museum or parks or work on projects together.

Tips for taking care of your child/teen with sensory special needs

- Help to organise your visually-impaired foster child's/teen's wardrobe for easy dressing, and place the right tools in the same places for easy accessibility. Teach them to take care of themselves.
- Use Braille keyboards and voice and sound from computer programmes to enable your foster child/teen to use the internet and do school work.
- When communicating with your foster child/teen with hearing loss, make sure you get their attention first before proceeding to converse with them properly.
- Speak clearly, slowly and steadily. There is no need to shout or exaggerate your words.



TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOUR FOSTER CHILD/TEEN WITH LEARNING SPECIAL NEEDS

- Ensure your foster child/teen has given you their attention and made eye contact before giving instructions. Speak slowly and clearly.
- Break down large amounts of information into shorter steps for easier understanding.
- Give your foster child/teen time to process the information and carry out your instructions.
- If need be, patiently repeat your instruction to give your foster child/teen more time to understand.
- Positive reinforcement when your foster child/teen has completed a task correctly can go a long way with children and teens with development special needs. Look for ways to reward them for good behaviour, such as giving them their favourite snack or toy.



TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOUR FOSTER CHILD/TEEN WITH BEHAVIOURAL SPECIAL NEEDS

- Pay attention to your child's/teen's hypersensitivities. Learn what triggers your foster child/teen and the appropriate response to calm them down.
- Create a "safe zone" for your foster child/teen to be calm and relaxed in. Including a familiar item like their favourite pillow or soft toy will help.
- Be consistent with your teaching techniques to help reinforce your foster child's/teen's learning across various settings.
- Set up a consistent and highly-structured schedule for your foster child/teen, with regular times for meals, therapy, school and bedtime.



HOW TO COPE WITH PARENTING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Foster parents of special needs children/teens have to deal with a number of challenges which may be stressful and frustrating. Here are some tips that could make fostering a special needs foster child/teen easier for yourself:



HELP AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE

There is a wide range of support services available for you and your foster child/teen with special needs:

- Training for foster parents who foster children/teens with special needs.
- Healthcare professionals who will support your foster child's/teen's medical needs.
- Support groups: Get to know other parents who have foster children with similar conditions so that you can share experience and advice.
- Community groups and voluntary welfare organisations that provide support and counselling.
- Funding for equipment and assistive technology.
- Therapeutic support (e.g. counselling, speech therapy).
- Social workers, psychologists and other professionals at your foster child's/teen's special needs school.

17 Overseas Travel and Passport Application



According to the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) policy, **passport applications and overseas travel require written consent from the foster child's/teen's natural parents.**

Let your Case Manager know if you wish to apply for a passport for your foster child/teen. Do also **clarify which documents you will need** to bring to apply for your foster child's/teen's passport, since the requirements change from time to time.



TRAVELLING OVERSEAS WITH YOUR FOSTER CHILD/TEEN

If you would like to bring your foster child/teen overseas, it is recommended that you let your Case Manager know your travel plans at least **one month in advance**. This is so that your Case Manager can help you obtain consent from your foster child's/teen's natural parents.

If your foster child/teen has a Court Order, the Case Manager will write to court to **obtain the Court's approval** for your foster child's/teen's overseas travel.

You may need to **make respite care arrangements** for your foster child/teen if he/she is unable to travel with you.





FACTORS TO CONSIDER FOR OVERSEAS TRAVEL

Here are some things to consider when you are planning for overseas travel:

Your Foster Child/Teen

- The **stability** of your foster child's/teen's placement.
- Your foster child's/teen's **routine**.
- Your foster child's/teen's **readiness** to travel and **feelings** about it.
- Your foster child's/teen's **health** and **medical needs** (has the doctor declared him/her fit for travel? Does your foster child/teen have sufficient medication for travel?).
- The **appropriateness** and **safety** of your travel plan.

Your Family

- Your family's ability to manage your foster child's **behaviour**.
- Your family's need for **self-care**.

Administrative Details

- **Visa** Requirements
- **Travel insurance**
- Recommended **immunisations** from the Travel Clinic
- **Travel advisories** from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Health



YOUR FOSTER CHILD'S/TEEN'S OVERSEAS TRAVEL WITH THE SCHOOL

If your foster child/teen wishes to travel overseas with the school, the Case Manager has to obtain **the natural parent's consent**. Please **notify the Case Manager immediately** upon receiving information about your foster child's/teen's overseas trips organised by the school.

If the natural parents give consent, please prepare for your foster child's/teen's travel by:

- Attending the school briefing.
- Noting down emergency contact details of the school personnel-in-charge.
- Assisting your foster child/teen with his or her preparation for travel.



18 Emergency/Unusual Circumstances

You may encounter emergency or unusual circumstances during your fostering journey. However, be assured that **support will be available** to help you cope and manage your foster child/teen in these stressful situations.

These situations may be:

- Your foster child/teen did not return home on time or is suspected to have run away.
- You or a significant family member is ill or hospitalised.
- Natural parents show up unannounced at your doorstep.
- Your foster child/teen who is not a citizen/permanent resident is asked to leave Singapore.

