

Host Family Handbook

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Safe Families for Children is a movement of compassion that is transforming thousands of Christian families across the country, helping them to take up the spiritual practice of Biblical hospitality by opening their homes to vulnerable children and by extending their hands to the parents of the children who are struggling to escape the ravaging effects of poverty and social isolation.

Safe Families is a movement of the Church to care for the most vulnerable people group in our society, our vulnerable children and their families. The Church is commanded (Care for orphans and widows) and best equipped to meet this need. Additionally, the church has the most experience as she has been doing it throughout history (until foster care was created 100 years ago). Safe Families is a vehicle to return the church back to the forefront of caring for children.

Section 1: Brief Description of Safe Families

Safe Families for Children hosts vulnerable children and creates extended family-like supports for desperate families through a community of compassionate volunteers motivated by their faith to keep children safe and ultimately together with their families.

Founded in Chicago in 2003, Safe Families for Children (SFFC) is a multi-site volunteer movement that gives hope and support to families in distress. SFFC reframes how families are supported during a crisis. Parents voluntarily place their children in safe, loving homes where they are cared for while the parents seek to restore stability in their lives. SFFC is dedicated to family support, stabilization and, most importantly, child abuse prevention.

SFFC is a community-based movement predicated on the belief that the safety and health of children in our communities is the responsibility of all of us, and that parents are the key to providing that well-being for their children. Accordingly, SFFC focuses on strengthening and supporting parents so they can be safe families for their children. SFFC is rooted in faith-based principles of welcoming strangers into our hearts and homes.

Facts

- Screen and approve host families similar to foster care
- Monitor children in host homes at the same frequency as foster care
- Average stay 44 days
- 69.62% 5 years old and below
- Referral Sources: schools, homeless and domestic violence centers, substance abuse, hospitals, child welfare, law enforcement

Program Components – Broadening the range of services we provide

1. **Host Families**- Screened and approved volunteers who take in children from parents in crisis
2. **Family Friends**: Volunteers who provide parent mentoring, babysitting, transportation and other supportive services to families.
3. **Resource Friends**: Volunteers who donate a variety of items (beds, clothes, etc) to families.
4. **Safe Families Plus**: Connecting youth aging out of foster care with host families willing to support them

The Answer: – Resurrecting Biblical Hospitality; Unleashing the Family.

Throughout Scripture, there are numerous references to widows and children. James associates the care of orphans and widows with one's purity of faith. He writes, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). Asaph the song writer pleads, "Defend the cause of the weak

and the fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:3).

David further describes God’s concern for orphans and widows by saying, “Father to the fatherless, defender of widows - this is our God, whose dwelling is holy. God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy” (Psalm 68: 5, 6 NLT). Isaiah adds, “Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:17).

The New Testament makes frequent mention of hospitality. The Hebrews writer instructs followers of Christ to “not neglect hospitality” (Hebrews 13:2). Peter, with insight into the difficulty of living a life of hospitality, encourages us to “offer hospitality ungrudgingly” (I Peter 4:9). Hebrews also alludes to the fact that the practice of hospitality can be mysterious and have its rewards. “Do not neglect to show hospitality. By doing so, some have entertained angels” (Hebrews 13:2). Paul instructs Christians to “pursue hospitality” (Romans 12:13), because hospitality does not come naturally and it often goes against our nature. Not only were all Christians encouraged to live lives of hospitality, but leaders were especially instructed to be hospitable. In fact, hospitality is a characteristic that was to be used to identify those who should be considered for leadership. “Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach” (I Timothy 3:2).

Section 2- Glossary of Terms

Child Protection: This refers to the front-end of the child welfare system responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and determining when a child should enter foster care.

Child welfare: the term for the governmental institution that legally and forcibly removes children from the custody of their parents for abuse or neglect and puts them in foster care; one of the primary goals of Safe Families for Children is to make this type of system unnecessary by supporting parents before abuse and neglect occur.

Family Coach: trained volunteer or staff who works with several sets of children to coordinate and observe their living arrangements with Host Families; helps parents connect with needed services not offered by Safe Families for Children.

Family Coach Supervisor: Typically a paid staff person who provides supervision to the volunteer family coaches and oversees intake.

Family Friend: individual or family who engage in a partnering relationship with parents in crisis or host families without necessarily caring for the children. This may involve mentoring, transportation, child care, etc.

Hospitality: it is “love of strangers” in the original Greek and was usually performed in homes. Ancient hospitality is quite different than the hospitality we know of now. When one hears the word hospitality, the hotel and restaurant industry often comes to mind. Ancient hospitality is deliberate, can be dangerous, and is demanding.

Host Family: screened and approved family who has decided to open their home to children on a short-term basis without compensation while their parents retain custody.

Implementer: Faith-based child placing agency that is responsible for developing Safe Families in a particular region. The implementer usually provides the technical expertise needed to screen and approve families. However, non-child placing agencies or community collaborative may implement if they can insure the technical/safety aspect of Safe Families is taken care of and approved by the Alliance.

Ministry Lead: The volunteer who is leading the Safe Families effort at a local church.

Resource Friend: A resource friend is a volunteer who has something tangible (bed, clothes, etc) to help meet the need of a host family.

Safe Families for Children Churches: Spiritual communities that desire to live out the Safe Families for Children movement on one of three possible levels:

Participating Church: The church becomes involved in the SFFC movement by engaging in the following activities: advocacy for families in at-risk environs, recruiting Host Families, Family Friends and Youshare.

Lead Church: In addition to the activities of participating church, the church designates Safe Families as one of its official outreach ministries; the church will also offer monthly support groups for SFFC, recruit volunteer Family Coaches, resource host families and parents, etc.

Community Lead Church: Includes activities of participating and lead churches. Community Lead Churches also provide this level of support and intervention to other host families (not attending their church) who do not have a SF church to get the support from.

Section 3 – Theology – Resurrecting Hospitality

A Theology of Orphans and Widows

Throughout Scripture, there are numerous references to widows and children. Few would argue that children are the most vulnerable “people group” in our society requiring special attention and protection. In fact, James associates the care of orphans and widows with ones purity of faith. He writes, *“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”* (James 1:27). In Lamentations 2:19, Jeremiah cries, *“Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street.”* Asaph the song writer pleads, *“Defend the cause of the weak and the fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked”* (Psalm 82:3).

David further describes God’s concern for orphans and widows by saying, *“Father to the fatherless, defender of widows - this is our God, whose dwelling is holy. God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy”* (Psalm 68: 5, 6 NLT). Isaiah adds, *“Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow”* (Isaiah 1:17). God clearly states that they need protection, *“Do not take advantage of the widow or orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless”* (Exodus 22: 22-24).

Jesus valued children. His words are direct, *“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”* (Matthew 19:14). He also warned those who would mistreat them, *“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea”* (Matthew 18:6).

The Early Church

When the early church was fully alive in engaging the culture and significantly impacting the “least of these,” the practice of offering care to strangers (hospitality) became a distinguishing characteristic.¹ These Christians became known for their acts of kindness and service. Babies that were deformed or of the wrong sex were discarded on the waste heaps outside the city. The Christians would

gather the unwanted babies and raise them as if they were their own. The Christian writer Tertullian (AD 200) wrote, “It is our care of the helpless, our practice of lovingkindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents.” 2

As in ancient times, children today continue to be hurt by societal ills that have filtered down to the family. Christians are concerned and disturbed by reports like the two boys abandoned on the train, but often do not know how to make a difference. That is where the ministry of Safe Families for Children comes in. Safe Families is a movement of hundreds of Christian families who have opened their homes to care for children whose parents are struggling. By demonstrating Biblical hospitality, Safe Families returns the church to the forefront of caring for “orphans and widows.”

