

## Ten Tips to Survive an Allegation

Imagine this: Jessica had a visit with her case manager and a social worker for one of the children in her care. Jessica and Paula, her case manager, had a great conversation— they talked about the children and brainstormed some ideas and strategies. Afterward, Jessica felt good. She had started fostering a few years ago, and her whole heart was still in it. She loved helping children and their families.

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

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

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

1. **Stay calm.** Try not to let your mind run wild, imagining all the worst-case scenarios.
2. **Educate yourself.** Learning more about the dynamics of false allegations, the investigation process, and your rights as a foster parent may ease some of your worries and fears.
3. **Remember that workers from your agency can't discuss the investigation and details.** While the investigation is ongoing, your worker and others from your agency must be careful and mindful of the process. Remind yourself that they are always working, like you, in the child's best interest, and that they don't wish to do anything that will compromise the investigation.
4. **Be cooperative, respectful, and factual with investigators.** It can be difficult to remain calm in such an emotional situation, so do your best to keep emotion out of your conversations with investigators.
5. **Provide any documentation that may support the facts** (e.g., the child tends to make false allegations immediately after each weekly visit with Dad).

6. **Lean on your circle of support.** Talking with another foster parent who faced a similar situation may bring comfort and strength.
7. **Try not to take it personally.** Although it may feel very personal, remember the child's trauma history and that false allegations may be a symptom of that trauma.
8. **Trust the process.** Be generous with yourself and remember that the investigators involved know their process and will uncover what is true and what is false.
9. **Seek support from neutral resources who understand the foster care system,** such as a counselor or mentor who can help you remain positive and strong.
10. **Take good care of yourself.** Eating well and getting plenty of sleep will help keep your mind clear and reduce your stress while the process plays out.

After an allegation, give yourself time before making any decisions to close your fostering license or ask that a child be removed from your home. You may wish to take some time to reevaluate some things, such as:

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

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

## Tips That Might Help Prevent an Allegation

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

# Resources

## Tip Sheets

- [Under the Microscope: Dealing with Maltreatment Allegations](#)

## From the [Resource Library](#)

- *Legal Resource Manual for Foster Parents*, by the NFPA, the CWLA, Legal Advocates for Permanent Parenting, and the ABA-Center on Children and the Law
- [Family Support Groups and Support Associations](#)

## Learn in [the Champion Classrooms](#)

- [Before Asking for Removal: How to Prevent a Disruption](#)
- [Lying as Trauma-Driven Behavior](#)

## Additional Resources

- [WFAPA's Foster and Adoptive Support and Preservation Program](#)
- [WFAPA's Surviving Allegations of Abuse or Neglect](#)
- [State of Wisconsin Foster Parent Handbook](#)
- [Wisconsin Child Protective Services Process](#)
- [False Allegations: Helping Group Members Understand, Avoid, and Survive Them](#)