

# HANDLING ALLEGATIONS AGAINST YOUR RESOURCE HOME



*Developed by*

*The Cumberland KY Foster & Adoptive Parent Training Support Network*

*In collaboration with*

*The Kentucky Department for Community Based Services*

*Out of Home Care & Child Safety Branches*

Our Mission is to work hand and hand with DCBS and community partners to recruit, retain, strengthen and support foster and adoptive families in becoming stable, secure and permanent homes for abused and neglected children.





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### ***Disclaimer***

*This brochure is intended for use as a guide to assist foster/adoptive families in coping with the potential crisis of a home investigation. This document is not intended to supersede or contradict the Cabinet for Health & Family Services policies and procedures. This document may be reproduced solely for nonprofit educational purposes or personal use.*



## HANDLING ALLEGATIONS AGAINST YOUR RESOURCE HOME

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### Handling Allegations

Thank you for taking time to review our booklet on one of the hardest aspects of being a foster/adoptive parent. Experienced parents know that abuse or neglect allegations against foster homes are fairly common. You are not alone. Sometimes allegations are made by an angry child or parent or are simply a misunderstanding. Investigative staff from the Department for Community Based Services have a legal responsibility to thoroughly investigate reports that meet agency criteria. Their mission, as is ours, is to ensure the safety of children.

### Allegation Prevention Strategies:

Every foster and adoptive parent can take steps to keep situations from turning into allegations. Here are some ideas for parents to consider:

- **Know & expand your limits.** If you are not comfortable parenting children with certain challenging backgrounds and behaviors, don't set yourself up for failure by knowingly accepting placements with these needs. Attend training that improves your parenting skills for all types of children.
- **Learn all you can about each child before placement.** The Cabinet is required to inform foster parents of known history of behaviors that indicate a safety risk for placement. Develop your own list of questions to learn about information necessary in your placement decision making. Don't be afraid to ask if there have been any previous abuse allegations in the child's previous placements.
- **Take precautions.** Proactive precautions are important for children who have experienced trauma, especially at the beginning of a placement. Talk with your partner and others in the household about a safety plan that will protect everyone in the home. Stay proactive. Remember to preserve confidentiality of the child's history.
- **Be clear about rules and boundaries.** Caregivers must agree on house rules, boundaries, and consequences. Each child comes from a different culture of parenting, sexuality, sleeping habits, dress style, touch, and more, and needs to learn what is appropriate. As a foster parent you may need to talk about sexuality as one of the house rules. Sound crude? Perhaps, but when approached in a matter of fact way, this house rule can set a very clear boundary most children we work with need.
- **Never use physical discipline.** Per policy, corporal punishment is not an acceptable form of discipline for children in foster care. Don't do it. Further, children with a history of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse often do not differentiate between physical discipline and abuse. Any use of physical punishment can result in an allegation.



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- **Avoid teasing, horseplay, wrestling, and suggestive language.** These are acts of intimacy and intimacy is just what abused children often resist. In addition, the child may receive a different message than you intended during close physical contact.
- **Document sexual acting out in writing.** Send reports to the child's social worker and therapist. Continue to document all incidents as they occur. Keep in mind healthy, developmental stages of body exploration and sexuality during this process.
- **Document behavior patterns and any injuries.** When a child enters your home, consider using a calendar to record your child's daily behavior and any physical marks or injuries and their cause. This documentation may reveal a pattern of behavior related specific triggers or times of the year (like traumaver-saries). Communicate any injuries (even small bruises or scrapes) to your child's worker, consider including photos in communication or documentation.
- **Participate in a support group.** As foster and adoptive parents of children in special needs, we need to share the struggles and joys that are a part of our lives with those who can empathize and support us. Those also experiencing the journey get it.
- **Reserve personal time to reduce stress.** Know your triggers and establish a calming plan. Develop your personal de-escalation tools and model stress reduction techniques for your children. Make plans for a regular time away from the children. Take care of yourself; you are the child's greatest gift.
- **Educate yourself on agency standard of practice (SOP).** SOP (KRS 2.15.1) can be found at <https://manuals-sp-chfs.ky.gov/chaper2/Pages/2-15-1.aspx>.

### Tips to Remember

Remember these tips when faced with allegations:

- **Get the facts.** Make sure the investigator reads the entire report to you and explains how they will be investigating the allegation (i.e. talking to the children at school, referring the child for evaluation, etc).
- **Remain calm.** Take a breath and find your calm. Clearly state your response to the allegation. Avoid being hostile to the worker or panicking to the point that you cannot give clear answers.
- **Document everything.** Keep a journal or file of documentation about every child, this could be a great asset during the interview. Be sure to add to your journal everything that happened during the interview and any information the investigator shared with you. Remember these journals should cover everything from scrapes and bruises to shouting matches.



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- **Talk to the children.** For many children, an investigator coming to the home can be traumatic, not unlike when they were removed from their home of origin. Reassure the children, but do not interfere with the investigation.
- **Be cooperative.** Try to help, not hinder, the investigation. Do not refuse to speak to the investigator and do not deny the investigator access to interviewing the children. Expect that the agency staff will request to interview foster parents in the home separately.
- **Turn to your supports.** Talk to your Foster Parent Mentor, a close foster parent friend, or a member of your local Network team. Mentors and Network members are required to maintain your confidentiality. Avoid sharing your intense feelings during this time on social media in a public forum.
- **Don't stress over the origin of the report.** It does not matter who made the allegations. Kentucky law mandates that referral sources remain confidential.
- **Try not to view the DCBS as opponents.** Remember their job is to take every allegation seriously to ensure the safety of children in out of home care.
- **Learn from experience.** Everything on this journey is a lesson in life. You may be a support for another foster family in the same situation one day.