Biblical Hospitality

The Wrights, along with other Safe Families, epitomize the biblical command for all Christians to live lives characterized by hospitality. We are witnessing an extraordinary movement of care as families join this wave of Biblical hospitality by using their homes for Kingdom purposes. In so doing, the church returns to the forefront of caring for children, as we had been throughout history.

The hospitality of the Bible is dangerous, demanding, and must be deliberate. It is radical, far different than the lifestyle with which we may be accustomed. While the Safe Families Program provides as many safe guards as reasonably possible, opening our doors to strangers can be risky. Our own children can be exposed to language and behaviors that are undesirable. The needs of a child or children newly separated from their parent and feeling stressed will demand more of our time and energy. Our children will need to sacrifice and exercise patience as they share their possessions and their parents with those to whom we are ministering. However, the blessings run deep when we practice Biblical hospitality and demonstrate to the world that the Christian family, in obedience to Christ, can be a powerful source of change in our society.

Hospitality Defined

But what exactly is hospitality? We often think of inviting friends and family to our home for food and socializing as hospitality; however, that may be more accurately defined as entertaining. Entertaining is enjoyable and often strengthens relationships, but it is not to be confused with Biblical hospitality. Likewise, we refer to hotel and restaurant establishments as part of the “hospitality industry.” Unfortunately, that is often the extent to which many of us understand and live out hospitality. The practice of hospitality, apart from the hospitality industry, is nearly extinct in our society.

Somewhere along the way we have changed and watered down the original meaning of this concept. The Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia* which means “love of strangers.” We often do not put the word love and stranger in the same sentence. Fear of strangers is a much more common thought than love of strangers.

However, Biblical hospitality is powerful and instrumental in reaching our world with the gospel of Christ. In our post-modern age, hospitality is an essential practice that needs to accompany our verbal proclamation of faith in order to restore our credibility to a society that sees us as being anti-gay, too political, hypocritical, insincere, sheltered, and judgmental.

The practice of Christian hospitality was most vibrant during the first five centuries of the church. It provided credibility (word and deed) and distinguished the church from its surrounding environment. The teachings of the New Testament command all of God’s people to be hospitable, as we will soon see, and the early church believed it and lived it out. This involved loving and welcoming

strangers into their homes. Hospitality was not seen as a special gift that only a few possessed but rather as a command for all Christians. Hospitality was one of the foundational ministries of the early church. Christians were to regard hospitality to strangers as a fundamental expression of the gospel.

The New Testament makes frequent mention of hospitality. The Hebrews writer instructs followers of Christ to “not neglect hospitality” (Hebrews 13:2). Peter, with insight into the difficulty of living a life of hospitality, encourages us to “offer hospitality ungrudgingly” (1 Peter 4:9). Hebrews also alludes to the fact that the practice of hospitality can be mysterious and have its rewards. *“Do not neglect to show hospitality. By doing so, some have entertained angels” (Hebrews 13:2).* Paul instructs Christians to “pursue hospitality” (Romans 12:13), because hospitality does not come naturally and it often goes against our nature. Not only were all Christians encouraged to live lives of hospitality, but leaders were especially instructed to be hospitable. In fact, hospitality is a characteristic that was to be used to identify those who should be considered for leadership. *“Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2).*

Barriers to Hospitality

When people consider the challenge of opening their homes to others, a number of concerns arise. These concerns can lead to barriers that hinder us from practicing the discipline of hospitality.

Castle Mentality - Much of our income is invested into our homes. Because we invest so much, we may develop a perspective that our homes are our castles, something of significant value. That perspective can easily shift to our homes and their contents becoming our idols. I once spoke at a fairly wealthy church and a couple came up afterwards indicating an interest in opening up their home for a child but wanted a guarantee that their possessions would not be harmed. When told that such a promise could not be made, they walked away discouraged. I could not help but think of the rich young ruler who walked away from Jesus because of his possessions (Mark 10:17-25). This is probably the biggest challenge for our wealthy North American church. The practice of hospitality is an alternative to a life focused on consumption and materialism. God lends us our homes and possessions to use for kingdom purposes, not just for our own comfort and entertainment. Hospitality insures that we maintain a right relationship with our possessions.

Fortress Mentality – With so many problems and negative influences in our world, it is natural to desire a “safe place” to which we can withdraw. Often our homes become this “safe place” with figuratively high walls and deep moats. The desire for safety and protection is not wrong. However, it can have a detrimental effect as we are lulled into thinking our safety comes from our fortress rather than trusting in Christ for His protection. This fortress mentality also keeps others out who desperately need to be exposed to the extraordinary love of Christ as expressed in relationships within a family. When was the last time a neighbor, stranger, or acquaintance crossed the threshold of your front door?

Haven Mentality – Our homes have become our sanctuaries for refueling and restoration. Certainly this is important. However, hospitality and restoration are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The Lord often uses a variety of people and places to restore us, even our guests. Reliance on our home for restoration may detract us from other ways to be restored such as fully using all we are and have for His purpose. *“As the deer pants for the water, so my soul pants for you my Lord” (Psalm 42:1).* Additionally, the joy of seeing God at work in someone’s life is a tremendously rejuvenating experience that we may inadvertently exclude ourselves from when we fail to open our doors to others.

Time – Time is the most often reported reason that people give for being unable to open their

homes. Families are quite busy running to school meetings, soccer games, church activities, etc. Many Christian families would like to find the time to mentor/tutor a child, visit a homeless shelter, or reach out to their neighbor. A ministry like Safe Families provides very busy families opportunities to serve because we bring the needs to them and the children are integrated into their routines.

Role of the Family in Ministry

This type of integration into the family not only has a healing affect on the at-risk children, it also allows the host family to participate together in life-changing ministry. There are few opportunities for an entire family to minister together. Church programs and ministries are usually divided by age and sometimes gender. This is helpful in meeting the specific needs of various groups. However, when possible, ministering together as a family promotes unity and allows our children real experience in living out their faith. The Christian family is one of the most powerful sources of change in our society. Our homes are a powerful change agent. Rather than sheltering our families, we need to unleash them for ministry. It is easy for us to see our families as fragile, requiring us to handle them with care by defending and protecting rather than unleashing. Few sports teams ever win games by solely focusing on defensive strategies. If the Church is going to make a significant impact in our society, we have to use our homes and change our strategies from being predominately defensive to an offensive game plan. Our families are not as fragile as one thinks.

Healthy churches understand the importance of both reaching out and caring for its own (discipleship). If one or the other is out of line or non-existent, problems often occur. Might this also be the same for our families? Healthy families must care for its own (raise their children) but also reach out to others as a family. By not recognizing the need to reach out, the church is less effective and our families miss out on a unique blessing (and some suffer the consequences of a lack of purpose).

The section on hospitality in the book of Hebrews (13:2) seems to insinuate that there may be a surprise (“some have entertained angels”) for the host as they live out hospitality. Many of our Safe Families attest to the fact that they received more of a blessing than they gave. It makes sense. When a family is given a life-changing purpose which requires the involvement of every member, new life and energy is breathed into the family. Some have said that their family now has a purpose beyond just raising the next generation. *“Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy”* (Matthew 5:7).

Section 4 – Safe Families as a Movement

We consider Safe Families as a Social Movement. This means a number of things as you compare it to a social program. A social movement is a grassroots entity that is designed to be viral in nature. Volunteers (like yourself) are considered the key change agents and take on key leadership roles. For example, later in this manual we mention that you will have a family coach to assist and support you. In most situations, these family coaches will also be volunteers like you but specifically trained in their roles. Additionally, the leader of Safe Families at your church, a ministry lead, is also a volunteer. Paid staff are usually focused on screening and approving families and providing supervision to the family coaches. This volunteer-driven/professionally supported, decentralized approach provides us an opportunity to make even greater impact.

