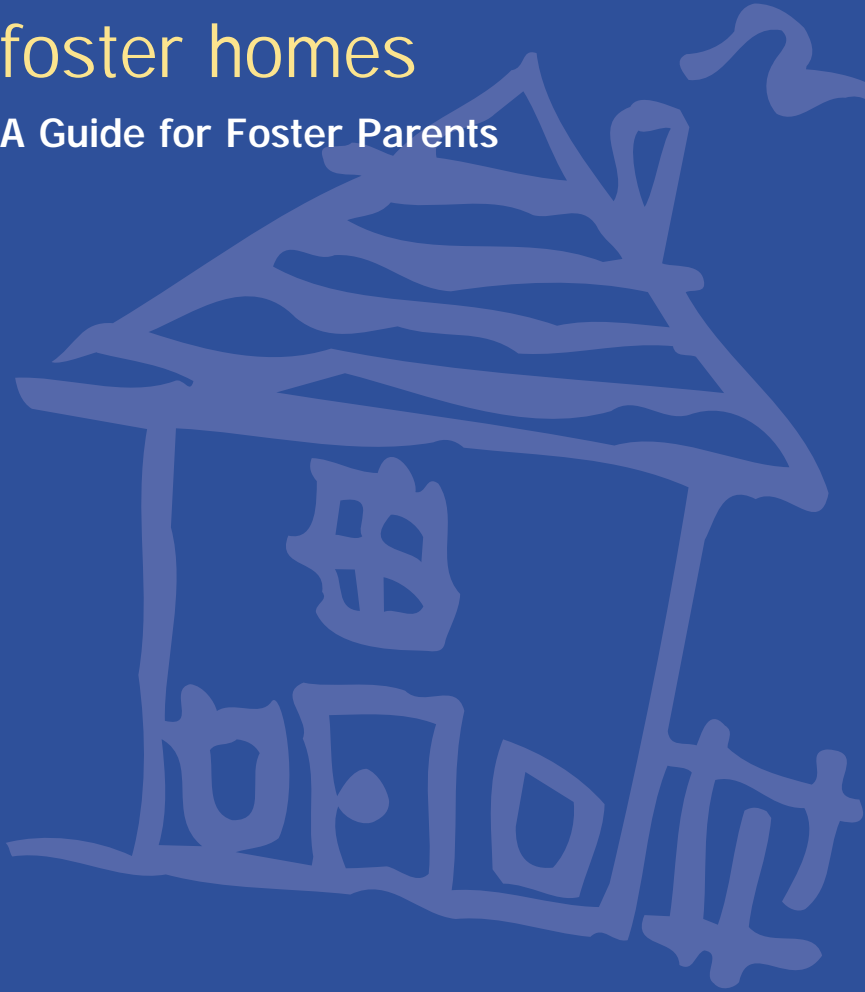


dealing with difficulties in foster homes

A Guide for Foster Parents



Foster Home Protocols

When issues or concerns arise about a child's foster care

As foster parents, you share the ministry's responsibility to protect the safety and well-being of children in care. Carrying out this responsibility in day-to-day life is not always easy. Foster families face a lot of challenges, and sometimes these lead to differences between foster parents and ministry staff.

Most issues can be worked out by talking things over with a social worker. But others cannot. Three special situations require a formal process – called a protocol – that clearly spells out what will happen and when.

The first situation is when the ministry receives a report that a child in care in your home has been abused or neglected. In a case like this, the *Protocol for Investigating Reports of Abuse or Neglect in Foster Homes* is followed.

The second is when someone has a concern about the quality of care a child in your foster home is receiving. In this case, the *Protocol for Reviewing Quality of Care Concerns* is followed.

The third is when you and ministry staff cannot agree on an issue. In this case, the *Protocol for Resolving Issues Between Foster Parents and Ministry Staff* is followed.

This pamphlet tells you what happens in each of these cases. This is only a summary of the three protocols. You can get more detailed information from the booklet *Protocols for Foster Homes*. And, if you still have questions, ask your local ministry staff or foster parent association.



Protocol for Investigating Reports of Abuse or Neglect in Foster Homes

Whenever someone reports a concern about a child, the ministry must look into the report and decide whether an investigation is required. If the ministry concludes that a child may need protection, an investigation must always take place. That doesn't mean the allegation is accepted as true. It just means that the ministry must look into it.

As foster parents, you are entitled to support and guidance throughout the investigation process. Your resource worker will keep you informed, answer your questions, and provide you with information and support. If you choose, you can also have the help of a representative from your local foster parent association. You can also ask for another support person to be involved – perhaps a friend or other foster parent.

You are entitled to be treated with respect, trust, honesty and fairness during the investigation. The investigation protocol is meant to give you every opportunity to be represented, to have your views heard, and to have your concerns about the investigation reviewed.

