

# **HANDLING ALLEGATIONS AGAINST YOUR RESOURCE HOME**

**Developed by  
The Lake Cumberland Foster and Adoptive Parent Training Support Network**



**In collaboration with The Kentucky Department for Community Based  
Services Out of Home Care and Child Safety Branches**

**Our Mission:**

To work hand in 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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**KY FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT TRAINING SUPPORT NETWORK**

**1-877-70HEART**

## Handling Allegations Against Your Resource Home

Congratulations on taking the time to review our booklet on one of the hardest aspects of being a resource parent. Experienced parents know that abuse or neglect allegations against foster homes are fairly commonplace. You are not alone. Sometimes the 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 insure 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 your limits.** If you are not comfortable parenting children with certain challenging backgrounds and behaviors, don't set yourself up by bringing such children into your home. 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 the Resource Parent of any known history of any behaviors of the child that indicate a safety risk for placement. Refer to "Placement in a DCBS Resource Home" on page 48 of the Resource Parent Handbook for more information. Link to the handbook at <http://chfs.ky.gov/dcbs/dpp/>. Develop your own list of questions that are important to you. You may ask if there have been any abuse allegations.
- **Take precautions.** Proactive precautions are very important for children who have been sexually abused, especially at the beginning of the 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 children's histories.
- **Be crystal clear about rules for dress, privacy, touching, etc.** Caregivers must agree on house rules, boundaries, and consequences. Each child comes from a different culture of parenting, sexuality, sleeping habits, dress, 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 said in a matter-of-fact way, this house rule can set a very clear boundary that most children we work with really need.
- **Never use physical discipline.** Corporal punishment is not allowed in foster care, but some folks think that once the kids are adopted, physical discipline is OK. Don't do it. Children with a history of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse often misinterpret physical discipline, and an allegation is possible. Physical discipline can also undermine attachment.

- **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 get a different message than you intend during the close physical contact involved.
- **Document sexual acting out in writing.** Send reports to the child's social worker and therapist. Then, if another incident comes to light, the worker and therapist can see that there might be a pattern to the child's acting out that perhaps relates to past experiences.
- **Document behavior patterns.** When a child enters your home, use a calendar to record changes in the child's behavior; inappropriate words or actions during birth parent visits; the child's behavior following visits; the cause of scratches, bruises or other injuries; and any patterns of behavior that seem to follow specific events or times of the year (like anniversaries of certain past events).
- **Participate in a support group.** As foster and adoptive parents of children with 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. We need folks who can laugh and cry with us and really understand foster and adoptive parents' journey.
- **Reserve personal time to reduce stress.** Know what really pushes your buttons, and establish a calming plan. Post 20 calming tips on your refrigerator and model stress-reduction techniques for your children. Then, make plans for a weekly – yes, weekly – time away from the children. Take care of yourself; you are the child's greatest gift!
- **Educate yourself on agency standards of practice (SOPs).** The "Specialized Investigations Process Overview" begins on page 42 of the Resource Parent Handbook. The CHFS web site at <http://chfs.ky.gov> contains further SOP on Intake and Investigations.

## 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 allegations. (i.e. talking to the children at school, making collateral contacts, referring the child for an evaluation.)
- **Remain calm** and clearly state your response to the allegations. Do not become hostile or so distressed that you cannot give clear answers.
- **Document everything.** You should be keeping a journal on every child and 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 shares with you. (Remember, these journals should cover everything from bumps and bruises to shouting matches.)

- **Talk to the children.** For many children, an investigator coming to the home can be a traumatic experience, not unlike the first time they were removed from their birth home. 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 in interviewing the children. Expect that the agency staff will request to interview resource parents separately.
- **Turn to your supports.** Talk to your mentor, a close foster parent friend or a member of the Foster and Adoptive Parent Training Support Network, but do not advertise the investigation. Keep it off the “grapevine.”
- **Do not concern yourself with the origin of the report.** It does not matter who made the allegations. Kentucky law mandates that referral sources remain confidential.
- **Do not view DCBS as the bad guys.** Try to remember that if you knew a child was being abused and you called in a report. You would not want the agency to overlook your concerns simply because it is a foster home.
- **Learn from experience.** Everything on this journey is a lesson in life. You may be the mentor or support system for another foster home in the same situation someday.