Section 4 – Growing the Movement

Growing the movement of Safe Families is a priority. We found that our most effective host family recruiters are our current host families. We hope you would be willing to expose your family and friends to the Safe Families and challenge them to participate at some level.

Chapter 2 – Approval Process and Requirements

Section 1 - Host Family Requirements

It is our preference to recruit host Family parents that see their participation in Safe Families as a way of living out the compassion of Christ by caring for the most vulnerable people group in our society. Safe Families is family focused and hostings are offered on behalf of the child's parent. Success is determined by the reuniting of the family. Some have even considered the orphan of the family to be the young Mom and/or Dad who are isolated from their own family and are standing alone during their crisis. Volunteer parents with this mindset are able to bring the healing dynamic of Christian love to children on behalf of their families in crisis.

It is the policy of Safe Families to approve the most competent and effective host family parents to care for the needs of the children. The ultimate goal is to provide a culturally relevant and secure family that is free from any potential dangers to their guest. It is also important for the child to feel loved and cared for, and feel as though they are a part of the family. The impact you have in the life of this child is significant. To qualify as a host family, the parents need to:

- Have sufficient financial resources that caring for an additional child will not put undue strain on the rest of the family.
- Be 25 years or older; stable, mature and law abiding.
- Be free from the use of drugs and not overly use alcohol
- Provide a home that is in a satisfactory condition.
- Agree to the requirements of the Safe Families regarding guidelines for parent's expectations.
- Refrain from profanity and other potentially damaging behavior to a child.
- Be capable of providing for the health and safety of the child, and be in sufficient health, strength, and mobility to meet the many demands of a Host Family parent.
- Compassion for struggling families staying together
- Willing to serve under the organization of a safe family church

Section 2 - Host Families versus Foster Families

Safe Families for Children is both similar to and radically different from serving as a Foster Family. Safe Families was started in order to help families in crisis BEFORE their children are legally removed from them, while Foster Families serve children whose parents can only get their children back through the courts because they have been legally removed and placed in foster care. Host Families receive no funds to help in caring for children while Foster Families receive a small monthly sum. These differences in legal and financial involvement are essential to the distinctive dynamic provided by compassionate Safe Families care. Placing parents maintain all legal rights and decision making in Safe Families allowing for powerful healthy relationships to be formed between the host family and the placing family with extended family -like bonding and commitment. The host family role is to temporarily supplement the biological family rather than legally substitute the biological parents. In foster care, parents have had their rights suspended and many times the foster parent and biological parent do not have the opportunity for healthy relationship because of the legal restraints and pressures imposed on the foster parent being the substitute to the biological parent.

Host Families are patterned after Foster Families in how they are authorized to serve but very differently on behalf of who they serve. Every effort is made to assure that the host family truly is safe and appropriate to care for children. These efforts include many of the same requirements and best practices that Foster Families have; home study, background checks, references, and agreement to use only non-corporal measures of discipline with children brought into their care, training, etc. Foster

families are authorized to serve on behalf of the state legal system of child welfare and Host families are authorized to serve on behalf of the child's placing biological parent.

To help compassionate people to more easily participate, and because these families have not abused their child needing legal intervention, the required Host Family training omits training dealing with the legal system and with children who have been abused. Our belief is that many families desire to serve, but the amount of training time required to become a foster family becomes prohibitive and in the training and is not relevant to placing families. Instead the training focuses more on reducing isolation with the emphasis on a family to family relational model of care. Thus we have sought to make Safe Families training more 'trainee-friendly.'

Section 3 – Steps to getting approved

There are a number of hoops that need to be passed through in order to be part of the Safe Family team. Given the society we live in, we have to take potential host families through a process of careful screening to ensure that we are truly providing safe homes. I'm sure you understand our need to do this. The hoops involve the following:

- Completion of the Host Family Application
- References
- Completion of Training
- Completion of a home assessment similar to (but not as extensive as what one might have to go through to adopt or foster). Our staff will come out to your home to meet with you and to see the setting the Safe Family child may be living in.
- Finger Prints and background checks
- Determining Capacity and Types of Children

During the home assessment process, we will talk with you about the number and types (ages, gender, personality) of children you would prefer to have in your home. We will set a capacity (the most you can take) for your home but this does not mean you have to take in that many children.

Chapter 3 – Welcoming a Child

Section 1 - Referral Process

Parents are referred to the Safe Families program from a variety of sources. They include: child protection investigators, day care centers, hospitals, schools, police stations, homeless centers, other placing parents, etc. Typically, someone involved with the parent will call on their behalf (caseworker). Nearly all the referrals are crisis related. In other words, the children are probably in need of placement that same day.

Once we receive a call, we get basic information to make sure the family is appropriate for the Safe Families Program. The most important decision is whether the children can be adequately cared for in a family setting. Some children have special medical needs so we will look for host families that have been (or are willing to be) trained to meet those needs.

The Safe Family staff will then fax or email documents that the parent needs to complete that will give a host family consent to care for the child.

Once we receive these forms back, we will begin to contact families who have indicated they are interested in caring for a child of that age. We always start with families that live closest to the parent who is placing the child. This is the most cumbersome part of the process. We could end up making 50 calls to place one child. We often have to leave messages. Because we are calling many different people at the same time, we might occasionally have found another home by the time you call back. We have set up something called youshare.org to more easily get the information out to host families so we can respond more quickly. If you are not registered in www.youshare.org, please do so.

Intake

Once you say yes to taking in a child, a Safe Family staff or your volunteer Family Coach or Ministry Lead, in many situations, drop off the child at your home. We also may try to have you meet us half way or, if you are up for it, pick up the child yourself.

It is not uncommon for children to often not come with very many clothes and supplies. Please remember that these are crisis situations and in most cases your church ministry team will be prepared to support you as their host family. SFFC will do everything we can to get additional clothes as soon as we can. We will do what we can to help provide what you need. Many host families have developed a network of support around them from their church that can help provide clothes and other supplies.

When you receive the child, you should also be given the following paperwork:

- Consent for placement form
- Power of attorney for health care – this might be combined with the consent form.
- Child intake forms or
- Medical card

We will tell you all we know about the child coming into your home. However, it is important to note that there have been occasions that we were not aware of certain situations at intake (e.g. health, colds, behavior). If that does occur, we will work with you to make sure you are able to meet the child's needs. When re-use occurs please make sure that you have let your Family Coach know that you are hosting a child in care so that the systems of supports are offered.

Section 2 – Meeting the Child and introducing them to your family

1. What to expect?

Children have a variety of reactions to being placed with a Host Family. Some children might be angry because they are away from their parents and everything familiar. Some may be relieved because their living situation was quite difficult. Other children may be quite shy and withdrawn. Some may appear overly friendly and compliant. Putting yourself in the child's shoes can help you understand some of the difficulties a child might have. How would you react to being separated from all of your natural supports – home, job, family, and friends? Your feelings of sadness, nervousness about your new living situation, uncertainty about new roommates, and stress related to not knowing any of the rules and expectations (spoken and unspoken) can be difficult to deal with.

2. Making a child feel comfortable

No matter how fun and exciting the new host family home might be, the child will likely have some transition problems. Expecting some challenges might help prepare you for this. The sooner the child feels comfortable, the better. The best way for the child to feel comfortable is for the host family to be comfortable within themselves. Kids can sense discomfort and will adapt accordingly. The best way of being comfortable within yourself is to bring who you are into the encounter with the child. Know yourself and be yourself. If your strength is to be funny, then be funny. If you are nice, then be nice, if serious, then be serious. Routines also are very helpful with the transition. Realize that the child may not follow rules and routines immediately. Also, they may have feelings of sadness and loss that will eventually resolve. You may have to help the kids work it through.