If such a situation arises, **call your Case Manager or the Fostering Hotline (9026 6818) immediately** as this may concern the safety of your family and your foster child/teen. If you are with a Fostering Agency, please call your Fostering Agency's hotline number.

If your foster child/teen faces any life-threatening situations, please call 999 and make a police report. Inform your Case Manager immediately after that.

“ You have to make sure that you are committed to take care of them like they are your own children. ”

- Mr Anuar bin Mohamed Said
Foster father since 2012



19 Safe Practices



SCREENING FOSTER FAMILIES

To ensure your foster child's/teen's safety and protection, **we regularly screen all foster families**. During screenings, we will check:

- Whether there are any changes in your household, such as additional members joining your household
- Whether there are any changes in your support network
- Your household income

Please inform your Case Manager immediately if **additional members (e.g. relatives, friends, tenants) join your household**. Please be ready to provide us with their basic particulars during our regular screening exercises.



MAINTAINING APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES WITH FOSTER CHILDREN/TEENS

Establishing healthy boundaries is crucial to fostering. While these boundaries protect your foster child/teen, they also protect you from burnout, crossing safety lines, and allegations of abuse.

It is your responsibility to **set and maintain strict house rules** between your foster child/teen and adults. Pay special attention to boundaries of appropriate conduct regarding sensitive issues such as touching, showering, toileting, dressing and sleeping.

Avoid letting your foster child/teen share beds or sit on your lap, and do not leave a foster father alone to bathe or dress a female foster child.



MAINTAINING APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES WITH NATURAL FAMILIES

In order to ensure your family's and your foster child's/teen's safety and privacy, please **do not share your contact details** (phone number, address) with your foster child's/teen's **natural parents**.



CREATING A CHILD-SAFE HOME ENVIRONMENT

A child-safe environment is **nurturing and warm**. It is also **free from violence, abuse and antisocial activities** that hinder your foster child's/teen's development.

Minimise the risk that your foster child/teen would be harmed by installing safety devices such as locked window grills, having well-arranged and uncluttered furniture, and supervising young children in the bathroom.

“ I wish for other children like me to grow up in a safe home with a loving family too. ”

- “Rachel”
Foster Child



20 Useful Resources

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- General guidelines on child development:
<https://www.kkh.com.sg/HealthPedia/Pages/GrowingUpDevelopment.aspx>
- Foster parents can use this checklist to ensure that your foster child/teen is meeting the milestones for his/her age:
<https://www.healthhub.sg/sites/assets/Assets/Programs/screening/pdf/health-booklet-2014.pdf>

EDUCATION

- Ministry of Education - Primary One Registration
<https://www.moe.gov.sg/admissions/primary-one-registration>
- Early Childhood Development Agency - Choosing a Childcare or Kindergarten
<https://www.ecda.gov.sg/parents/Pages/Default.aspx>
- theAsianparent - Why Your Child Does Not Want to Go to School
<https://sg.theasianparent.com/child-does-not-want-to-go-to-school/>
- Institute of Mental Health - What is School Refusal
https://www.imh.com.sg/uploadedFiles/Clinical_Services/Community-based_Services/REACH/What-is-School-Refusal.pdf



MANAGING CHILD BEHAVIOURS

- KK Women's and Children's Hospital - Understanding Your Child's Behaviour
<https://www.singhealth.com.sg/PatientCare/ConditionsAndTreatments/Pages/Behaviour-Child.aspx>
- Singapore Motherhood - Managing Challenging Behaviour in Toddlers
<https://singaporemotherhood.com/articles/2014/03/managing-challenging-behaviour-in-toddlers/>
- Singapore Motherhood - Help Your Kids Deal With Anger
<https://singaporemotherhood.com/articles/2012/07/help-your-kids-deal-with-anger/>

SPECIAL NEEDS

- SG Enable provides information, referrals, and assistive schemes for caregivers.
www.sgenable.sg
Hotline 1800-8585-885
- AWWA Centre for Caregivers runs support groups and workshops for caregivers of children with autism.
www.awwa.org.sg
Hotline 1800-2992-992
- Autism Association (Singapore)
www.autismlinks.org.sg
- Autism Resource Centre conducts training for caregivers supporting people with autism.
www.autismlinks.org.sg
- Down Syndrome Association
www.downsyndrome-singapore.org

EARLY INTERVENTION CENTRES

- The Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Young Children (EIPIC) offers children with developmental needs a head start in their development of motor, cognitive, language, socialisation and self-help skills.
www.sgenable.sg
- The Integrated Child Care Programme enables children ages 2-6 with learning needs to learn alongside their peers in mainstream childcare centres.
www.sgenable.sg/pages/content.aspx?Path=/for-children/integrated-child-care-programme-iccp/
- Rainbow Centre runs parenting workshops and support groups to help parents cope with their children's developmental issues.
www.rainbowcentre.org.sg
- Society for the Physically Disabled (SPD)
www.spd.org.sg
- Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society Limited provides rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities and training for their caregivers.
www.thkms.org.sg
- Dyslexia Association of Singapore
www.das.org.sg
- Caregiving... The Journey Starts With You: A Caregivers Handbook
www.awwa.org.sg/awwa_content/uploads/2017/08/AWWACaregiverService_CaregiversHandbook_English_V1.pdf
- Society for the Promotion of ADHD Research and Knowledge
www.spark.org.sg