Protocol for Reviewing Quality of Care Concerns

The ministry can look into the quality of care a child is receiving in your foster home where the child's safety is not in question. This is called a quality of care review.

There are three situations that can lead to a quality of care review. The first is when someone feels that you may not be giving the child the care that is expected in foster homes. The second is when someone has made a report to the ministry but the ministry has decided not to investigate. In these cases,

ministry workers will want to make sure with you that there are no problems remaining. The third case is where the Office of the Director of Child Protection asks ministry workers to check that everything is running well in your foster home. This would usually happen if there has been an incident or reportable circumstance involving a child in your care.

In any of these cases, the workers involved with your home will follow the Protocol for Resolving Quality of Care Reviews in Foster Homes. Your resource worker will help you understand the quality of care review and will provide you with any information, support, and assistance you need.

Protocol for Resolving Issues

It may happen that you and ministry staff can't agree on an issue. For situations where this happens, the protocol for resolving issues sets out a formal process for sorting things out.

This protocol can be used to work out any problems between you and the workers involved with your home as long as there is no question about the safety of any child in your home. It might be used, for example, if you had a difference of opinion with a worker over services that you expected to receive or that the ministry expected of you. If your disagreement is with your own resource worker, another resource worker will be assigned to provide support and assistance throughout the process.

If you feel you have been treated unfairly, you can ask the Ombudsman to look into your case at any time.



Protocol for Investigating Reports of Abuse or Neglect in Foster Homes

Assessment *Within 24 hours*

First, the child protection manager for your area will consider the information in the report and decide whether an investigation is required. This will happen within 24 hours of the report.

The manager will send you the decision by registered letter. Even if the manager decides not to investigate, workers for your foster home and for the child will go over the report to see whether there are any other concerns about the child's care that need to be worked out. If this happens, your resource worker will let you know immediately.

Investigation

Within 5 days of the report

If the ministry decides to conduct an investigation, your resource worker will phone you immediately to let you know. Your resource worker will tell you how you can get help from the BCFFPA and will offer to contact them for you. If you decide you would like a BCFFPA support worker to be involved, you will have to provide the worker with a written confirmation of this on the same day.

The ministry will ask a child protection worker to do the investigation. This worker, along with your resource worker, will meet with you as soon as possible to tell you about the report and make sure you understand how the investigation works.

Throughout the investigation your resource worker will give you any support or information you need, and will listen to your concerns.

The investigating worker will start investigating within 5 days of the report. This worker will check to make sure the child is safe in your home and may decide to move the child from your home.

The investigating worker will interview you, as well as the child, and anyone else who may have helpful information. They will gather any other information needed and then submit a report to the protection manager. The worker will meet with you at least every two weeks while the investigation is being carried out.

Decision

The protection manager and other managers involved with your home and the child will decide what happens next. They will decide about the placement of the child and other children in care in your home. The manager responsible for your foster home will talk with you about how any problems in your foster home can be resolved. After considering all the information, this manager will decide about the use of your home in the future.

Notification *Within 30 days of the start of the investigation*

The ministry will send you its decision by letter within 30 days of starting the investigation. Your resource worker and the investigating worker will meet with you to talk over this decision. They will explain to you what will happen next and will tell you what you should do if you feel the decision should be reviewed.

Review *Within 30 days of your request*

If you feel the investigation decision was unfair, you can ask the Office of the Director of Child Protection to review the investigation. You must ask for this review within 7 days of receiving the investigation decision. The Director will review the information and send you a decision within 30 days of your request.

If you feel you have been treated unfairly, you can ask the Ombudsman to look into your case at any time (1-800-567-3247).

Protocol for Reviewing Quality of Care Concerns

Assessment *Within 72 hours*

First, your resource worker and the child's worker will consider the concern and decide whether a quality of care review is needed. They will do this within 72 hours of learning about the concern, and will let you know as soon as possible. Your resource worker will also tell you how you can get help from your foster parent association and will give you any help, support or information you need.

Quality of care review

Your resource worker and the child's worker will meet with you to find out your views of the concern and your suggestions on how to resolve any problems. The workers will also meet with the child. From these meetings and other information they have, they will put together a plan for how to resolve any issues about the child's care in your home.

Decision

The workers involved with your home and with the child will decide on a final plan. This plan will state whether any action is needed, who will carry it out, and when each action will take place.

Meeting to discuss the decision

Within 30 days of the start of the review
Your resource worker and the child's worker will meet with you to let you know the outcome of the quality of care review within 30 days of starting the review. They will discuss the plan with you and talk over any unresolved issues. You can bring a representative from the foster parent association to the meeting or another support person, or both people if you want.