## The Allegation

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

A 13-year-old girl alleged that her 71-year-old foster grandfather had sexually abused her. The grandfather had a heart condition, and the reports of the allegation nearly killed him. After looking into the charges, investigators discovered that the girl was distorting the situation and reenacting a previous abuse situation with her birth grandfather.

This same situation could have occurred with the foster father or mother or other family member named as the alleged abuser. It's important to educate ourselves and our extended families 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 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 may lose their sense of identity, their self-esteem, and their trust in the worker or agency. Children may be removed — another painful loss for both the children and parents.

Even after child protective services completes the investigation, a parent may feel that the family's good name is forever tarnished and the episode will never be resolved. The family will most likely need support as they work to resolve any issues resulting from this experience

## Allegation Survival Strategies

Sometimes, despite a family's efforts to prevent them, allegations may happen.

Maybe things are going a little too well with Jimmy – a 12-year-old with a history of sexual abuse – and he starts to get scared. The week after a lively game of Twister with his foster dad, Jimmy tells his worker that the foster dad was touching and pressing his body against Jimmy's. Jimmy claims it was sexual abuse, and soon child protective services accepts a referral and investigates Jimmy's allegation.

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

- **Try to stay positive.** Don't let charges that are not proven true damage your relationships within your family, with your friends or your feelings of self-worth and dignity. The incidence of substantiated resource parent allegations in Kentucky is below the national average. Child protective services has to investigate to make certain that 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 to record details of every phone conversation, personal interview, and correspondence related to the allegation. Write in pen and be prepared to use the notebook to back up your story in court if need be. You have the right to request information on the investigation through the Kentucky Open Records Act. Call (502) 564-3834 for information. The Cabinet is required to send written notification that formally states the results of the allegation.
- **Educate yourself.** Read your Resource Parent Handbook. Go online to the handbook at <http://chfs.ky.gov/dcbs/dpp/> to 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.
- **Behave appropriately.** During interviews, make your point and then stop talking. Speak with confidence, and be factual, honest, respectful, and businesslike. Avoid emotional language when telling your side of the story. It may be extremely hard, but you must try to be objective.
- **Meet with people who are gathering information.** If an investigator asks to meet with you, don't keep him or her waiting. 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 support network representatives.** Regional help line numbers are included on page 12. Additionally, your recruitment and certification staff have the network members' phone numbers. Staff can also assist you with interpretation of the standards of practice.
- **Communicate with your partner.** Allegations, especially those of sexual abuse, can really drive a wedge between partners. The husband thinks, "How could they think I would do something like that?!" The wife wonders, "Could it possibly be true?!" If not openly discussed, these questions can pull couples apart just when they need each other's support the most.



- **Know your rights.** Don't be afraid to appeal a substantiation and learn how the appeals procedure 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 on. Think hard and give yourself some time off before bringing a child back into your home or accepting another placement. Take care of the children still in the home. Difficult times can be therapeutic and healing by showing children that we can have tough times, but as families we are strong and resilient.

### How the Network Can Help

In addition to educating new foster and adoptive families about taking conscious steps to prevent allegations, the Kentucky Foster and Adoptive Parent Training Support 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 family members who are going through an investigation, the network team can:

- **Offer a sympathetic ear.** This is a time when families really need the network! Network members are here to respectfully listen to your dilemma and help to process your feelings.
- **Stay neutral.** It is *not* the network's job to fix the problem or to be a therapist. There are many sides to the story, 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.
- **Share their experiences.** Parents going through an allegation may have an easier time talking to one person who has experienced an allegation rather than the whole network. A call from someone who can say, "I've walked the walk," can mean so much during this time. Members can also refer a family to the mentor program if they don't have one.

***If you can't prevent an allegation, at least do what you can to survive, learn and thrive.***



# HOW TO CONTACT THE NETWORK

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***FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL PEER  
SUPPORT***

**STATEWIDE HOTLINE: 1-877-70HEART**

**[WWW.KENTUCKYNETWORK.ORG](http://WWW.KENTUCKYNETWORK.ORG)**