

Foster Parent Training in America

“...authentic pride flows from real accomplishments, like raising a difficult child, starting a company or rebuilding an engine.”

— *The New York Times, When All You Have Left is Your Pride, April 7, 2009*

There are hundreds of thousands of foster parents in America taking care of the 510,000 children in foster care. To ensure the safety and well-being of children during their time in foster care, the foster parents, who volunteer to care for them while they are separated from their birth families, are screened during the licensing process. They are also offered trainings as required by federal law: “...before a child in foster care under the responsibility of the State is placed with prospective foster parents, the prospective foster parents will be prepared adequately with the appropriate knowledge and skills to provide for the needs of the child, and that such preparation will be continued, as necessary, after the placement of the child,” according to the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999.

States have made their own laws and policies with regard to foster parent training reflecting their interpretation of the federal mandate. However, in general, foster parent training falls into two categories: preservice programs such as Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting, or MAPP, or Parent Resource for Information, Development and Education, or PRIDE, which focus primarily on helping prospective families evaluate whether foster parenting is appropriate for them. Many people are misinformed about the foster care system and preservice training gives them

information to decide whether they want to become foster parents. During this time, prospective parents learn the basic requirements, such as the amount of space they need to have for a child in their home, and are provided the opportunity to reflect on why they want to become foster parents and evaluate whether their motivations are consistent with the needs of the children in foster care. And equally important, preservice training allows agencies to get to know the prospective families better and decide if the families have the appropriate resources, attitude and ability to care for children who have been abused or neglected.

The second type of training is called “in-service” and refers to the ongoing training that foster parents get after they are licensed and when they are caring for children. The requirements for in-service training vary widely across the states. Training varies in: the number of required hours; how it is provided — in person or by video, for example — and by whom; and the content. The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning has compiled information about how different states approach in-service training and this article will present the various approaches here.

MANDATORY TRAINING HOURS: States vary from no required hours in Hawaii, U.S. Virgin

Islands, Rhode Island, Virginia and Wisconsin to 20 required hours annually in Colorado, Ohio and Texas for a basic foster parent license. Additional hours are often required for therapeutic foster care.

SOURCE OF TRAINING: Many states offer a variety of possible sources for training such as Alaska, where all trainings are offered via Web-based, on site, self-study packet, video or audio and some trainings are available in one of the Native languages. Iowa’s training requirements may be met through a variety of modalities including group training, individual training, videos, tapes and books. Most of the training opportunities are provided by the Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association, including support groups and an annual conference. Some states, such as New Hampshire, contract with a university to provide training. Others, such as Montana require simply that the training must be provided or approved by the Department of Public Health and Human Services.

CONTENT OF TRAINING: States’ policies generally fall into two categories with regard to training content. They either provide generalized training, as Tennessee does for the first year: three hours each on discipline, sexual abuse, cultural competency and work with birth parents; two hours on education; and one elective hour. Texas’ required training includes first aid and CPR, psychotropic medication, behavior management and AIDs. Or states’ policies require that the training should be tailored to the needs of the family and child. For example, Ohio requires that continuing training be based on a written individual training needs assessment and

Mandatory Training Hours

Most states require a minimum number of in-service training hours annually, but the range of mandatory hours is quite large. Hours given are only for basic foster care; many states have additional requirements for therapeutic foster parents. Many states describe requirements over the course of the licensing period, often two years; in those cases the total time has been divided evenly for an “annual” requirement.

* **Alaska:** 15 hours/two parent household; 10 hours for a single parent household.

* **Colorado:** In the first year there must be 27 hours of core/certification training. Of that, 12 hours is called Core Foster Parent training. The additional 15 hours must be completed within three to four months of a child’s placement. The training must focus on the areas of competency needed to meet the child’s needs. In addition, they must have CPR/first aid prior to child’s placement, in addition to the 27 hours. They also must complete 20 hours of ongoing training. By the time of annual recertification they will have received about 55 hours. Thereafter, they must get 20 hours of annual training.

* **Illinois:** 16 hours over a four-year period.

* **Maine:** 24 hours over two years.

* **Missouri:** 20 hours every two years for “traditional” foster/kinship parents; 30 hours every two years for “professional” foster/kinship parents; and 32 hours every two years for “career” foster parents.

* **New Jersey:** Seven hours annually or 21 hours over the three-year licensing cycle for “primary” foster parent five hours annually or 15 hours over the three-year licensing cycle for “secondary” foster parent.

* **New York:** Six hours annually for foster parents caring for children designated special or exceptional. Some foster parents caring for special and exceptional children may be designated as “therapeutic foster boarding homes,” while others may not.

* **Ohio:** 40 hours over a two-year certification period. A foster caregiver certified to operate a pre-adoptive infant foster home shall complete a minimum of 24 hours of continuing training during each certification period.

* **Texas:** Up to 10 hours of annual training may be carried over to the next year.

* **Rhode Island:** The state does not have any in-service training requirement for foster parents. Some contract agencies do require in-service for the families who work for them.