Resolving disagreements

Within 7 days
If you feel the quality of care review was unfair, you can ask for a meeting with the manager responsible for your foster home. You must make your request within 7 days of the meeting to discuss the quality of care review. The manager for your foster home will then follow the third protocol – the Protocol for Resolving Issues, which is described on the next page. You can also ask the Ombudsman to look into your case at any time (1-800-567-3247).



Protocol for Resolving Issues

Local meeting

Either you or a worker can call a meeting to discuss the matter and try to come up with a solution that everyone can agree to. Your resource worker will arrange the meeting, which will take place within 10 days.

The meeting will include you, your resource worker and anyone else involved with the issue. You can ask for a BCFFPA support worker or other support person (or both) to attend the meeting with you. The meeting is meant to give everyone a chance to go over the issue and try to find a workable solution.

If you reach an agreement at the meeting, your resource worker will send you a copy of the plan for resolving the issue, within 7 days of the meeting. If the meeting doesn't end with an agreement, your resource worker will explain what other possibilities are available to resolve the issue.

Meeting with the manager for your foster home

If you are dissatisfied with the way the issue stands after the first meeting, you can ask for a meeting with the ministry manager who is responsible for your foster home. Your resource worker will let you know how to get help from the BCFFPA and will provide you with any information, help or support you need.

This manager will hold a meeting with you, any workers involved, any support persons you choose, and anyone else involved with the issue. The purpose of the meeting is to give everyone the chance to discuss the issue and to try to reach a solution. The manager will send you the results of the meeting within 7 days. The manager will also send you the name of another ministry manager who you can contact if you are unhappy with the way things stand.

Resolution by a non-involved manager

Within 30 days of the request

If you are not satisfied with the results of the meeting with the manager for your foster home, you may contact the ministry manager whose name you were given and ask this person to resolve the issue. This manager will be someone who is not involved with your foster home. You must send a written request for this person to become involved within 5 days of your meeting with the manager for your home. You may arrange for support from the BCFFPA.

Within 7 days of your request, the non-involved manager will contact you to set up a meeting between you and any others involved with the issue. The manager will listen to the concerns and suggestions of everyone at the meeting and will gather any other information needed about the issue. The non-involved manager will let you know by letter what decision has been reached. You will receive this information within 30 days of asking the non-involved manager to become involved.

Review by the Office of the Director of Child Protection

Within 30 days of the request

If the issue has still not been resolved, you may ask the Office of the Director of Child Protection to review the issue. If you need support during the review, contact your local foster parent association.

The Office of the Director of Child Protection will complete a review of the unresolved issue and will notify you of the results in writing within 30 days of your request.

Some Questions & Answers About Investigations

Will I be investigated any time someone contacts the ministry about a child in my home?

The ministry looks carefully at any concern about a child in care. But it doesn't always investigate. Many concerns can be worked out without an investigation. However, if the ministry believes that a child may not be safe, it will always investigate to find out if the concern is real.

What kind of reports get investigated?

If the ministry believes a child has been harmed, or might be harmed, in any way, it will always investigate. This includes any kind of physical, sexual or emotional harm. It also includes any case where a child needs health care or is left alone or isn't getting enough supervision to be safe.

Who can make a report?

Anyone can contact the ministry about a child in care. A report might come from a neighbour, relative, or friend of yours or the child's. A ministry worker can also report a concern about a child in care in your home.

What if the report isn't true?

The ministry will first of all try to find out if the report is true before starting an investigation. During an investigation, you will have the chance to tell your side of the story and to add any information about the report that you think the ministry should know. If the ministry makes a decision that you think is unfair, you can ask the Office of the Director of Child Protection to review the investigation.

Who represents foster parents?

If you want help during the investigation, your local foster parent association can arrange for a support person to help you. The support person can answer your questions, attend any interviews with you, and give you information about the investigation. You can ask another support person to be involved instead of the BCFFPA support person or as well as that person. You can also hire a lawyer to represent you. Your resource worker will also give you support and information and will keep you informed throughout the investigation.

What happens to our maintenance payments if a child is moved?

If the ministry decides to move a child from your foster home while the investigation is going on, you will keep receiving payment for up to 45 days. Your payments will end sooner if the decision not to return the child to your care is made before the 45 days are up.

How long does the whole process take?

The investigation is completed within 30 days from the time it starts until you are notified by letter about the ministry's decision. You then have 7 days to ask for a review of the investigation. This review is also completed within 30 days.

BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations
(604) 466-7487 or 1-800-663-9999

Local Foster Parent Association

Resource Worker

name: _____

phone: _____

Resource Supervisor

name: _____

phone: _____

Resource Manager

name: _____

phone: _____