



False Allegations of Abuse and Neglect Against Foster and Adoptive Parents: Statement of Position

April 2016

BACKGROUND

The Coalition has a network of 70 foster and adoptive parent groups throughout New York State. The purpose of this statement is to address the problem of false and sometimes frequent child abuse or neglect allegations against adoptive and foster families. The problem exists in New York and throughout the country. Under no circumstances do we condone child abuse or neglect in any family. However, we recognize there are circumstances which make some adoptive and foster families especially vulnerable to reports of abuse and neglect and susceptible to misjudgments.

OUR POSITION

Children who have experienced abuse or neglect as well as the uncertainties and insecurities of years of foster care, often with multiple moves, can behave in ways that are not typical for children of their age. Many children have learned maladaptive or anti-social coping behaviors. Such children, due to their histories, typically behave in ways which jeopardize the security and stability of the families diligently striving to undo some of the damage of the past and to help the children develop more appropriate and socially acceptable behaviors.

Children may lie and play on the responses of other adults who do not view their behaviors in the context of the children's prior experiences. Some children deliberately hurt those who offer help and try to destroy close relationships. After a sequence of adult rejections, they cannot accept that others care about or love them. It is not uncommon for the children themselves to make false reports of abuse/neglect in an effort to control adult behavior or to deal with fears of close relationships.

The parents of children in foster care and children who have been adopted from foster care may have also experienced trauma and dysfunction. This, combined with anger at the child welfare system, a lack of control and concern about the system or foster parent wanting to take their child away from them may in some cases lead parents to make false accusations.

Adoptive and foster parents of children with histories of trauma are often subjected to community scrutiny and suspicion that birth families do not experience. Adoptive and foster families are sometimes highly visible in their communities due to their size or composition. Many people do not understand why someone would choose to parent older children, large numbers of children, children with handicapping conditions or negative histories. Hence, they are suspicious of adoptive and foster parents' motives.

Agency standards for investigations of alleged child abuse or neglect are not uniform in practice nor necessarily of high quality. Protective services workers may be untrained or inexperienced. Workers may not be familiar with the complexities of the pathologies displayed by the children and the stresses

they bring to family living. The child's psychological, medical, and educational records may not be considered in an investigation. Appropriate child management techniques and therapeutic interventions may be viewed out of context by those not familiar with their purposes. Unsubstantiated charges can go unchallenged, and New York's evidentiary standard in child abuse and neglect investigations of "some credible evidence" can result in overly subjective decisions.

CONCLUSION

Due to these factors, adoptive and foster parents can be unfairly targeted and unduly stressed. Instead of receiving support and assistance from the community, they may be forced to expend their energies on defending themselves rather than getting on with their parenting job. This can have the unfortunate effect of having committed foster parents leave the system and, unchecked, may impede recruitment of foster parents. Adoptive and foster parents join with all parents in seeking acceptance and support from their communities. We share a commitment to our children and a belief in the value of family life. Above all, we seek the health and well-being of all of our children. Therefore, we support the following:

- Continued efforts to identify child abusers and neglectors to assure that all children are safe and that their parents provide nurturing environments.
- Increased preventive, corrective, and rehabilitative services. All parents must have continuous opportunities to learn about and improve parenting skills. Community agencies must provide on-going and widely publicized programs.
- Provision of on-going support and educational services to parents adopting or providing foster care for children with special needs. We encourage Social Services Departments to use Preventive Services monies and resources in order to prevent the disruption of families with special needs children.
- Higher standards for the selection of protective services workers and increased training requirements. Workers must be required to include in their investigations all historical information on the child as well as testimony from knowledgeable therapists, educators, and medical resources.
- Appropriate legislation and/or regulations to assure the above.

QUESTIONS OR FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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