Many have also found that the children of the host family can play a very significant role in facilitating the transition. Kids seem to naturally trust other children and play seems to be the equalizer. Many host family encourage their own children to take the lead in helping the new guest

feel more comfortable and begin to settle in. They also become a role model in helping the child internalize the new routines and how to relate to the new adults in their life.

- i. The separation process causes children to have many painful feelings. For example a child may feel anger, guilt, sadness, or frustration. Sometimes these feelings are “acted out.” Contact with the placing parents help children get out some of their feelings, so it should be expected that children will seem more upset before, during or after a visit with their placing parents.
- ii. If children are allowed to have contact and express all their upset feelings, then they will be less likely to take out or “displace” these feelings on the foster parents. They will be able to develop a positive relationship with the Safe Family. A good connection to their Safe Family will help them with other relationships.

Here are some other ideas to help with the transition.

Try this: Give Them Familiar Surroundings Surround them with something familiar. Place pictures of familiar faces in frames and hang on their bedroom wall or place on their bedside table. Do they have a favorite teddy bear or blanket that they can have nearby? Create a memory book of the child’s time in your home. Get as many pictures with their bio mom and dad and your safe family together. Children take cues from bio parents regarding who is safe. Pictures of their bio family and Safe family together will allow the child to feel more comfortable in your home.

Try This: Explain Family Rules & Expectations: Let him know what is expected of him. Explain the family rules and expectations on the child’s age and maturity level. Write out a daily schedule and post it where he can refer to it as often as needed. Even fairly young children can understand what the meaning of certain pictures are, for example: a picture of a bed means that it is time to go to bed, a picture of food means it’s time to eat, and so forth. Don’t expect perfect behavior and perfect adherence to the family rules and expectations. The older the child is when he or she enters the family, the more bad habits they are likely to display. Give the child some adjustment time, and then take only one or two behaviors at a time to work on. Otherwise, the child may feel like he or she has to earn love and quickly become overwhelmed and frustrated.

Try This: Identify Problems & Provide a Solution: Pulling away from attempts to show affection is common, do not be offended. Should the child be reluctant to receive physical affection, start slowly by asking his permission for a hug. In this way, he feels he is in control and won’t feel violated. Children who were not adequately fed in their previous home may hoard or sneak food. Have snacks available for the child, at least for a while. Eat meals on a predictable schedule (breakfast at 9, lunch at 12, dinner at 6, etc). Eventually, he will be able to be weaned off as he learns to trust that he will be fed consistently. Give him choices. Many times older children feel out of control, with strangers constantly dictating his every move. Perhaps he was forced to fend for himself much of the time prior to his placement. Allow him the chance to make appropriate choices. For instance, if he prefers to wear inappropriate clothing, allow him two or three choices from an acceptable alternative. By identifying the child’s learned behaviors and providing an acceptable solution, power struggles are headed off before they arise, and the child learns that his Safe family really does care about his well-being.

3. Tips from experienced host families

- Point out something your child does well every day. Genuine praise helps a child feel good about himself and tells him/her you care enough to notice.
- Explain house rules to the new children in your home, including why people and things work the way they do. If you can’t explain a rule, you may want to ask yourself why you need it.
- Demonstrate appropriate behavior and have other children help you. Actions speak louder than words.

- Plan time alone with every child for positive attention. The oldest needs just as much one-on-one time as the youngest.
- Anticipate problems and discuss consequences before problems come up. . Get a sense of prior problems the child has had and strategize how you might handle it if it comes up.
- Talk to the child in words and terms appropriate for his age or developmental level.
- Respond to the child's feelings first, then the behavior. After they calm down, you both can talk about the behavior.
- Try to recognize when you are upset or stressed about something else. Act, don't react, to the child's behavior.
- Give a child a chance to learn from their mistakes. Unless it is dangerous or costly, let the child learn the consequences of his actions.
- Be realistic with your expectations. Give the child time to change.
- Let the child know when he/she controls behavior well.
- Prepare the child for times of transition. Tell them where you are going, what you will be doing and how long you will stay. Also let them know that they will be returning home with you after a planned activity or visit.

4. Double checking safety issues

It's good to double check things in your home that might create some safety concerns.

i) Animals

If there are animals in the household, please provide close supervision of children when they are around animals, especially when the child and/or animal are also near the animal's food. Ensure that all pets are kept current on health examinations and vaccinations, including rabies shots for dogs, cats and ferrets. Make sure that the pets are not dangerous or aggressive towards people. Please contact your family coach if you have questions.

ii) Firearms

If you have firearms, please make sure they are locked and ammunition is stored separately.

iii) Water Safety

If you have a pool, please make sure the fence surrounding the pool is kept locked. Bodies of water include but are not limited to: above-ground or in-ground swimming pool on the property, or if there is a pond, lake, creek, stream or fountain. Also, please make sure that the adult supervising the swimming knows how to swim. Kids need direct supervision by an adult at all times around water.

iv) Motor Vehicle Safety

Make sure you have an appropriate car seat to transport the child according to your state rules. Below are general guidelines.

- (1) All children ages twelve (12) and under should ride in a back seat.
- (2) Infants should be in rear-facing child safety seats until at least twenty (20) pounds and at least one (1) year old.

- (3) Children over one (1) year old and between twenty (20) and forty (40) pounds can be in forward-facing child safety seats, or in rear-facing convertible seats if the child has not reached the maximum rear-facing weight.
- (4) Children ages four (4) to eight (8) (up to about 4 feet 9 inches tall) should be in a booster seat and restrained with lap and shoulder belts every time they ride. Adult safety belts alone do not adequately protect children this size from injury in a crash.
- (5) Children eight (8) years old and older, over 4 feet 9 inches tall, or weighing more than 65 pounds can usually fit correctly in lap/shoulder belts.
- (6) Children must be inside the vehicle when transported and wearing seat belts or other appropriate accommodations, i.e., car seats or booster seats.
- (7) The bed of a pick-up truck is not considered inside the vehicle.
- (8) No child placed with a Safe Family can be transported in a vehicle driven by an individual under the age of 18, regardless of whether the minor has his or her driver's license. Children should never be left unattended in a vehicle.

v) Sleep/Medication/Cleaning Supplies

Regarding infants, please make sure the child sleeps on their back or side, not stomach. Make sure and cleaning supplies are out of reach.

Other Safety Precautions

The following general safety precautions should be maintained.

- Fire and smoke detectors should be operational.
- It is important for everyone to know how to get out of the house in case of fire.
- Young children should not have access to matches and lighters.
- The hot water in the home should not be set higher than 120 degrees
- Hot items (hair dryers, curlers) should be kept out of the reach of children
- Extension cords should not be under rugs
- Electric outlets should be covered when not in use.
- Infants should sleep alone in a crib and should not sleep with toys or stuffed animals.
- Plastic bags, pins, balloons should be kept out of reach of children
- Young children should not play with toys they can swallow.
- Young children should never be left alone in a bath or pool.
- Drain the baby pool when not in use
- Never leave an infant alone while they are on changing tables
- Do not use a baby walker
- Do not have furniture that a toddler can climb on placed near a window.
- Never shake a baby
- Always leave the children with an appropriate caregiver.
- Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle.
- It's good to have a list of emergency phone numbers posted near the telephone.
- If your child has asthma, Safe Family staff has an asthma action plan available to assist you.

