



## Under the Microscope: Dealing with Maltreatment Allegations

When you made the commitment to become a foster or adoptive parent, you may have never considered that you might become the subject of a child abuse investigation.

Unfortunately, the truth is that foster and adoptive parents have allegations made against them at a higher rate than the general public. Often the allegations are found to be unsubstantiated but having to go through the investigation process can be stressful and frustrating.

### How Can You Minimize the Risk of an Allegation?

While there is no guaranteed way to avoid an allegation of child abuse or neglect, there are ways to minimize the risk of allegations.

Most of the following suggestions come from the [National Foster Parent Association](#) to give you some tips for minimizing the risk of an allegation of abuse or neglect:

**Participate in training** and educate yourself about how children who have been abused or neglected sometimes misunderstand discipline or nurturing interactions that are typical for most families but are unfamiliar to them.

**Find out as much information as**

**possible** before deciding whether to take a child for placement, including the child's abuse history both at home and in out-of-home placements. Do not accept a referral for a child who you do not feel you can adequately parent.

Ask whether a child has a history of making allegations of abuse against caregivers. Such a history does not mean the child is untruthful, but it could indicate a need for more involved treatment and more precautions being put in place in your home.

**Follow all regulations** related to [foster care and adoption in Wisconsin](#).

**Have consistent family rules** and expectations for the entire family.

**Provide a high level of supervision** for a child who demonstrates

inappropriateness or has a prior history of sexualized behaviors.

**Keep a daily log** and record any:

- Unusual events, behaviors, comments, reactions before or after interaction with family members
- School issues
- Medical, dental, or therapy appointments
- All discussions with other professionals

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6682 West Greenfield, Suite 310  
Milwaukee, WI 53214  
800-762-8063  
[info@coalitionforcf.org](mailto:info@coalitionforcf.org)

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about the child's progress and needs (including social workers, attorneys, mental health professionals, etc.)

**Document your notes in a spiral notebook** with the date on each entry, and keep it locked in a cabinet (for confidentiality reasons). Keeping a spiral notebook shows that you haven't changed any entries, whereas notes on a computer are not as credible since information could have been changed, added, or deleted.

**Report any unusual incident or injury** immediately to the child's agency.

**Maintain good working relationships** with everyone involved in the child's life.



**Read the *Wisconsin Foster Family Handbook***, which has excellent information for taking care of yourself and the children in your care. [Chapter 2](#) also has information about allegations.

### What Can You Do if There's an Investigation?

Going through an investigation of child abuse or neglect is a very difficult, emotional, and challenging experience.

You're probably familiar with the phrase, "Check with your worker for...." but this is *one* case when you *won't* be able to check with your worker. The very people who you've leaned on to help you navigate the foster care system are now unable to talk with you until an independent investigation is fully completed.

You can, however, call the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center at 800-947-8074. We are here to be neutral and help you know

what to anticipate.

We also strongly encourage you to talk to other parents who have been through this investigative process. Having access to other parents who have undergone an allegation is invaluable to foster and adoptive parents.

To find another foster or adoptive parent to talk with you, contact the Foster and Adoptive Support and Preservation Program (FASPP).

FASPP is a volunteer network of foster and adoptive foster parents designed to help *you*. They will listen to you and refer you to different sources and help you navigate your way through different situations, including allegations of abuse

and neglect.

FASPP is a program of the Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parents Association's (WFAPA). WFAPA also offers spring and fall conferences, which are excellent opportunities to talk with other foster parents about all kinds of issues.

### What Else Can You Do During the Investigation?

In addition to talking with another parent, the National Foster Parent Association suggests the following:

- Try to maintain an objective attitude (as hard as this may be).
- Stay focused on understanding and following the procedures in place to resolve the maltreatment report.
- Maintain or start a log of every conversation or activity related to

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800-762-8063  
info@coalitionforcyf.org

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the investigation, including the person calling and his or her agency.

- Ask for all documents such as a copy of the complaint or report of abuse and the safety plan established for the child.
- Read documents carefully and ask questions about anything you do not understand.
- Keep track of timelines for the investigation.
- Provide information and documentation to the agency about the event that caused the report to be made.
- Reach out to local foster care support groups and ask for support.
- Request that the child welfare agency provide at least one contact person in the agency to provide basic information about the investigation process.
- Maintain the family routine; do not isolate yourself from friends and family.

Going through the allegation process can be terrifying and you may feel very alone. But know that you will get through it. Other parents have also gone through it and will help you if they can. While they wouldn't want to go through it again, some parents have even said the experience has made them better parents.



## Resources

- *Legal Resource Manual for Foster Parents*, by Regina Deihl, J.D. Chapter 4 focuses on *Allegations of Maltreatment*.
- [Chapter 2 of Wisconsin's Foster Family Handbook](#)
- [Foster Care Regulations](#)
- [Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parents Association's FSAPP program](#)
- [Child Welfare Complaint Procedures in Wisconsin](#)
- [National Foster Parent Association](#)
- Tip Sheet: [Ten Tips to Survive an Allegation](#)



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