PARENTING TEENAGERS

- Articles for Parenting Teenagers
www.parentingunited.sg/category/parenting/teenagers-12-16/
- How to Recognize Signs of Peer Pressure in Your Child Plus Strategies to Handle It
www.singaporemotherhood.com/articles/2017/02/peer-pressure-children/
- Your Role in Sexuality Education
www.healthhub.sg/live-healthy/1402/role-in-sexuality

TEENAGE HEALTH AND PUBERTY

- Help Your Child Cope with Puberty and Self-Esteem
www.healthhub.sg/live-healthy/957/help-your-child-cope-with-puberty-and-self-esteem
- Technology and Cyber Safety Activity Books for students.
Covers issues such as downloading apps from unofficial platforms, befriending strangers online, and scams that seek to obtain your personal information.
www.csa.gov.sg/gosafeonline/resources/activity-book
- The Bully-Free Programme Singapore website contains advice and resources for parents and children affected by school bullying and cyber-bullying.
www.bullyfree.sg
- Staying Safe on Social Media
<http://www.familiesforlife.sg/discover-an-article/Pages/Staying-Safe-on-Social-Media.aspx>

HELPING YOUR FOSTER TEEN TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

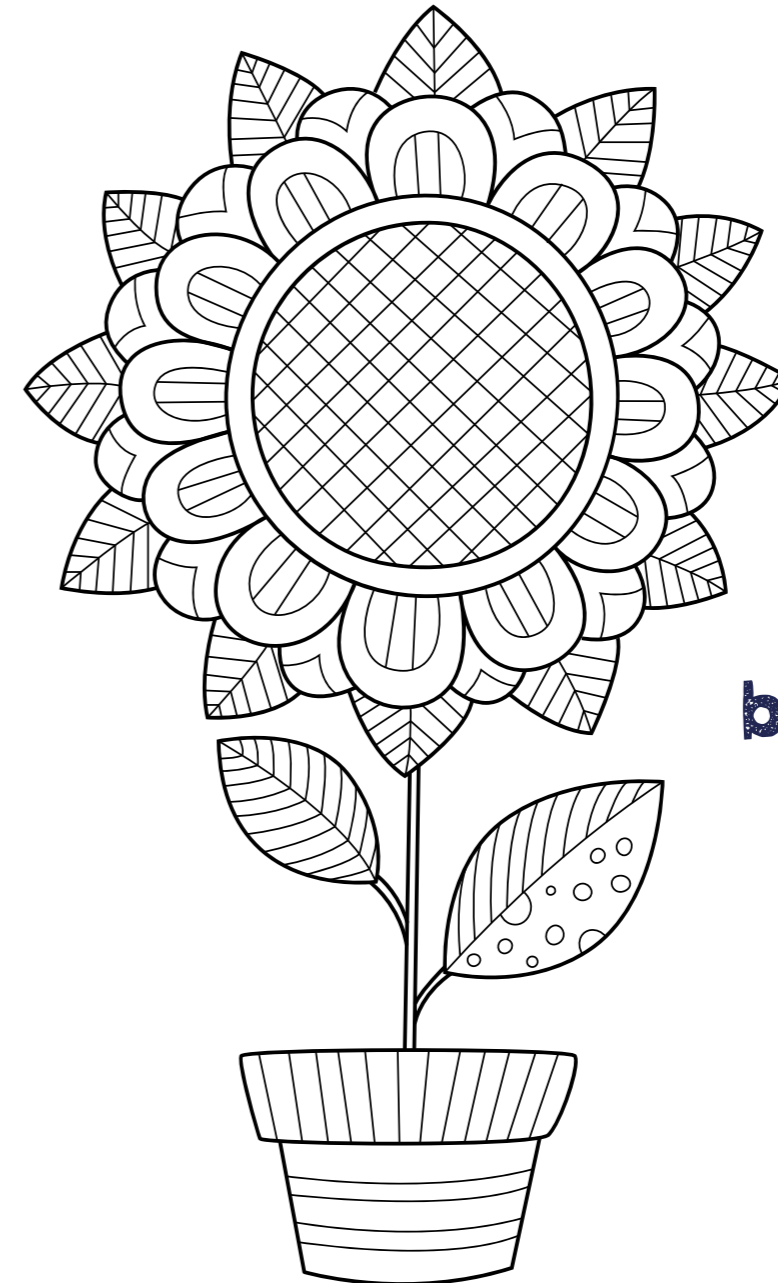
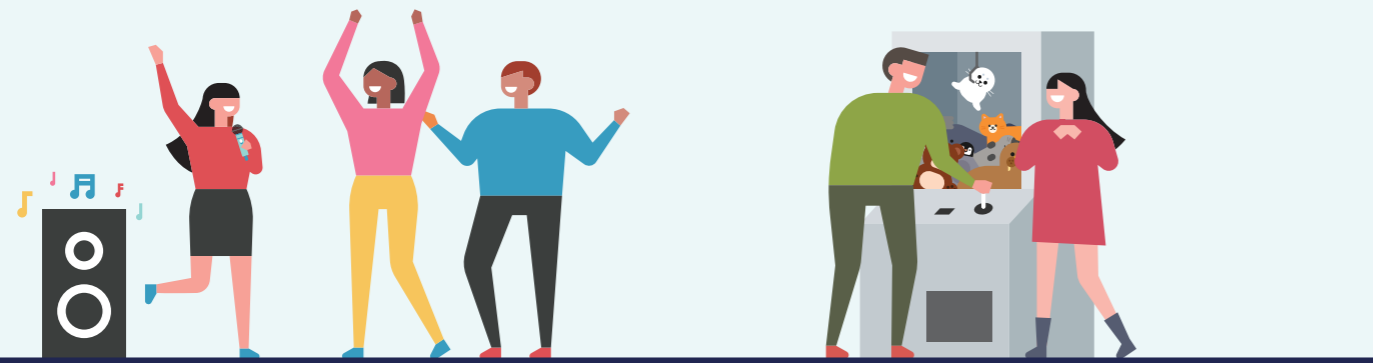
- The Singapore Polytechnic Institute for Financial Literacy offers free financial literacy talks and workshops
<http://finlit.sp.edu.sg>
- Teaching My Kids the Truth About Money
www.family.org.sg/FOTFS/Blog/Parenting/Teaching_My_Kids_the_Truth_About_Money.aspx
- SkillsFuture Education and Career Guidance for Primary to Tertiary Students
www.myskillsfuture.sg/content/portal/en/index.html
- The Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) offers free career counselling services
www.e2i.com.sg