Section 3 – Routines and Structure

1. The importance of establishing routines

Establishing firm and consistent routines is one of the most important things you can do for the child. Many kids come from very chaotic environments where routines have been up for grabs. Developing clear and consistent routines will go a long way in helping the child adapt to their new environment. The following are some areas to develop routines in.

- **Meals** – There is a strong possibility that meals may have been quite irregular. Food is a basic need so when meals are irregular, having food is a priority. Please be sensitive to that. Some kids have a sense of security taking some food with them to bed or they may always be hungry. This is likely a response to inconsistent meals and their way of coping. Consistency in meals may alleviate some of their anxiety and communicate to them their importance to you.
- **Bedtime** – Bedtime is often a difficult time. This is when many ambivalent feelings come to the surface. Many kids express sadness at being separated at bedtime because this is when they are processing them. Consistency in bedtime schedules and routines (reading a book, rocking, staying in the room until the child is near sleeping) may be important interventions.
- **Following Rules** – Most likely your rules will be very different than what the child is aware of. Be sensitive to that. So many rules and expectations are unspoken. Do your best in helping the family bring their expectations and rules verbally. Also, help them understand that they might want to start with big rules and gradually add them in as the child adapts to their environment.

Type of discipline needed – Corporal punishment should not be used. Helping the parent consider other discipline strategies will be important. Then the parent should be consistent with implementing them. Time outs and taking away privileges are the most common.

2. Addressing health needs

Probably, one of the most important things a host family can do is to get a good understanding of the child's health and medical needs and get their treatment on track. There have been some many occasions where children come to host family homes with undiagnosed medical problems. Or the child had been diagnosed with something, but the parent was not aware of or confused about the treatment. If the child will be staying for a period of time, it might be worth the host family to bring the child to the doctor for a checkup. Many times we might not have all the medical history or immunization records, particular if the parent was homeless or their housing situation was unstable. Often, maintaining the child's health record is not the parent's top concern. Additionally, most parents can be overwhelmed understanding instructions from a Dr. regarding the child's condition. Our placing parents are the same. Make sure the host family maintains any treatment the parent instructs them to. Changes in treatment should only be done with the parent's permission.

3. Enrolling in school/homeschool

Schooling is another way we can serve the parent, when their child is returned home. Many Safe Family children are struggling with school. Some may have undiagnosed learning difficulties. It takes a self-assured parent to advocate for their children to make sure they are getting what they need. Many placing parents lack that assurance and sophistication needed to advocate for their academic rights. We could be a huge resource to parents if, while they are in our care, we can get a good understanding of their academic needs.

It would be important for the child to be enrolled in school right away. Priority is always to try and keep a child in their previous setting for consistency sake. Some schools will even provide transportation under a federal law. You certainly can advocate for that. However, it might be more convenient to enroll them in the local school, especially if the child will be there for a number of months.

Homeschooling: If the parent gives permission, children can certainly be homeschooled.

4. Setting up visits with parent

Regular visits between the parent and the child are probably the most important issue that should

be addressed. Visits not only help children with their adjustment but are instrumental in keeping the parent on track to address issues that led to the need for placement. The family coach may help you set up the visit and go with for the first one. It's important that visits are done at a convenient location to the parent as they will likely have the most difficulty with transportation. Although, visits are vital and necessary for the family, it is important to invite the placing parent in your home when you are comfortable and not too feel undue pressure

- i) Regular contact with placing parents gives the child several important messages: (1) the child can see that the parents care enough to visit, and the child can see that all the adults – placing parents, Safe Family parents, Family Coach – are working together; (2) children can see for themselves how much progress their parents are making toward getting them home. Research in the child welfare field consistently indicates the regular visits between children and the placing parent is the strongest indicator of family reunification.
- ii) Contact also is helpful for the parents. Just as the child may fantasize about “ideal” parents, the parents may forget how difficult parenting is. Regular contact with their child helps them measure their own ability and commitment to their children's return.
- iii) Contact between children and placing parents helps Safe Families too. It keeps them from becoming overly attached to the child, because they can see that this child and the child's parents belong together. Safe Families, by getting to know the placing parents, can better understand the child's behavior.
- iv) One of the most important benefits is that regular contact helps all the adults – placing parents, Safe Family parents, and Family Coach –practice partnership in assuring permanence for children.

5. Church and other activities

It can be difficult for a child to go into new surroundings with many people who are unfamiliar to them. Experiencing trauma and crisis can make it even more difficult. With that sensitivity in mind, our hope is that Host Family parents will be able to include the children placed with them in as many of the family's normal routines and support networks as possible, including church and faith-related activities of all kinds. Faith can be a valuable resource during difficult times. If a child is of a different faith from yours, we will make sure the parent agrees for their child to attend your church. We do want to respect the parent's wishes. It is important to get consent from parents if the child is going to be baptized or confirmed.

6. Out of State Travel

When you have plans to leave the area on vacation, we ask that you notify us as soon as possible. If you plan to leave the state, you can take the Safe Family child with you with the placing parent's permission. Because some Host Families have had difficulty getting kids through the airport, make sure you have all necessary consent forms with you. Since most people do not understand the Safe Families program but do understand foster care, many Host Families tell authorities that this is their foster child.

Chapter 4 – Ongoing care of the child and child development

Section 1 – Health

Many kids come to Safe Families with many unmet health/medical needs. It could be as simple as poor eating habits or as complex as undiagnosed asthma. Although parents attempt to inform us of all the health needs of their children, often they might minimize concerns or not be aware of existing troubles. Getting a good understanding of a child's health needs and implementing corrective interventions can be very helpful for the long-term development of the child.

Asthma is a breathing condition that many parents are not aware of. Exposure to second hand smoke can further complicate any breathing troubles that may exist.

Although medical exams are not required at intake, we strongly encourage the host family to bring the child to the doctor within the first 30 days.

Health Care Coverage

In nearly all situations a child should come with a medical card or public aid number. This will likely be public aid (state medical care). Nearly all physicians are required to provide services for patients on public aid. You might want to call your own doctor to see if they would be willing to take a child on public aid. There will not be a co-pay for services. If the card given to you is outdated, a Doctor's office often just needs the numbers on the card to access updated information on the internet. Even if a card is outdated, you should still be able to use it.

Uninsured Children

This typically is not a problem but it has arisen on occasion. If you have an uninsured child, Safe Families might have resources of physicians who are willing to see children without insurance. A second option is that every county has public health centers for uninsured patients. You might want to check your phone directory for the location of the closest public health clinic. If there is an emergency and you have to bring an uninsured child to the emergency room, they may ask for you to sign a form saying you will be responsible for the costs. Please call us if that happens. You should not have to sign that you will be financially responsible.

Emergency Treatment

Please bring the Safe Family child to the emergency room the way you would seek medical care for your own child. However, make sure you have the necessary paperwork with you when you go.

Universal Precautions

It's always a good practice to make universal precautions part of your family's routine. This will help to cut down on the chances that others may catch colds and other illnesses that a child might have. There are three universal precautions that can be used.

- Use a cloth barrier or wear gloves when caring for bleeding wounds, nosebleeds, bloody diarrhea and diaper changes.
- Clean surfaces exposed to blood with a bleach solution.
- Consistently wash hands (and teach children to wash hands) with soap and water.
- Children in the home should not share teething toys, feeding bottles or toothbrushes.

