

Ten Tips to Survive an Allegation

Just the other day, Jessica had a visit with her case manager and a social worker for one of the children in her care. Jessica and Paula, her case manager, had a great conversation—they talked about the children, brainstormed some ideas and strategies, and, afterward, Jessica felt good. She had started fostering a few years ago and her whole heart was still in it. She loved being able to help children and their families.



When the phone rang and Jessica saw her case worker's number, she picked up, wondering what had come up since their visit the other day. She was stunned to hear Paula say that one of the children in her care had made an allegation of abuse. Jessica sat down hard on a chair in the kitchen. She just barely registered what Paula was saying—an investigative process would be starting.

Unfortunately, allegations like these can be a common part of fostering or adopting children with a history of trauma. There are many reasons a child may make a false allegation. Children who have suffered abuse can be hyper-sensitive to triggers that they associate with that abuse. They may project abuse by a loved one on a new caregiver. They may believe alleging abuse by the foster parent will get them returned home. Whether the reasons are simple or complex, veteran foster parents will tell you that there may be a strong chance you will face an allegation sooner or later in your fostering journey.

So, how do you survive something so upsetting? Following are ten tips that we hope will help you get through this difficult situation:

- **Stay calm.** Try not to let your mind run wild and imagine all the worst-case scenarios.
- **Educate yourself.** Learning more about the dynamics of false allegations, the investigation process, and your rights as a foster parent may ease some of your worries and fears.
- **Remember that workers from your agency can't discuss the investigation and details.** While the investigation is ongoing, your worker and others from your agency must be careful of and mindful of the process. Remind yourself that they are always working, like you, in the best interest of the child, and that they don't wish to do anything that will compromise the investigation.
- **Be cooperative, respectful, and factual with investigators.** In such an emotional situation, it can be difficult to remain calm. Do your best to keep emotion out of your conversations with investigators.
- **Provide any documentation** that may support the facts (e.g., your child has a tendency to make false allegations immediately after each weekly visit with dad).
- **Lean on with your circle of support.** You may find comfort and strength from talking with another foster parent who maybe faced a similar situation.

Continued on page 2

- **Try not to take it personally.** Although it may feel very personal, remember the child's trauma history and that false allegations may be a symptom of that trauma.
- **Trust the process.** Be generous with yourself in remembering that the investigators involved know their process and that they will uncover what is true and what is false.
- **Seek out support** from neutral resources who understand the foster care system, such as a counselor or mentor who can help you remain positive and

Tips that Might Help Prevent an Allegation

- Ask plenty of questions at the time of placement. You might ask about any history of abuse or allegations, if there are any known trauma triggers for the child, or other suggestions that might help in your care decisions.
- Be very clear with the child and professionals working with her about how you approach discipline in your home. Reassure her that she is safe and that hitting (or even talking about hitting) is never allowed in the home.
- Post a "Home Safety Plan" agreement that assures all household members are aware of the rules for keeping everyone safe.
- Document, document, document. Keep a notebook. Write down any bumps or bruises from the playground or school and make your worker aware. Document any changes in behavior or patterns in behavior, perhaps following a therapy session, birth parent visit, around certain times of day, or certain occasions. Make note of any triggers you notice that may lead to the child feeling threatened or frightened.

strong.

- **Take good care of yourself.** Eating well and getting plenty of sleep will help keep your mind clear and will help you feel less stressed out while the process plays out.

After an allegation, allow yourself time before making any decisions to close your fostering license, or asking that a child be moved. You may wish to take some time to reevaluate some things, such as:

- Are there practices you use in your home that could unintentionally be potential triggers for a child?
- Are there certain types of behaviors, age groups, or situations that you feel more or less skillful at working with?
- Do you have a strong support system that can offer help during a stressful time?
- Is there additional information, training, or other resources that might have helped avoid the allegation?

As upsetting, worrisome, and hurtful as an allegation can be, it may help to remember that you are not alone. Although being falsely accused is never a pleasant experience, preparing for the possibility can go a long way in coming out on the other side of it stronger and more resilient than ever.



Continued on page 3



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Resources

- Tip Sheet: [Under the Microscope: Maltreatment Allegations](#)
- State of Wisconsin [Foster Parent Handbook](#)
- [Allegations Happen: How to Prevent and Survive Them](#)
- [False Allegations: One Foster Parent's Story](#), Fostering Perspectives
- Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association – [Foster & Adoptive Support & Prevention Program](#)
- [Wisconsin Child Protective Services Process](#)
- *The Foster Parenting Toolbox*, Edited by Kim Phagan-Hansel



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