* **Vermont:** Resource caregivers are required to attend 40 hours of training in two years to move from one level of reimbursement to the next level. The 40 hours of training can be a combination of hours completed by caregivers in the household. After four years of experience and 80 hours of training, 10 hours of training a year is required to maintain the current level of reimbursement.

Required Annual Hours	States
None	Hawaii, U.S. Virgin Islands, Rhode Island*, Virginia, Wisconsin
4	Illinois*, Nevada
5	Delaware (beginning the second year; see Content of Training below for first year)
6	Arizona, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan (12 more than the first two years), Mississippi, Pennsylvania, South Dakota
8	California, Florida, New Hampshire
9	Connecticut (45 hours in the first 18 months)
10	Idaho, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Mexico, North Carolina,
12	Maine*, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Utah, Washington (36 hours over three years), West Virginia
14	South Carolina (28 hours over two years)
15	Alabama, Alaska*, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Montana, Oregon (30 hours over two years) Tennessee, D.C.
16	Kansas, Wyoming
20	Colorado*, Ohio*, Texas*
Other	*Missouri, *New Jersey, *Vermont
# of hours not specified	New York*
* Please see references	

Information reprinted with permission from the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work, which can be found at <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/policy-issues/Foster-Parent-In-Service-Training.pdf>.

continuing training plan. Kentucky provides training in areas targeted by the social worker and the foster parent.

From the above, it is clear that states' approaches to foster parent training vary widely. So how does the federal government ensure that states are complying with the law and that foster parents have the appropriate knowledge and skills to provide for the needs of the children in their care? One relatively new approach has been the Child and Family Service Reviews, the "report card" that the federal government completes for each state with regard to foster care and adoption. In the Child and Family Service Reviews, states' training efforts are given marks of "strength," "need improvement" or "no data was available." Marks are given based on stakeholder interviews during on-site reviews as most states don't track foster parent training offerings, compliance or evaluate effectiveness of the training. Thirty-eight states, or 73 percent, were rated as a Strength in the "provision of training for caregivers and adoptive parents that addresses the necessary skills and knowl-

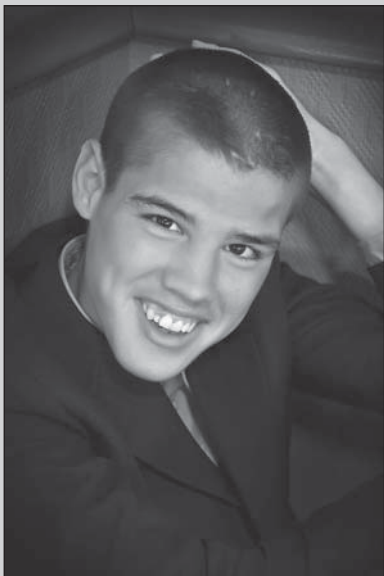
edge" in the first round of reviews. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions as to best practice standards for foster parent training as "the high marks for training . . . are supported by very little data." This is stated in the article, "Part II in a Series: Foster Parent Training: What the CFS Reviews Do and Don't Tell Us" by B. Grimm that was published in the "Youth Law News." Hopefully, the current round of reviews will provide more information.

Prospective parents choose to foster because they find pleasure in parenting and they want to improve a child's life. Appropriate training will help retain foster parents and enable them to do a better job for the children in their care. A large study of 539 foster parents designed to find out what makes foster parents feel satisfied and influences their decision to continue to foster found improved training to be the greatest training need. The authors suggested a focus on "better preparation of foster parents to deal with increasingly more difficult behaviors . . . and an infrastructure of support for and between foster parents," it states in the article,

"Predictors of Foster Parents' Satisfaction and Intent to Continue to Foster" by R. Denby, N. Rindfleisch, and G. Bean. But it isn't necessary to look to research when one can use common sense: any professional needs training to feel competent. And foster parents are professional parents. ❁

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(kids in waiting)



Charlie, 18, is known for his willingness to please and his enthusiastic personality. Charlie enjoys exploring new places and meeting new people. Going out to eat is a pleasure for Charlie, and shopping is another pastime that brings him joy. Sweet and kind, he loves to be in quiet settings and drawing is top on his list. Playing board games, working on puzzles, watching Disney movies and going on nature walks are enjoyable for him. This budding artist dreams of finding a forever family and showing them what living is all about. In eleventh grade, Charlie is a favorite with his teachers. He is well-spoken, engaging and interacts nicely with adults. He benefits from an Individual Educational Plan, and speech therapy, as well as counseling, which will need to continue after placement. It is not expected that he will live independently as an adult, but he can have a great life.

Charlie has a grandmother with whom he remains in contact. His caseworker prefers a family with no other children because of his need for less stimulation; but all family types will be considered. The adoptive family would need to participate in a transitional plan prior to placement. Financial assistance is available for adoption-related services. For Colorado children, both homestudied and non-homestudied Colorado families are encouraged to inquire; only homestudied families from other states should do so. For more information, contact The Adoption Exchange at (800) 451-5246. Child ID 5070