Section 2 – Emotional/Behavioral Development

When a child is with a host family, there is an opportunity for us to help expedite their emotional/behavioral development. Helping to improve a child's ability to follow instructions and accept no can be one of the most important things we can do for the parent. A child that is disobedient and defiant can create a lot of parenting stress and may ultimately lead to excessive corporal punishment by the parent out of sheer exhaustion. Teaching children how to follow instruction, take a time out, accept consequences, accept no, etc. will make a parent's job easier. In fact, if the host family can demonstrate to the parent how to use a time out, be consistent and simple with instructions, use effective praise, etc. we can increase the likelihood that things will go well. That is why we spend so much time dealing with discipline in a number of chapters in this manual.

Emotions: Initially, there might need to be focus on the 4 emotions below, as these unresolved feelings may hinder further emotional development.

1. Four Healing Emotions

Anger

- Anger allows children to emotionally explore what has happened that they did not want to happen.
- Children who are not given permission to feel anger risk remaining stuck in a numb and lifeless state.
- Feeling, then releasing anger reconnects a child to love and passion for life.

Sadness

- Sadness allows children to emotionally explore what did not happen that they wanted to happen.
- After a loss it is important for a child to have permission to be sad, so that the child can adjust to expectation of what is now possible.
- Feeling, the releasing, sadness opens a child's heart to the joys of love again.

Fear

- Fear allows children to emotionally explore what could happen that they do not want to happen.
- After a loss it is important for a child to have permission to be sad, so that the child can express very real and normal anxieties.
- Feeling, then releasing, fear provides a child the ability to express real needs.

Sorrow

- Sorrow allows children to explore what cannot happen than they want to happen.
- Sorrow is an acknowledgement of a child's powerlessness to undo what has happened.
- Feeling then releasing, sorrow provides a child with the ability to discern what is possible.

2. Dealing with Grief

Grief in children is often difficult to recognize. Although there might be some relief being out of a chaotic living situation, being separated from parents most likely can precipitate a sense of grief. Grief is often expressed in different ways.

Signs and Symptoms:

- Apparent lack of feeling (child appears numb or withdrawn)
- Physiological changes (changes in child's eating or sleeping habits)
- Regressed behaviors (child acting younger than their chronological age)
- Disorganized behaviors (panic or fear)
- Explosive emotions (anger or mood swings)
- Acting-out behaviors (hitting, kicking, yelling, etc)
- Guilt and self-blame (child blames self for family problems)
- Relief
- Isolation or loneliness

To help grieving children, adults need to:

- Allow children to be the teachers about their grief experience. Respect the child's timing and space. Listen carefully, make eye contact, and accept child's feelings (even if you disagree).
- Create safe environments where children can openly express their grief.
- Have emotional courage to go through grief with the child.
- Use simple direct language in explaining what has happened. Encourage child to ask questions, but also respect child's timing.
- Do not assume that every child in a certain age group understands the loss the same way or has the same feelings.

- Remember healing in grief is a process, not an event. Do not assume that children always grieve in some kind of orderly and predictable way.
- Do not misinterpret lack of apparent reaction for lack of feelings about loss. Remember that relief does not mean lack of love or lack of grief.

Section 3 – Learning and Education

Academics and learning are often quite a challenge for many of our kids. This may be because they are not genetically endowed with strengths in these areas. Additionally, when a parent is in a crisis situation, they will not be able to provide the academic support the child needs. Additionally, homelessness often leads to numerous changes in schools that could be very upsetting to children and limit their ability to learn from their situation.

While a child is with a host family, we have an opportunity to figure out what is the best learning environment the child needs. We also may have an opportunity to assess (formally or informally) whether there are any learning disabilities that might need special interventions. Finally, we have an opportunity to put in the child's routine the need to do daily work at home, whether they are assigned homework from school or not. Teaching the child that after school, there is a period of time where learning occurs will help them when they return home. Even if the host family has to create age-appropriate learning, this should be encouraged.

School and Book Fees

School districts often require hundreds of dollars for new students to cover their school fees. However, many school districts have waivers for children in crisis situations. In Illinois, for example, there is a waiver for school fees for homeless children and youth. By definition of needing a Safe Family placement, most children in the Safe Families program fit this category. These fees may include:

- Charges for text books
- Charges for locks, lab equipment, and towels
- Charges for field trips
- Charges for uniforms or equipment related to sports
- Graduation fees
- School record fees
- School health service fees
- Free or reduced lunches

Section 4 – Self-care

As mentioned previously, we'd like to return children back to their folks in better condition than when we received them. Part of this strategy is increasing their capacity to provide as much self-care as possible. As a result, we need to continually teach children how to do things for themselves. When there are young, this might involve toilet training, dressing, and cleaning themselves. As they get older, children will be better off if they learn to make their own breakfasts and lunches, internalize routines (bedtimes), etc. Many parents might not be in a position to provide exactly what their children need. So... if we can help them be in a position to get their own needs met, we are helping them in the long run.

Chapter 5 – Connecting to the Placing Parent

Biological parents maintain full authority and responsibility for their children. Our desire is that you will

be able to develop a positive, supportive relationship with them so that we can assist them in caring for their children. In fact, our hope is that this relationship might continue even after the children are returned to their parents. Placing parents may have various responses to you. Some are very embarrassed by their situation and thus may appear guarded or unappreciated. Many have very few supports in their life so they will accept anything you have to offer.

You might have some hesitancy about having the placing parent contact you until you get to know them. Our staff will do what we can to address this for you. Many parents would like to have phone contact with their children as much as possible. We hope this will be ok with you.

You have a significant opportunity to impact these parents in a way that family coaches and others do not have because you are taking care of their children for free and loving their child with them. You might want to keep the following in mind:

It is important to maintain an open and positive relationship with the parents, who are likely in a crisis situation and need all the support they can get. The best way to be supportive is to offer compassion and encouragement. Please be careful about giving financial resources (which may be provided to them through other means) or taking responsibility from them, which is important for them to bear as part of their healing. Please refrain from being judgmental or critical. Since many of us have not experienced the multiple difficulties they currently are under, it is difficult for us to understand the barriers that often arise.

Parent's rights are fully intact. Statistically, the best place for a child to grow up is with their family of origin. All other scenarios require redemptive hope.

Remember that we desire to minister the love of Christ to those we serve. Dr John Townsend reminds us that the two contributions that people bring to other people are connection and reality'. Connection is the fuel of life and provides the love, support, empathy and encouragement to navigate the storms of life. Being with people who are "for you" enables you to practice energy motivation clarity creativity and strength needed to get back on your feet. Don't underestimate the value of your offered relationship to these struggling parents. Remember back to a time when a simple connection with someone else fueled you to move through a difficult time.

As mentioned in Dr Townsend's quote the second contribution that people bring to other people is reality that has to do with advice wisdom expertise experience and competence. Making friends with reality is hard to do in isolation and placing parents are at the depth of their crisis and may not have practiced reality well as it has been too hard. However, as a young parent, many Moms (Dads) are ready to step forward on behalf of their children and give their children a second chance beyond what they received. Reality, offered in a graceful relationship such as you have as a host family with the placing parent can be a privileged divine appointment. Reality present may seem overwhelming but reality future may be a vision and a hope that you are able to envision on behalf of this struggling family and provide it to them. As they practice grace (connection) and truth (reality) in relationship with you and others on the Safe Families team they will be refueled to provide that for their children. Periodically, we may need to establish firm boundaries and guidelines concerning contact with the placing parent to model reality based relationship.

Section 1 - Parental Visits

Research shows that parents do better when they can visit their children who are in another's care. While we hope that the biological parents will be able to have such visits, this may not always be possible. When visits are possible, the family coach will seek to arrange visits on a weekly basis. Feel free to take the lead in this. We also encourage appropriate phone contact between the parent and their child, as well as between the parent and Host Family.

