

1.0 HOUR SELF-STUDY

Licensed foster parents can read the following article and earn foster parent training credit by filling out the following questionnaire and returning it to the Alaska Center for Resource Families.

What Foster Parents Need to Know About HB 151 Children Deserve a Loving Home Act

By Aileen McInnis, Director, Alaska Center for Resource Families

Recent Legislation passed by the State of Alaska Legislature included HB151 which is also known as “Children Deserve a Loving Home Act”. This legislation includes many provisions that will have a big impact on improving how the Office of Children’s Services is able to do its work of protecting children. Highlights include a mandate for lower caseloads for worker, more initial training for new caseworkers, and a streamlining of the foster care licensing process. Included in this legislation are several provisions that impact foster families directly. While many of these provisions are already in effect in policy, this legislation makes it part of the law as well. What do you need to know about HB151 and how it impacts you? Basically there are three things you need to know:

Need to Know #1: HB 151 states, “to the extent practicable, the Department of Health and Social Services should enable a child’s contact with previous out-of-home caregivers when appropriate and in the best interests of the child.” The OCS Child Protection Manual states, “The PS Specialist will assist the child in maintaining contact with prior foster care providers if the child desires and there is no reason to believe that such contact would be contrary to the best interest of the child.”

So if a child is moved from one resource family home to another, post-placement contact between the child and a former resource family can be allowed if it is determined not to be harmful to the child. If you as a child’s foster parent want to continue to have contact with a child after he or she leaves your homes, you should discuss with your assigned worker and/or the child’s parent before the transition happens if possible. This contact is more likely to happen if you have developed a good relationship with the family (birth family or adoptive family) he or she is being placed into. However, as a foster parent, you do not have a right to these visits. If a child is moved to another placement, the assigned worker has the final decision regarding visits between the child and former resource families. If a child is returned home or is adopted, the wishes of the child’s family about further contact with the resource family should be respected.

Need to Know #2: If siblings are separated when placed into foster care, OCS must give contact information to each sibling and encourage caregivers to maintain visitation.

It is currently OCS Policies that sibling contact is supported and it should be written into the Family Contact Plan. OCS already encourage caregivers to maintain visitation and make sibling visits and contacts occur. HB 151 requires contact information to be shared if siblings are separated including when adoption occurs and these new procedures are currently being written and plan to be in effect by June 2019. Stay tuned for more information on this one but for now, it is encouraged and expected that siblings be supported to stay in contact with each other if separated under most circumstances.

Need to Know #3: Foster parents have the right and responsibility to make decisions about child’s activities using a “reasonable and prudent” parent standard.

This is currently in OCS Policy and HB 151 also put it into Alaska law. Foster parents can make basic decisions about participating in cultural, enrichment, social and extra-curricular activities as long as it doesn’t interfere with court orders, visitations, or go against licensing regulations (such as needing permission for high risk activities or needing to notify if absent longer than 72 hours or permission to leave the state or country). Decisions should encourage children and youth to participate in normal activities and should be made using a reasonable and prudent standard taking into consideration the child’s age, developmental level and particular abilities. To learn more about the prudent parent standard, every foster parent is encourage to take this training ***The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard***. Call ACRF to request this self-study or go www.acrf.org and search for this self-study, or participate in the teleconference on February 26th (See **Rural Teleconference Training Schedule** in this issue for more information).