### The Allegation

*The following is an example of a report involving a foster family.*

A 13 year old girl alleged her 71 year old foster grandpa sexually abused her. After looking into the allegations, investigators discovered the girl was distorting the situation and reenacting a previous abuse situation with her biological grandpa.

The same situation could have occurred with the foster father, mother, or another family member named as the alleged abuser. It's important to educate ourselves and our extended family members and friends about the dynamics of child abuse and how it can affect children, their behavior and their outlook on the world.

### Consequences of the Allegation

Though not substantiated, the charge in the described case became a part of the family's case file, and the stress family members experienced lingered. Many parents describe allegations and the subsequent investigation as a process of loss and grief. Parents lose their sense of safety, self-esteem, and trust in the agency. In some cases, children may be removed—another painful loss for the children and parents.

Even after the completion of the investigation, a parent may feel their reputation is tarnished and unresolved about the situation. The family will need support as they work to resolve issues from the experience.



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### Allegation Survival Strategies

Sometimes, despite a family's best efforts, allegations happen.

Maybe things are going a little too well and Jimmy, a 12 year old with a history of sexual abuse, gets scared. The week after a game of Twister with his foster dad, Jimmy tells his worker the foster dad was touching and pressing his body against his. Jimmy claims it was sexual abuse and soon a referral is accepted and an investigation of the allegation begins.

The foster family is looking at weeks or months of investigation and Jimmy has to move to an emergency shelter. What can the parents do to take care of themselves?

- **Try to stay positive.** Don't let unproven charges damage relationships within your family, with your friends, or your feelings of self worth and dignity. Child protective services is required to investigate all allegations to make certain the child is not being abused. The best thing you can do is cooperate and try to stay as positive as possible.
- **Document everything.** Start a notebook or GoogleDoc recording details of every phone conversation, personal interview, and correspondence related to the allegation. Be prepared to use the documentation to back up your story in court if needed. You have the right to request information on the investigation through the Kentucky Open Records Act. Call 502-564-3834 or visit [chfs.ky.gov/dcbs/dpp](https://chfs.ky.gov/dcbs/dpp) for information. The Cabinet is required to send written notification stating the results of the investigation.
- **Educate yourself.** Read your Foster Parent Handbook. Read the most current standards of practice. Find out what will happen during the investigation, what your rights are, and how you can appeal an investigator's determination. Request training in your region from your local R&C team or Network team.
- **Behave appropriately.** During interviews, be factual and respectful. Avoid emotional language when telling your side of the story. You must try to be objective.
- **Meet with people who are gathering information.** If an investigator asks to meet with you, make time for them. Prepare for the meeting and take notes. Investigations are confidential and you may not be allowed to have someone other than legal counsel with you.
- **Call your Network team.** Contact information for your local team is on page eight of this handbook and can also be found at [www.murraystate.edu/trc](http://www.murraystate.edu/trc). Additionally your Recruitment and Certification staff can assist you with interpretation of standards of practice, but remember they cannot be your primary support during this time, nor sharing details about the process.
- **Communicate with your partner.** Allegations, especially those of sexual abuse, can drive a wedge between partners. Feelings of betrayal and uncertainty are common and if not openly discussed, these questions can pull couples apart when they need each other's support the most.



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- **Know your rights.** Don't be afraid to appeal a substantiation and learn how the appeals process works. If need be, hire legal counsel. You may request a copy of the investigation through the Kentucky Open Records Act. Call 502-564-3834.
- **Be sure to take good care of yourself.** After the investigation is over, ask for help to regain your equilibrium, rebuild, and move forward. Give yourself some time off before bringing a child back into your home or accepting a new placement. Take care of the children still in the home. You have the opportunity to demonstrate strength and resiliency through this difficult situation to your children.

### How the Network Can Help

In addition to educating foster and adoptive families about taking conscious steps to prevent allegations, the Network can be very helpful when a family is going through or has just concluded an allegation investigation. Sometimes, the best help is just being there. To support foster families going through an investigation the Network can:

- **Offer a sympathetic ear.** This is a time when families need the Network. Network members are also foster and adoptive parents and face the same experiences as you. They are here to respectfully listen and help to process your feelings. All conversations are confidential unless a person indicates they are hurting someone, someone is hurting them, or they plan to hurt themselves.
- **Stay neutral.** It is NOT the Network's job to fix the problem or be a therapist. There are many perspectives in a situation and the Network must be objective. Agency bashing helps no one.
- **Provide information.** Network members can talk to foster and adoptive parents about agency policy and procedural information.
- **Suggest resources.** Network members can suggest how families can obtain agency policies concerning allegations or other supports in the community.
- **Share their experiences.** Parents going through an allegation may have an easier time talking to someone who has experienced the same. A call from someone who truly understands the experience can mean so much during this time. Members can also refer the family to the Foster Parent Mentor program if they have not been assigned a Mentor.



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### **Contacting the Network:**

**Lori Dowdy, Coordinator**

**1-877-994-9970**

**ldowdy5@murraystate.edu**

**Regional team contact information is available at**

**[www.murraystate.edu/trc](http://www.murraystate.edu/trc)**

**For immediate Network investigation and allegation support:**

**Text: 502-221-3019**

**Email: [KYFosterAdoptNetwork@gmail.com](mailto:KYFosterAdoptNetwork@gmail.com)**

### **Useful Links**

Standard of Practice

<https://manuals-sp-chfs.ky.gov>

Foster Parent Handbook

<https://manuals-sp-chfs.ky.gov/resources/Documents%20and%20Forms/Kentucky%20Foster%20Parent%20Handbook.pdf>