Homesick: In most cases, this is to be expected and a normal response of the child. When possible, the child should be assisted in contacting her/his parent(s). When that is not possible, the empathy and support of the Host Family can actually facilitate healing and a healthy bonding with the Host Family.

Section 2 - Disagreements with Parents

Biological extended families (and sometimes even biological parents) may disagree on what to do. It is important for Host Family parents to try to understand the biological parents and not react against ideas that may not be communicated in the best way. Remember that this is a family in crisis, and the parent (s) may feel very threatened or troubled by their need for their children to be away from them, even when they KNOW it is necessary and something they requested. Unless it is clearly against policy or the values of the Host Family, every effort should be made to accommodate the biological parents' preferences and include them in the decision. This may include simple things like cutting a child's hair. In case of ongoing conflict or failure to reach resolution, please contact Safe Families staff.

Section 3 – Engaging Parents

Jesus, in Matthew 12, tells of how once demons are cleaned out of a space, the space left unoccupied will become an open invitation for more troubles. When the Biological family is relieved of some stress by the placement of their child, they have space for new input. Safe Families need to fill up the Biological Family with new options of family living so that once their child is returned, they will not just go back to old, dysfunctional patterns.

So.. we need to move quickly to fill in the void that is created during this placement. Visits, implementing resources, etc are ways that we can make sure the parent fills the void with positive things.

Although parents look for help from Safe Families because of specific reasons such as homelessness, substance abuse, etc., the underlying reason for nearly all placements is social isolation. They lack the necessary support system that many of us naturally have because of family relationships or relationships we build within our church or with neighbors. It's sad to be in a position that you have no one else to turn to other than strangers when things are not going well.

There are a number of reasons why parents might not have a solid support network:

- The parents may lack the necessary social skills to develop and maintain relationships
- The parent's mental health may stand in the way of developing healthy relationships. Depression, bipolar, etc. often have accompanying relational difficulties.
- Many relationships develop because there is a natural give and take. Some placing parents have never learned or don't feel they have anything to give (low self-esteem, self-centeredness), so they only take. Those parents who grew up in foster care or learned very early that they have to fight for themselves because their parents were not responsible often continue this pattern into adulthood.
- Many communities that parents come from might not be conducive for mutual social connections, etc.
- Many parents have burned out relationships with family or friends because of their substance abuse history or making numerous promises that they don't follow through with.

Whatever the reason, most parents need caring people who are willing to befriend them. It's these relationships that have a powerful opportunity to prevent child abuse and crises in the future. This is the core of Safe Families, becoming part of the parent's support network. In the Christian world, we call it creating a sense of community. This is what we are experts in and this is what parents need the most.

It's an exciting match between the Church's ultimate strength with a parent's greatest challenge. This is why Safe Families is so important.

Section 4 - Hope

Many parents come to Safe Families not with one single problem, but with multiple problems. Our job is not to fix their problems. Many of the problems have been longstanding and cannot be completely fixed during their time with Safe Families. However, we do have an opportunity to communicate hope. Faith, hope and love but the greatest is love. However, hope is right up there. By giving the parent a moment to breath and alleviate the immediate crisis (what do I do with my child), we begin the process of giving the parent hope that their situation can be better. Interactions with the parent should be filled with hope. Although many times, we are hopeful for not specific reason. In Safe Families, we have to communicate hope that is reinforced by tangible action. If a parent can begin to feel a sense of hope, they can leverage the energy, new relations, and skills necessary to get things back on place.

Being Positive: The parent is filled with relationships that are negative. They hear messages from themselves or others that they are a failure. They can't provide for their children, they can't keep a job, they can't, they can't, etc. There might be some truth with the struggles they have. However, they do have the abilities to overcome many of their challenges. We see ourselves as having a coaching role with parents. A coach's job is to inspire, motivate, instruct, and encourage. Good coaches find and build on the athlete's strengths and bring in others that can help improve the athlete's performance. However, the athlete has to do the work. We can motivate, encourage, instruct and inspire the parent. However, they have to do much of the work. We must be good coaches. We must learn how to motivate the parent. We must learn how to help be positive in the midst of multiple problems and negativity. We must learn to help a parent break down tasks into doable activities. We must bring in the necessary supports to help parents get on their feet. We must be likeable so parents see us as someone they can go to for help and direction.

Ultimately, we realize that many of their challenges need divine intervention. We must be willing to talk with the parent about their spiritual condition and how to improve it, if they want to.

1. General Attitude toward placing parent

The following are some attitudes that help in the relationship with the parent.

- 1) Parents are assumed to be capable of being competent in the care of their child, although they may go through varying stages of functioning that impacts their care-giving abilities.
- 2) Coach/host family facilitates the spiritual extend-family relationship between the parents and the host parents.
- 3) Coach/host conveys a sense of cooperation in joint responsibility (partnership) for meeting needs and solving problems. Participatory decision making and shared responsibility are sought whenever possible.
- 4) Coach/host focuses on solving problems rather than criticizing or blaming the parents for the situation they are in.
- 5) Interventions are strength based. It's more effective to build on the parent's strength in order to compensate for their weaknesses rather than focusing on their weaknesses.
- 6) Coach/host maintains a positive, pro-active role that offers help and makes help readily available.
- 7) Coach/host works cooperatively with parent(s) to identify needs and goals and to select applicable services. This is something that needs to be worked on together. It typically isn't helpful if the family coach dictates to the parent what they need to do.
- 8) The parents need to be able to experience that the response-costs of seeking help does not outweigh the benefits of receiving help. In other words, asking for help should be easy. A parent should not be made to feel bad about it.

- 9) Coach/host seeks to enhance parents' problem solving and coping skills and helps them experience immediate positive reinforcement for their attempts. Our goal should be to role model and teach a parent how to address problems and come up with solutions rather than consistently do this for them.
- 10) Parents' desire to reciprocate for the assistance they receive is to be honored. If a parent would like to give back out of a sense of appreciation, the family coach and host family should respect that. This is part of building a mutually beneficial relationship and is a positive sign of health.

It is expected that coach/host family have at least weekly phone calls with the parents to determine their progress on the issues that led to the need for a SFFC hosting arrangement. These calls may also involve linking them to appropriate services and supports that would help them get back on their feet. The Family Coach will also facilitate visits and encourage and support the relationship between the host parents and parents. If the parent has some concerns about how their child is being cared for, the Family Coach would actively address those concerns.

2. Things to watch out for in your attitude

It's interesting how our own attitudes, prejudices, and experiences can stand in the way of connecting with the parent. If we have not experienced significant challenges in our lives, it might be hard for us to truly understand the challenges parents face. We have found that those who have had many life challenges and overcome them make great coaches and connect exceptionally well to parents. Here are some things to watch out for:

- Our own prejudices: Many of us will quickly conclude that we are not prejudice. However, watch closely your reactions to the placing parent and you might find some prejudices surface.
- Rescue mentality: We might feel an urge to rescue the parent/child and be seen as their "savior." It's important to guard against this because it communicates the parent is not capable.
- Negativity: We can easily get caught up in the parent's negative situation. We need to rise above this and be a constant messenger of hope, because of the hope we have in Christ.
- Distance: The parent's problems are overwhelming. A natural copy mechanism is to distance ourselves from them. We might be thinking that we are setting boundaries but in fact we are creating distance for our own benefit and protection.
- Unfair expectations: Many of us may feel that once we help a parent figure out what they should do, they should do it. We then become frustrated that they don't. It's important for us to hang in there with the parent. If they don't follow through on something that is simple, we need to break the task down to find out what went wrong.

