

# Foster Parent Code of Ethics

## Preamble

The mission of the National Foster Parent Association is to support foster parents in achieving safety, well-being, and permanency for the infants, children, and youth in their care commensurate with the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act passed in 1980, and the Adoptions and Safe Families Act passed in 1997. The Code of Ethics for Foster Parents begins by emphasizing that family foster care is an integral component of the child welfare system which:

- Recognizes the rights of children and youth to safe, nurturing relationships, intended to last a lifetime;
- Assists parents to regain custody or make alternative plans, intended to be permanent, for their children and youth;
- Emphasizes the developmental needs of children and youth
- Provides each child or youth with a foster parent and social worker who have the skills to support the child or youth's safety, developmental, and permanency needs, and provide foster parents and social workers with the supports necessary to develop and use these skills;
- Designs family foster care as a part of a comprehensive, coordinated, inter-disciplinary service delivery system;
- Provides legal representation to ensure timely and skillful responses to case plans involving court proceedings;
- Collects, analyzes, and disseminates accurate and relevant data about children, youth, and their families leading to informed policies, programs, and practices; and
- Supports family foster care - and all child welfare services - with effective and accountable leadership in city halls, governors' offices, national organizations, the judiciary, the federal government, Congress, and the White House (National Commission on Family Foster Care, 1991, p. 5).

## Historical Perspective and Definitions

The Code of Ethics for foster parents is based on the definition of family foster care established by the 1991 National Commission on Family Foster Care, sponsored by the Child Welfare League of America and the National Foster Parent Association. It reframed the historical term, "foster family care" to "family foster care," to emphasize the importance of family. This is based on the premise established by the first White House Conference on Children in 1909 (Rycus & Hughes, 1998) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1997 that children need and have the right to a family life. Family foster care: An essential child welfare service option for children and parents who must live apart while maintaining legal and, usually, affectional ties. When children and parents must be separated because of the tragedy of physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, maltreatment, or special circumstances, family foster care provides a planned, goal-directed service in which the care of children and youth takes place in the home of an agency-approved family. The value of family foster care is that it can respond to the unique, individual needs of infants, children, youth, and their families through the strength of family living, and through family and community supports. The goal of family foster care is to provide opportunities for healing, growth, and development, leading to healthier infants, children, and youth, and families, with safe and nurturing relationships intended to be permanent (National Commission on Family Foster Care, 1991, p. 6).

*Foster Parent NFPA definition: Includes those providing kinship, guardianship, resource and family foster/adoptive care.*

## Statement of Purpose

The Code of Ethics is a public statement by the National Foster Parent Association that sets clear expectations and principles to articulate basic values and to guide practice. Family foster care is a public trust that requires foster parents, with essential supports from their agencies, to be dedicated to service for the welfare of the children in their care. Each foster parent has an obligation to maintain and improve the practice of fostering, constantly to examine, use and increase the knowledge upon which fostering is based, and to perform the service of fostering with dignity, integrity, and competence.

## Principles

Successful family foster parenting includes competencies in the following domains:

**Principle 1:** Providing a safe and secure environment

**Principle 2:** Providing a loving, nurturing, stable family care environment.

**Principle 3:** Modeling healthy family living to help children, youth, and families learn and practice skills for safe and supportive relationships.

**Principle 4:** Providing positive guidance that promotes self-respect while respecting culture, ethnicity, and agency policy.

**Principle 5:** Promoting and supporting positive relationships among children, youth, and their families to the fullest possible extent.

**Principle 6:** Meeting physical and mental health care needs.

**Principle 7:** Promoting educational attainment and success

**Principle 8:** Promoting social and emotional development

**Principle 9:** Supporting permanency plans

**Principle 10:** Growing as a foster parent - skill development and role clarification; participation in training, professional or skill development, and foster parent support organizations and associations.

**Principle 11:** Arranging activities to meet the child's individual recreational, cultural, and spiritual needs.

**Principle 12:** Preparing children and youth for self-sufficient and responsible adult lives.

**Principle 13:** Meeting and maintaining all licensing or approval requirements.

**Principle 14:** Advocating for resources to meet the unique needs of the children and youth in their care (National Commission on Family Foster Care, 1991, p. 17).

**Principle 15:** Collaborating with other foster parents and the child welfare team, building trust and respecting confidentiality.

**Principle 16:** Promoting decisions that are in the best interest of the child/youth, promoting safety, well-being, and permanence.

**Principle 17:** Supporting relationships between children and youth and their families.

**Principle 18:** Working as a team member.

## Context

A Code of Ethics for Foster Parents must be viewed within the context of the service delivery system in which individual foster parents are affiliated. Foster parents recognize that while they have the solemn responsibility for the 24-hour care of the children placed with them, their abilities and resources are influenced by caseworkers, the role reciprocals. The National Foster Parent Association urges social work professionals to view the Code of Ethics for Foster Parents within the Code of Ethics for Social Workers, promulgated by the National Association of Social Workers: competence, dignity, integrity, importance of human relationships, service, and social justice (National Association of Social Workers, 1996, p. 1).

## References

- *National Commission on Family Foster Care* (1991). A blueprint for fostering infants, children, and youths in the 1990's. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.
- *National Association of Social Workers* (1996). NASW Code of Ethics. Washington, DC.

May 2007