

DSCYF
Fostering Teens Pre-Service Training Summary

Curriculum

Fostering teen pre-service training is a prerequisite to becoming an approved foster home for teenagers. Foster parents must successfully complete 30 hours of training as well as other assessments interwoven with the training. After demonstrating that they meet the required competencies, they then may become foster parents.

A variety of training methods can be employed to help participants obtain the awareness, knowledge and understanding needed to make a decision to foster teens, following is an overview of the ten sessions, each of which is three hours in length:

Session One: Pre-Service Training Orientation

Session one connects participants with the fostering teens training program. Participants learn how the pre-service training provides the formative principles of assessment, selection, licensing, and approval. The competencies needed for successful fostering and adopting are reviewed in relation to the Fostering Teens pre-service sessions and the process of becoming a foster or adoptive family. Participants discover the history and current trends in family foster care and adoption. They explore challenges and rewards of fostering and adopting. Session one features video that sets the stage for understanding the needs of foster parents in foster care as well as a look at experiences that may accompany fostering and adopting teens.

Session Two: Entering the System

This session introduces the agency, its mandates and the notion of safety and permanence. Teamwork is an integral part of providing foster parents with the interventions and support needed to succeed while in foster care and once they have left the system. This session will look at the role of foster parents in teamwork. The importance of family will be explored and the potential impact of the maltreatment of children and foster parents will be introduced.

Session Three: Child Abuse and Neglect

How a foster parent enters the foster care system is discussed, defining the types of abuse and maltreatment that lead to a foster parents being placed in foster care. As family conflict and violence is often the precipitating factor to a child or foster parents entering the system, this session will carefully explain the connection and the appropriate responses of the agency. Trainees discover the unique role of foster parents as members of a professional team that respond to a foster parent in need.

Session Four: Child Development and Maltreatment

This session reviews the “basics” about child growth and development. It considers important milestones for growth and development. Session Three emphasizes ways maltreatment impacts development and introduces the foster or adoptive parent to considering the behavioral implications on adolescent behavior and appropriate developmental interventions.

Session Five: Adolescent Development and Trauma

This session continues to concentrate on the developmental issues of adolescence, with a particular focus on sexuality and the trauma resulting from maltreatment and abuse. Attention is drawn to those foster parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and questioning their sexuality. This population experiences some unique challenges that prospective foster parents need to be aware of and prepared to deal with.

Session Six: Attachment and Loss

This session considers how important bonding and attachment are for growth and development in adolescents. An emphasis is placed on ways the foster or adoptive parent and the team may build positive attachments in order to meet developmental needs of foster parents. Separation and loss critically affect the child’s growth and development, particularly in family foster care and adoption. Participants learn the types of losses children encounter before entering foster care. They learn how placement can deepen the child’s sense of loss. Trainees review the stages of loss and consider how they influence a foster parents feelings and behaviors. Loss is presented as a universal issue. Foster families consider how they have dealt with losses in their lives. They discuss how they might approach losses that come with fostering and adopting, and how they can be “loss managers” for foster parents in their care.

Session Seven: Discipline

This session focuses on the challenges of discipline with foster parents in care. The content and activities focus on helping adolescents meet their developmental needs appropriately. Discipline is defined, the goals of effective discipline are identified, and the difference between discipline and punishment is illustrated. Trainees review the agency's policy on discipline and discuss the negative effects of physical punishment. Participants learn about the knowledge, skills, and personal qualities needed to instill discipline. They explore the meaning of a teen's behavior and the factors that influence behavior. The session outlines the methods foster and adoptive parents, as team members, can use to meet the goals of effective discipline.

Session Eight: Culture and Connections

This session focuses on how families promote identity, cultural identity, and self-esteem in foster parents. Participants review the child welfare concept that children and adolescents in placement should rejoin or remain connected to their families whenever possible. They discuss how the team and teamwork can help to connect foster parents to safe and nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime. The role of visiting in strengthening family relationships is also explored. Visitations with the birth family are discussed along with how to help adolescents manage them and how to handle reactions afterwards. The importance of families and permanency to foster parents is discussed especially in preparation for transitioning to adulthood.

Session Nine: Managing Change and Connections

How placement impacts the foster or adoptive family is the focus of this session. The first hours, days, and weeks of a teen's placement in the home are viewed practically. Trainees learn what to expect, how to prepare themselves and their families, and how to assist the foster parents who is in transition. Longer-term placement impact is also discussed, including how placement changes the foster or adoptive family. The notion that fostering and adopting carry risks is highlighted through a discussion of abuse allegations. Independent living activities are presented as foster children move closer to aging out and transitioning to living on their own. Use of the team for support and focus is emphasized.

Session Ten: Making an Informed Decision

This session offers foster parents a chance to learn firsthand from experienced members of the foster care team. Panelists may include foster children, foster parents, adoptive parents, caseworkers, and family members who present their perspectives and answer participants' questions. Participants will reflect on their growth and development regarding the pre-service competencies. They begin to make a final decision regarding their commitment to fostering or adopting.