3. Good Enough Parenting

It's important for us to guard against wanting the placing parent to be just like us. Or, we see the child flourishing in our home and want the parent to be just like us. This will only set us up for failure. There is a phrase in the child welfare world called "being a good enough parent." That is certainly appropriate for our families. The goal we need to work on with the parents is for them to be "good enough" to meet the needs of their children. You might think that children need the "best possible" parent. That might be true in many cases. However, in the cases of our parents, they are struggling by themselves with many challenges (finances, health, relationships, housing) that drain their energy and create distractions. Our goal is to help them deal with all these external stressors in such a way that they have enough strength to be "good enough" for what their child needs from them. Reducing our expectations may help us be more accepting, hopeful, and understanding. We

will not solve everything. However, if we can strengthen the “protective factors (mentioned below)”, we can help the parent be “good enough” for their child.

4. Protective Factors

Taken from: <http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/the-basics/protective-factors>

Protective factors are conditions or attributes in individuals, families, and communities, or the larger society that, when present, mitigate or eliminate risk in families and communities that, when present, increase the health and well-being of children and families. Protective factors help parents to find resources, supports, and coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress.

Five Protective Factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families Approach: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. Research studies support the common-sense notion that when these Protective Factors are well established in a family, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes. Research shows that these protective factors are also “promotive” factors that build family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child and youth development.

Safe Families directly addresses parental resilience, social connections, and concrete support. Knowledge of parenting and child development are also addressed in many situations.

Parental Resilience

No one can eliminate stress from parenting, but a parent’s capacity for resilience can affect how a parent deals with stress. Resilience is the ability to manage and bounce back from all types of challenges that emerge in every family’s life. It means finding ways to solve problems, building and sustaining trusting relationships including relationships with your own child, and knowing how to seek help when necessary.

Social Connections

Friends, family members, neighbors and community members provide emotional support, help solve problems, offer parenting advice and give concrete assistance to parents. Networks of support are essential to parents and also offer opportunities for people to “give back”, an important part of self-esteem as well as a benefit for the community. Isolated families may need extra help in reaching out to build positive relationships.

Concrete Support in Times of Need

Meeting basic economic needs like food, shelter, clothing and health care is essential for families to thrive. Likewise, when families encounter a crisis such as domestic violence, mental illness or substance abuse, adequate services and supports need to be in place to provide stability, treatment and help for family members to get through the crisis.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children’s behavior at every age help parents see their children and youth in a positive light and promote their healthy development. Information can come from many sources, including family members as well as parent

education classes and surfing the internet. Studies show information is most effective when it comes at the precise time parents need it to understand their own children. Parents who experienced harsh discipline or other negative childhood experiences may need extra help to change the parenting patterns they learned as children.

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

A child or youth's ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate their behavior and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults, and peers. Challenging behaviors or delayed development create extra stress for families, so early identification and assistance for both parents and children can head off negative results and keep development on track.

Chapter 6 – The Family Coach and other resources

Every child coming to your home will be assigned a family coach to work with you and the placing parent.

Section 1 - What does a Family Coach do?

There are four general roles a family coach has:

- 1) Supports the host family – The host family is the key to providing a safe and secure environment for the children as well as developing and positive relationship with the placement parent. The family coach is there to ensure the host family is supported and getting the resources they need. We will have a Safe Family Coach come to your home within 48 hours of placement to make sure everything is going well. The Family Coach will also visit your home weekly for the first 4 weeks. If placement lasts longer than four weeks, the visits from the Coach may decrease.
- 2) Monitors the safety and care of the child - The most important responsibility is monitoring kids that are currently in a host family home. This occurs 48 hours after the child starts with the host family and every week for at least a month. After a month, visits may be reduced to every other week. It's important for the family coach to make sure the child is adapting well to the home and the child is being well cared for. It would be important for the family coach to be aware of potential difficulties that may lead to a placement disruption if not addressed. Many potential disruptions can be avoided with early intervention.
- 3) Provides resources to the placing parent to help them get back on their feet - This may include making referrals and helping the parent get to any necessary appointments by making sure they know how to get there, etc. If there is another case worker involved, they will certainly take the lead here. However, you might need to fill in the gaps if their caseloads are high and they are not able to provide what the parent needs.
- 4) Facilitates the relationship between the host and placing parent - Many host families may become frustrated with the parent for many reasons. The family coach often serves as a mediator and interpreter of the parent's behavior and needs in order to facilitate compassion and empathy.

The Family Coach is your advocate. Feel free to contact them whenever you need help or direction. They will also be in contact with the placing parent on a regular basis to help them get back on their feet in order to get their children back. If things are not going well, it is important for you to let your Family Coach know.

Day Care

The parents in many Host Family homes both have to work. If you take in a child of day care age, please inquire whether the biological mother was ever approved for state subsidized day care. If she had been approved, it is likely this day care resource may continue when they are placed in your home.

Chapter 8 – Saying goodbye

Goal: To help the child and Safe Family prepare for the child to departure and return to their family.

At some point the child will return to his biological parents. Just as the initial transition is difficult so will the return be potentially difficult. These guidelines should help to make it easier on the child:

- Prepare for returning home the first day of placement. The host family should be encouraged to frequently talk about going home, pray for the parent with the child, etc.
- Prepare for the termination with family as soon as it is known that child will be going home.
- Always be open and honest with child. It's ok to acknowledge to the child that they might have ambivalent feelings. If the child mentions they don't want to go home, you can pursue that to find out why. If it's because the host family is more fun, then we need to matter of factly appreciate their thoughts but affirm the return home. However, there might be other reasons such as being uncomfortable with mom's boyfriend or something else that might need to be pursued further. Please do not put thoughts or ideas in their minds. Let them lead the conversation. Engage you family coach supervisor for feedback and direction.
- Create a schedule or calendar, to help the child understand the timing.
- Plan a good bye party for the child. This can be as simple as a special dinner with the child.
- Create life book or transitional object. This could be a photo of all of you in a frame or a treasure box with special keep sakes for the child. Depending on the length of stay you could also create memory box or book with the child.
- Make sure to honor the placing parent when they return for their child.

1. Preparing for Return Home

Once a date is becoming evident, it is suggested that you communicate this to the child in general terms (maybe this week). We want to avoid providing them a specific day when there might be good chances that something may fall through. It's better to be general and then notify them quickly with shorter-time frames when the exact date is known (you are leaving tomorrow).

2. Preparing Host Family for Transition

Preparing yourself for the separation is just as important. Even though it is frequently mentioned during the initial training, many families still struggle with sending the child back. In fact, they might not want to send the child home. They begin to fall in love with the child and want the best for them, which they believe might be their home. They don't fully understand that although they may have more "things," children still would prefer to be back with their parent, even if it's barely "good enough."

In most situations, putting in plans for ongoing contact and future visits can be the most effective way to deal with these separation concerns.

3. Setting the stage for ongoing contact/visits between host and placing parent

It is best if you are willing to have the parent call you if things don't go well with them. We see the reuse of a host family as not a negative thing. Many parents have periodic setbacks that require a

subsequent stay with the host family. Many times, the subsequent placements will likely be shorter in nature.

Planning for a visit within the month of the return home can be helpful, especially because it communicates to the parent that the reuse of a host family is really a normal intervention. Most parents have relatives that kids visit not because the parent is in crisis, but solely because they are considered extended family. We want this type of relationship to occur between the host and placing parent.

¹ Christine D. Pohl. *Making Room – Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, p. 33.

² Joseph Stowell. *The Trouble with Jesus*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003, p. 116.

⁶ Children Defense Fund Fact Sheet. www.childrendefense.org. 2007.

⁷ Ibid.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the New International Version.

Further Reading

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Lupton, Robert D. *Compassion, Justice, and the Christian Life*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007.

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