

Under the Microscope: Dealing With Maltreatment Allegations

When you first became a foster parent, adoptive parent, or relative caregiver, the possibility that you might be the subject of a child abuse investigation likely did not cross your mind.

Generally speaking, foster parents, adoptive parents, and relative caregivers have allegations made against them at a higher rate than the general public. Despite substantiation rates of such allegations being much lower in comparison to the general public, having to go through the investigation process can be stressful and frustrating.

How Can You Minimize the Risk of an Allegation?

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

The [Wisconsin Foster Parent Handbook](#)

includes a list of tips from the National Foster Parent Association about ways to minimize the risk of an allegation. We have included them here:

- Find out as much information as possible before deciding whether to take placement of a child, including the child's abuse or neglect history both at home and in out-of-home placements.
- Ask whether a child has a history of making allegations against caregivers.

Such a history does not mean the child is lying but could indicate a need for more involved treatment and more precautions that need to be put in place in the foster home.

- Do not accept placement of any child you do not feel confident you can adequately parent.
- Work with the agency and tribe to ensure that the child's needs are identified and met.
- Understand and follow all laws and regulations related to foster care.



- Develop family rules and expectations and ensure that all family members follow them. Rules might include:

- Always be clothed in common areas of the home.
- Restricting the foster parents' bedroom to foster parents only.
- Do not leave a child who has been sexually abused alone with

anyone unknown or unfamiliar to the child. Be mindful of who is caring for the child and possible triggers related to gender and the offender.

- Provide a HIGH level of supervision for a child who demonstrates or has a prior history of sexualized behaviors.
- Keep a daily log and record, making note of
 - Any unusual events, behaviors, comments, or reactions before or after interaction with family

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- members;
- School issues;
- Medical, dental, or therapy appointments
- All discussions with other professionals about the child's progress and needs (including social workers, attorneys, mental health professionals, etc.) with specific details about the person, event, and any important details.

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

- Promptly report any unusual incident or injury to the child's child welfare professional or tribal child welfare professional.
- Maintain a professional working relationship with the child's parents, child welfare professionals, and other professionals involved with the child.
- Participate in training for foster and adoptive parents about caring for children who have been abused or neglected.

What Can You Do if There's an Investigation?

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

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

You can, however, call the Wisconsin Family Connections Center at 1-800-762-8063. We are here to support you and can help you know what to anticipate. We can also connect you with other individuals, resources, and agencies that may be helpful to you in the interim.

We strongly encourage you to talk to other parents who have been through this investigative process. There are agencies across the state that provide opportunities for this type of connection through various parent-to-parent and peer support programs.

One example for foster and adoptive parents is the Foster and Adoptive Support and Preservation Program (FASPP), a program of the Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parents Association ([WFAPA](http://www.wfapa.org)). FASPP is a volunteer network of foster and adoptive parents who will offer support and help you navigate your way through different situations, including allegations of abuse and neglect.

What Else Can You Do During the Investigation?

Here are some additional tips from the Wisconsin Foster Parent Handbook and National Foster Parent Association:

- Maintain a professional attitude.
- Stay focused on understanding and following the procedures in place to assess the maltreatment report.
- Maintain or start a log of every conversation or activity related to the assessment, including the name of the person calling and the agency for which he or she works.
- Ask for copies of all documents, such as the complaint or report of abuse or neglect and the safety plan established for the child.
- Read documents carefully and ask questions about anything you do not understand.

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- Keep track of timelines for the assessment.
- Provide information and documentation to the agency about the event that caused the report to be made.
- Reach out to local foster care support groups and associations and ask for support and assistance.
- Request that the child welfare agency provide at least one contact person in the agency to provide ongoing basic information about the assessment process.
- Maintain your family's routine; do not isolate yourself from friends and family.

Going through the allegation process can be terrifying and upsetting, and you may feel very alone. But know that you will get through it. The team at the Wisconsin Family Connections Center, and other parents and caregivers who have experienced similar situations, can help provide support to you along the way.



Resources

Tip Sheet

- [Ten Tips to Survive an Allegation](#)

From the [Resource Library](#)

- *Legal Resource Manual for Foster Parents*, by Regina Deihl, J.D.

Additional Resources

- [Chapter Two of Wisconsin's Foster Family Handbook](#)
- [Foster Home Care For Children Regulations](#)
- [Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parents Association's FSAPP program](#)
- [Child Welfare Complaint Procedures in Wisconsin](#)
- [National Foster Parent Association](#)