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BONDING WITH YOUR FOSTER TEEN

- How to Befriend Your Teen
www.familiesforlife.sg/discover-an-article/Pages/How-To-Befriend-Your-Teen.aspx
- One-on-One Date Ideas with Your Teen
www.familiesforlife.sg/discover-an-article/Pages/One-on-One-Date-Ideas-with-Your-Teen.aspx
- What to do in Singapore with Teenagers
www.sassymamasg.com/fun-activities-for-teenagers-in-singapore/
- 10 Fun Things for Teenagers to do in Singapore
www.expatliving.sg/10-fun-things-for-teenagers-to-do-in-singapore/



**We rise
by lifting
others**

Leaving Care



21 Your Foster Child's/Teen's

Transition Out of Foster Care

While some foster children/teens require long-term foster care, **most foster children/teens are placed in foster care as a temporary care arrangement.** This means that one day, your foster child/teen will leave your care.

Letting your foster child/teen go is one of the major challenges of foster parenting, especially because of the strong bond you would have developed with your foster child/teen. It is thus important that you **prepare well for this day.**

Your foster child/teen will be discharged from your care under the following circumstances:

- **Reintegration** with natural family/extended family (kinship care).
- **Adoption**
- **Transfer** to another foster home or Voluntary Children's Home.
- **Return** to country of origin.
- **Exceeding** the out-of-home-care **age limit** (when your foster child/teen turns 18 or 21, depending on their needs).





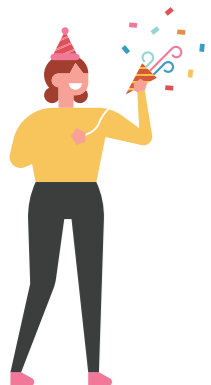
PREPARING YOUR FOSTER CHILD/TEEN TO LEAVE YOUR CARE

Leaving foster care is often a very difficult process for your foster child/teen. Here are some ways to help them better cope with leaving:

- Ensure that your foster child/teen knows the **reasons for leaving your care**. If you decide to give up the care of your foster child/teen, **please do not blame them**. Instead, **take ownership and state the reason**, such as “I am unable to care for you because I cannot provide the care that you need.”
- You can **ask your foster child/teen how they feel** about moving on, such as: How do you feel about going home? What are you looking forward to?
- Tell them it is **okay to feel unsure** about moving on. Your foster child/teen may feel conflicted about leaving your care. While they may feel that they should be happy about returning home, they may also feel sad about leaving your family. Assure them that **such feelings are normal**.
- Share with your foster child/teen the good memories you had with them.
- Encourage your foster child/teen to **voice their questions/thoughts** about moving on.
- Give your foster child/teen a **small present** (e.g. lifebook, souvenir box, photo album) or a **Thank You letter**.
- Organise a **farewell party** for your foster child/teen so that they have a chance to say goodbye to everyone.

REFLECTION:

Although parenting has its challenges, there is also great joy in seeing your children/teens mature. How have you grown from this experience? What are your takeaways?



FOR YOUR FOSTER TEEN AGING OUT OF CARE

How to Prepare Your Foster Teen for Independent Living:

- **Empower your foster teen to make their own decisions.**
It is essential to guide, support, and teach your foster teen to take charge of their own future. Provide your foster teen with frequent opportunities during daily life to make decisions and learn from these consequences - be it positive or negative.
- **Decrease your control and increase your foster teen's responsibilities gradually.**
Set clear boundaries even while allowing your foster teen to make their own choices. Involve them in setting rules together with you, and establish appropriate consequences related to their actions.
- **Share your expectations positively with your foster teen.**
Encourage and suggest positive possibilities of their potential and future, and add forward-looking comments into everyday conversation.
- **Start preparing early.**
Since preparation for adulthood is a long-term process, find ways to gradually introduce independent living skills and important values (e.g. the value of saving) to your foster teen.
- **Teach your foster teen one independent living skill at a time.**
When your foster teen has mastered it, you can move on to developing another skill.





INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS THAT TEENAGERS NEED

Managing Money

- **Teach your foster teen how to manage their money by giving them a monthly or fortnightly allowance.** Allowing your foster teen the freedom to manage their own finances will help them to better understand the value of money, by setting budgets and only spending what they can afford. Come up with a budget with your foster teen. **Refer to Annex G for an activity on Drawing up a Budget with your Foster Teen.**
- **Help your foster teen develop the habit of saving.** Encourage your foster teen to put aside a small amount every week, to purchase whatever they need or want with their own savings.
- **Encourage your foster teen to find a job during the school holidays to earn their own keep.** Getting a job can be your foster teen's first step towards financial independence.

Cooking

Cook a meal with your foster teen! It is a good way to bond and cultivate their cooking skills at the same time.

Household Chores

Teach your foster teen how to do household chores such as how to iron their school uniform, do the laundry, and clean their room. Get them to practise these newly learned skills. For example, they could iron their school uniforms once a week. If you have other children, make sure that they have similar responsibilities.

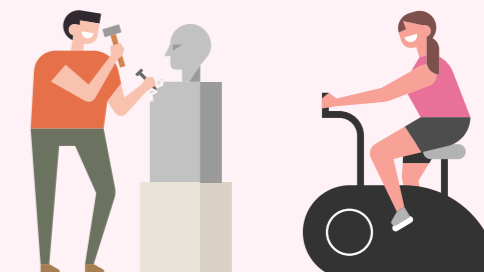


Resilience

Having an ability to bounce back is essential in dealing with life's challenges. Help your foster teen develop a resilient attitude to overcome challenges they might face.

Resilience comes from:

- Having **self-confidence** and the belief that you are competent to handle things yourself. Give your foster teen opportunities to take on responsibilities and exercise leadership. For example, you could ask your foster teen to plan an outing for the family.
- An understanding that **they control the outcomes of their life.** Help your foster teen understand that their choices and actions could have an impact on what happens in their lives.
- Having **social connections.** Encourage your foster teen to join community and co-curricular activities such as sports, volunteering, or the arts. Not only does this help your foster teen develop a sense of belonging and security, it also cultivates their self-confidence and abilities.
- Having **good coping skills.** Encourage your foster teen to relieve stress by doing things they enjoy. See the **School, Homework and Stress** section on page 88 for a list of activities you could do with your foster teen to de-stress.



Career Plans and Goals

- **Start planning for your foster teen's future.**
Ask your foster teen about their aspirations and dreams.
- **Figure out what interests your foster teen.**
Find out what activities and careers interest your foster teen. You may ask them what kind of jobs they like, what kind of working environment they would prefer, and what the minimum education requirements are for the jobs discussed.
- **Explore careers that may be of interest to your foster teen.**
Help your foster teen by getting information online, introducing people to talk to them about their jobs, or find volunteer/part-time jobs that your foster teen may be interested in.
- **Identify your foster teen's skills and personal qualities.**
You can help them identify jobs that are suitable for their strengths and personal qualities. You could also compare their traits to those expected in their preferred occupations.
- **Be involved in your foster teen's course selection.**
Whether your foster teen has a clear career goal in mind or not, assist them in finding out relevant course that will steer them in the right direction. You can discuss this with your Case Manager for more assistance.
- **Encourage your foster teen to keep their career options open.**
Encourage your foster teen to explore more career options should the ones they are interested in not be available or if they change their mind in the future.

Accommodation Issues

- **Reintegration with their natural family.**
For foster teens who will be returning to live with their natural family, you would have facilitated access and helped towards mending their relationship during the duration of the foster placement. Continue to support the reintegration efforts and remind your foster teen that it will not be easy as relationships are a work in progress.
- **Explore suitable types of accommodation.**
Work with your foster teen to explore suitable types of accommodation should they be staying on their own upon aging out of foster care, and explore the pros and cons of each choice.



REFLECTION:

Prepare your foster teen to live independently. Give them the freedom to make decisions and explore the world around them. How can you help your foster teen cultivate good decision making and problem-solving skills? Explore their feelings about moving out and living on their own.



FOR YOUR FAMILY AND REMAINING FOSTER CHILDREN/TEENS

Other members of your family and/or your other foster children/teens would also be affected by your foster child's/teen's departure. Here are some ways you can help your family through this process:

- **Be available** for them.
- Be a **good listener**.
- If your family member speaks to you about the move, **talk openly and honestly** about the move and why it happened.
- Allow your family to **identify and express their feelings** about the move.
- Focus on **positive aspects** of the change.
- **Allow grieving**, and grieve as a family.
- If symptoms of grief are severe or persistent and your family member is not coping with daily activities, **seek professional help**.

REFLECTION:

Saying goodbye to your foster child/teen may make you feel emotional. Take some time to reflect. What emotions are you feeling and why do you feel these emotions? Think about the times you shared with your foster child/teen. What experiences did you enjoy with them? What challenges did you go through with them?



FOR YOURSELF

It is important to take care of yourself so that you can be there for your loved ones. Here are some tips on self-care:

- **Get involved in the planning process** with your Case Manager and be updated on developments.
- **Share information about your foster child/teen** with your Case Manager to make the best plans for their next placement.
- **Establish any future contact** you may have with your foster child/teen after the move with your Case Manager.
- **Discuss your concerns/doubts** about the move with your Case Manager.
- Recount fond memories and **talk to your family, other foster parents and your Case Manager** about your feelings.
- **Make a scrapbook** of memories spent with your foster child/teen and put in one last photo before they leave.
- **Organise a farewell party** for your foster child/teen.
- **Draw your family closer** and “regroup”.
- **Take time to reconcile your feelings.**
- **Reflect on the good times of your fostering journey.**
- Allow yourself **time to grieve**.
- **Have positive thoughts.** Reflect on the good times of your fostering journey.
- **Re-adjust** to your usual routine.

22 Adopting your Foster Child/Teen

Your foster child/teen might be eligible for adoption if **their parents have signed the Statutory Declaration to give up their parental rights or if there are grounds in dispensing their parental rights.**

If you are interested in adopting your foster child/teen, who is eligible for adoption, you may **speak to your Case Manager** or find out more about the adoption process on the Adoption website <https://app.msf.gov.sg/adoption>.

After you have informed your Case Manager that you are interested in adopting your foster child/teen, the following will take place:

- Your CPO and Case Manager will **assess your suitability** to adopt.
- The recommendations will be put up for management's approval.
- If you are found suitable to adopt, you will be advised to attend a pre-adoption meeting. After which, you will have to **engage a lawyer** to complete the legal procedures for adoption.
- Once **the Court passes the Adoption Order**, you will become the foster child's/teen's legal parents.
- The **new birth certificate** for the foster child/teen will be issued by ICA.
- MSF will **discharge the child/teen from foster care** and the fostering allowance will cease.

**AS ADOPTION IS A
LIFELONG COMMITMENT,
DO CONSIDER THE
IMPLICATIONS CAREFULLY
AND DISCUSS ADOPTION WITH
YOUR FAMILY BEFOREHAND.
IF YOUR FAMILY IS NOT
SUPPORTIVE, WE ADVISE
YOU NOT TO PROCEED WITH
ADOPTION.**



23 Your Re-assessment Resignation and Retirement

We will conduct a **re-assessment** on you and your family if there are developments that impact your ability to safely care for your foster child/teen. Such new developments include the following:

- An **allegation of harm** has been made against you.
- An **allegation concerning your standard of care** has been reported (e.g. poor hygiene, insufficient pocket money/food/clothing).
- **Your family circumstances have changed** (e.g. separation, divorce, death, a new addition to the family, poor health/finances, new housing arrangements).

Re-assessment would involve but is not limited to the following:

- Interviews with an assessor
- Home visits
- Submission of an assessment report by the assessor

ASSESSMENT

Your case will be brought up at a Review Panel to decide whether you can resume fostering. Foster parents who are assessed as **unsuitable** to remain on the Fostering Scheme **will be informed** of this and will receive a formal letter.

If you wish to **resign/withdraw** (e.g. due to age and/or health) from the Fostering Scheme, you may **inform your Case Manager verbally or in writing**. Please do not delay in informing your Case Manager of your intention to resign or withdraw from the scheme.

If you are caring for a foster child/ teen, please give at least 2 months for alternative care arrangements to be made, and work closely with your Case Manager to transit your foster child/teen to their next care arrangement.

A **Letter of Acknowledgment** will be issued to you after you have indicated your wish to resign/withdraw from the Fostering Scheme.



24 Useful Resources

HELPING YOUR FOSTER TEEN TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

- The Singapore Polytechnic Institute for Financial Literacy offers free financial literacy talks and workshops
<http://finlit.sp.edu.sg>
- Teaching My Kids the Truth About Money
www.family.org.sg/FOTFS/Blog/Parenting/Teaching_My_Kids_the_Truth_About_Money.aspx
- SkillsFuture Education and Career Guidance for Primary to Tertiary Students
www.myskillsfuture.sg/content/portal/en/index.html
- The Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) offers free career counselling services
www.e2i.com.sg



Annex A

COMING UP WITH HOUSE RULES (ACTIVITY)

Your foster child/teen will invariably have different values and boundaries from you. As such, when your foster child/teen is first placed with you, it is good to have a discussion with him or her.

You can:

- **Highlight common issues that can lead to family conflicts.**

Examples:

- Not completing household chores.
- Playing music loudly.
- Not keeping the room tidy.
- Using their phone for long hours.
- Not wanting to join in family gatherings.

- **Explore how these disagreements will be handled**

One useful problem solving strategy is the **SOLVED** framework:

- | | |
|----------|---|
| S | - State the problem from your point of view. |
| O | - Open the discussion to other points of view. |
| L | - List the possible solutions together. |
| V | - Veto the solutions that are unacceptable. |
| E | - Evaluate the solutions that are left. |
| D | - Do the one most acceptable to everyone. |

- **Work out an agreement on the house rules.**

Get your foster child/teen to contribute to the rules too!



Come up with a few house rules that everyone can agree on. If circumstances change in the future, rules could be altered or more rules could be added.

Here is an example of how the agreement could look like.

Rules	Details of the Agreement	Consequences agreed upon by both parent and foster child/teen
1. Curfew	What is the curfew for weekdays and weekends?	
2. Friends	What are the rules for going out with friends? How about having friends over?	
3. Family Chores	What are your foster child's/teen's responsibilities? When should the chores be done?	
4. Family Activities	Which family activities should your foster child/teen attend?	
5. Telephone and Computer Use	When can your foster child/teen use the telephone and computer? What is the duration of usage?	
6. Dating	What are the rules for dating?	



Annex B

NATURAL AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Natural Consequence

It occurs automatically as a result of an action

(e.g. Tom having to face his teacher the next day and being scolded for not doing his homework, Sally falling and hurting herself after running across the wet floor).

Not preferred when...

- It affects the child's health/safety.
- Child unable to make the link due to delayed consequence.
- Child is too young to make links between misbehaviour and consequence.
- The consequence causes problem to others.

Logical Consequence

Imposed by the caregiver

(e.g. Tom's bike taken away for the day as he rode his bike on the road despite being told not to. Sally disallowed to go out the following weekend as she was two hours late from her set curfew.)

Both types of consequences are effective when done in a calm manner. They are more effective when the child agrees with the set consequences as they are more likely to adhere to the rules. Do ensure that consequences are age and phase appropriate, and are not perceived as threats. Consequence should be issued consistently and not delayed as the child will not be able to make the link.

Adapted from Gutlermez (2012) *Natural and Logical Consequences - How Implementing these leads to better discipline in Children* & Stauffer (n.d.). *A Parent's Guide to Natural and Logical Consequences*.

Annex C

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE

- **Show the foster child that you believe in him.**
Check whether the foster child has shared their information with any other person.

I want to thank you for sharing with me and I am proud of you for opening up.

Can you tell me more about Aunty?

What happened after that?

- **Allow the foster child to speak freely and ask open-ended questions.**

- **Reach out to provide comfort for the foster child.**

It must have been so scary when you were alone in the house. What she did was wrong and you should not have been left alone in the house.

I want you to know that what happened was not right. You are a child.

- **Provide assurance.**

- **Acknowledge your foster child's feelings.**

Allow the foster child to comment on their feelings even when you disagree with their actions and reactions.

- **Review the safety plan and encourage the foster child to talk.**
Remind the foster child of his safety plan, including who he can speak to when the memories or negative feelings return. A supportive way to respond to the foster child is to encourage him to talk when he is ready and let him know that you are willing to listen.
- **Update your Case Manager.**

Annex D

HELPING TEENS THRIVE IN A FOSTER HOME

Caring for foster teenagers is different from foster children. With the growing number of teenagers in foster care, it is important to understand that they are simply just **adults-in-training**. All they need at this stage of development is a life coach, role model and opportunities to develop their potential.

TEENAGERS SAY

- 1 MAKE US FEEL LIKE PART OF THE FAMILY.**
Teenagers do not like to be “singled” out. Fairness is key for children of a similar age-group. If rules are different, create opportunities for the foster teenager to have freedom to access things as birth children.
- 2 HELP US UNDERSTAND YOUR EXPECTATIONS.**
Be clear and firm about house rules, but do not obsess over it. Help the foster teenager to understand why these rules exist. Developmentally, it is normal for them to question “why?”. Encourage such open communication and respond calmly to their queries. Communication must always be clear and honest.
- 3 RESPECT OUR NATURAL FAMILY AND DO NOT HOLD THE PAST AGAINST US.**
Negative remarks about natural parents can cause problems and hinder the growth of the foster teenager. If the foster teenager has acted out, do not bring up the natural family situation or why he entered the system – do not hold their past against them. Issues should be kept between foster parents and natural family, do not drag the foster teenager into it.
- 4 HELP US TO BE INDEPENDENT.**
Teach life-skills and provide opportunities for the foster teenagers to learn independence. Be directly involved in this teaching process – do not rely on professionals. Allow the foster teenager to be a part of this learning process (check on what they are ready to embark on).
- 5 BE A GOOD LISTENER. EVERYONE LIKES TO BE LISTENED TO.**
Unfortunately, teenagers often hold the reputation of limiting their communication with adults. One of the recommended ways of getting your foster teenager to talk is by involving them in shared activities and decision-making processes.
- 6 DO NOT IMPOSE WHO YOU ARE ON US, BUT UNDERSTAND OUR NEEDS AND ENCOURAGE US TO BE OPEN TO SHARING.**
Respect the foster teenager’s beliefs and culture (do not impose your family values and beliefs). Learn about the foster teenager’s background to consider how some of it may have helped them through difficult times. If they show signs of mental health issues, engage professionals for further help.
- 7 SHOW THAT YOU CARE ABOUT FEELINGS, THAT YOU ARE SOMEONE WHO IS NICE, RESPECTFUL AND LOVING.**
Many foster teenagers come from environments where emotion is often expressed in extreme, inaccurate or inappropriate ways. So it is important that you show them you care by being nice, loving and respectful. Be a good role model and they will learn how to express their emotions appropriately.

Adapted from Ramsey County Community Human Services. Permanent Families Recruitment Project (2013)

Annex E

TIPS ON FOSTERING TEENS



Engage Teens & Build Bonds

Bond over weekly meals and common interests.

Build trust by sharing about daily activities with each other.

Involve teens in family activities and gatherings.



Enable Teens To Express Themselves

Include them in the decision-making process so they can learn the consequences of their choices.

Listen to their dreams, aspirations, opinions and worries and help them attain their goals.

Encourage them to express themselves through activities like music, sports and the arts.



Encourage Positive Behaviours

Be a good role model and focus on the positive aspects of life.

Celebrate their achievements and efforts to boost their self-esteem.

Be gentle but firm on house rules and expectations but give them time and space to adjust.



Express Your Care And Concern

Find out about your teen's past experiences so you can understand and provide support accordingly.

Try to see things from their point of view and let them trust that you will be there when they need you.

Annex F

THE IMPORTANCE OF CELEBRATING SMALL SUCCESSES

Ways to celebrate daily successes

- Celebrate successes (especially small ones!) with your foster child/teen.
- This will make your foster child/teen happy and physically recharge them, giving them the motivation to tackle the next mile and meet challenges positively.
- Celebrating together shows your foster child/teen that you support them and encourages them to focus on their accomplishments.

Share your little success with your friend

This friendship bond will help boost your state of mind.

Take time to reward yourself

Reward yourself with something simple like your favourite snack or a chat with a good friend.

Pause and breathe

In between completing tasks, pause to acknowledge what you have done, and realise that no accomplishment is too small.



Annex G

DRAWING UP A BUDGET WITH YOUR FOSTER TEEN (ACTIVITY)

Teach your foster teen how to manage his or her allowance by coming up with a budget together. Come up with a list of items that your foster teen typically spends money on.

Must Have: items that are essential for daily living.

Can Have: items that are nice to have, but are not essential.

No Need to Have: Luxury items that we do not need (e.g. branded clothing).

Your budget plan could look like this.

MY MONTHLY EXPENDITURE

Item	Amount Budgeted	Rating		
		Must Have	Can Have	No Need to Have
Food (daily)				
Food (cafes and restaurants)				
Transport (daily)				
Clothes				
Entertainment				
Savings				
Bills (mobile phone)				
Presents (birthdays)				



MY MONTHLY INCOME

Source of Income	Amount
Pocket money (from foster parents)	
Part-time work	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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University of Oxford Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education (2016).

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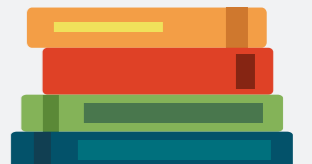
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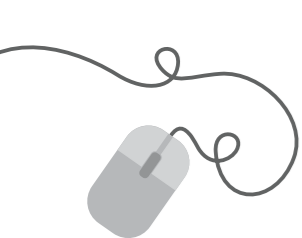
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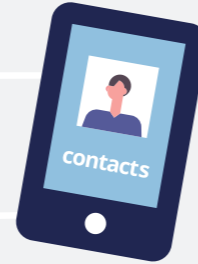
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CONTACT PERSONS

Foster Care Officer (FCO) / Fostering Agency Social Worker:

Child Protection Officer (CPO):



Hotlines (24 Hours) Fostering Service: 9026 6818

Epworth Community Services: 9119 6224

PPIS: 8201 5416

Boys' Town: 9113 7612

The Salvation Army: 8833 8495

Medical Appointment numbers

• Clinic:

• Hospital:

Your foster child's/teen's school:

Your foster child's/teen's school counsellor:

