

THE SAFE FAMILY PARENT HANDBOOK

Introduction

Problem

By law and policy most state child welfare agencies are allowed to rescue only children who have suffered blatant abuse or neglect, leaving thousands of children and their families in difficult situations. With the changing economy, many more families are experiencing financial crisis, unemployment, and homelessness. Others are dealing with family violence, parental drug and/or alcohol use, illness or incarceration. During such crises, many parents are not capable of providing a safe and caring environment for their children.

Historically the extended family often stepped in to support parents by taking care of children for short periods of time, and neighbors came alongside families in crisis. However, many urban families are socially isolated and their extended family is non-existent or not available. The children in a family traumatized by crisis become especially at risk for neglect or abuse as their parents struggle to cope with crushing circumstances and emotions. Without assistance, many of these situations will lead to abuse/neglect episodes with long-lasting consequences for the child

Safe Families Solution

Safe Families for Children (SFFC) is a network of host families that extends the community safety net by providing parents in need a loving sanctuary where they can safely place their children in times of crises. Parents voluntarily place their children temporarily with a Safe Family, so they can have the time needed to address personal issues without fear of losing custody.

Host Families, prompted solely by compassion, are screened, trained and serve without compensation. As a result, SFFC is a voluntary, non-coercive alternative to the state child welfare system.

Objectives

The Safe Families Program strives to meet three objectives:

1. **Child Welfare Deflection:** Safe Families provides a safe alternative to child welfare custody, thus significantly reducing the number of children entering the child welfare system.
2. **Child Abuse Prevention:** Providing an overwhelmed and resource limited parent with a safe, temporary place for their child without threat of losing custody can avert potential abuse/neglect episodes.
3. **Family Support and Stabilization:** Many parents struggle because of limited informal social supports and unavailable extended family. Many Safe Families become the extended family that a parent never had. One objective of the Safe Families program is for the Safe Family to develop a mentoring relationship with the placing parent, and that this relationship would continue even after the children are returned home. As part of that process, we hope that the Safe Family's resource network might be energized to provide initial and ongoing emotional and tangible support to the placing parent.

Who refers families to the Safe Family Program?

50% of families are referred by the child welfare system. Referrals also come from hospitals, drug treatment and homeless centers, prisons, schools, police stations, adoption agencies, churches, family members, etc.

What type of situations do these children come from?

The children come from families who are experiencing crisis of one sort or another. Many families experience financial crisis, unemployment, and homelessness. Although shelters are available, most do not accommodate children, and the ones which do are chronically full. In other cases, children may come from families thrown into crisis because a parent:

- Needs time for physical, mental, drug and/or alcohol rehabilitation
- Needs to address the issue of spousal abuse
- Has been remanded to a correctional institution.
- Has limited financial resources and/or suddenly become homeless.

While crises are traumatic, they also offer the opportunity for positive personal and familial transformations.

How long will the child stay with me?

The average length of time a child will be with a Safe Family is 45 days, and can range anywhere from overnight up to 3 months, or even 18 months under special circumstances. Every effort will be made to estimate how long that time will be at the time of placement. Factors determining the length of time include:

- severity of the family's crisis,
- willingness and ability of the biological parent to address the issues involved in the crisis,
- other situational variables needed for the family and home to be stable and healthy.

What type of child may I expect?

The ages of the children range from newborn infants through parenting teens (up to age 18). 85-90% of the children are returned to their parents.

Just like adults, the children will respond to their family crisis in different ways. Some children show little response to their circumstances, while others may be deeply troubled. Just as children in the same family are different from each other, so these children will each have their own individual personalities. While some children will have experienced a measure of trauma, these children are not believed to be victims of abuse and neglect; otherwise they would be wards of the state and not eligible for this program.

Chapter 1 – Approval Process and Requirements

Safe Family Parent Requirements

It is our preference to recruit Safe Family parents that see their participation in this program as a way of living out the compassion of Christ in caring for the hurting. Parents like this are able to bring the healing dynamic of Christian love to children and families in crisis. Thus, we prefer parents who are an active part of a Christian faith community, but we do remain open to those of other faith traditions that meet Safe Family requirements.

It is the policy of Safe Family to approve the most competent and effective safe parents to care for the needs of the children. The ultimate goal is to provide a culturally relevant (sensitive) and secure family that is free from any potential dangers to the child. It is also important for the child to feel loved and cared for as though they are a part of the family. The impact you have in the life of this child is significant. In order to do this, the following requirements of Safe Family parents are made:

1. Safe Family parents need to have verification of income. This is in order to ensure that the parents are capable of supporting their current household independently and that the child will not place any additional undue financial strain on the family.
2. Safe Family parents need to be over the age of 25 years; stable, mature and law abiding.
3. Safe Family parents need to be free from the use of drugs and alcohol on a regular basis.
4. Safe Family parents' home must be in a satisfactory condition.
5. Safe Family parents must be willing to agree to the requirements of the sponsoring agency (Lydia Home Association in Chicago) regarding guidelines for parent's expectations.
6. Safe Family parents must be willing to refrain from profanity and other potentially damaging behavior to a safe child.
7. A Safe Family parent must 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 safe parent.

Safe Families vs. 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. Safe Families receive no funds to help in caring for children while Foster Families receive a small monthly stipend. These distinctions of legal and financial involvement are essential to the distinctive dynamic of compassion within Safe Families care.

Safe Families are patterned after Foster Families in terms of how they are authorized to serve. Every effort is made to assure that the Safe Family truly is safe and appropriate to care for children. These efforts include many of the same requirements that Foster Families have including home study, background checks, references, and agreement to use only non-corporal measures of discipline with children brought into their care.

In order to enable compassionate people to more easily participate, the training required of Safe Families was abbreviated omitting training about serving abused children and navigating the legal system. Our belief is that there are many families who desire to serve but the amount of

training time required to become a foster family becomes prohibitive. Thus we have sought to make Safe Families certification more 'trainee-friendly.'

Full Foster Care licensure opens up additional options for families serving as Safe Families. Families that are fully licensed usually can continue to care for a child if that child's parents aren't able to resolve their difficulties and the child goes into the child welfare system. More resources are available to families who are fully licensed. Being fully licensed gives families an advantage on preparing for adoption if that is something they are considering in the future.

Both options of care (Safe Families and Foster Families) are available and we urge you to carefully consider which is the best fit for you. We are happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have. Whatever your choice we appreciate your interest in serving hurting children and families through this growing movement of compassionate hospitality.

Approval Process

There are a number of steps 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 Safe 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 steps include:

- Completion of the Safe Family Application
- Completion of a Home Study. Our staff/volunteer 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
- Completion of Training – live or DVD (workbook and DVD now available online at www.safe-families.org)

Determining Capacity and Types of Children

During the home study process, we will talk with you about the number and types (ages, gender) 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 2 – Placement Process

How are families are referred to Safe Families?

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, 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 Safe Families that have been (or are willing to) trained to meet those needs.

The Safe Family staff will then fax or email documents that the parent needs to complete. We will not begin looking for a family unless these documents are completed and turned into us.

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.

How will I receive the child?

Once you agree to take a child, a Safe Family staff will usually drop off the child at your home. We also may have you meet us half way or, if you are up for it, pick up the child yourself.

Children often arrive with very few clothes and supplies. Please remember that these are crisis situations. We will do everything we can to get additional clothes as soon as we can and help provide what you need. Many Safe Families have developed a network of support, especially from their church, to help provide clothes and other supplies.

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

- Consent for Short-term Guardianship
- Power of Attorney for Health Care
- Placement Agreement Form (In some states, placement agreement and short-term guardianship form are combined)
- Child Intake Form
- Medical Card – This can be used to seek medical care if needed

We will give you all the information we have about the child coming into your home, including any medical history. However, it is always possible 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.

What to expect when a child comes to my home?

Children have a variety of reactions to being placed with a Safe 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.

Contact with Safe Family Staff

A Safe Family staff member will come to your home within 48 hours of placement to make sure everything is going well. The Case Coach will also visit your home weekly for the first 4 weeks. If placement lasts longer than four weeks, the Case Coach visits may decrease.

The Case Coaches are your advocate. You can 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 and get their children back. If things are not going well, it is important for you to let your Case Coach know. Safe Families now have access to a data base at www.safe-families.net. The data base is a tool you can use to communicate with your case coach as well. Once logged in, you can write notes about the child in your care or conversations you have had with the parent. Your notes will then be saved and become part of his/her record.

Safe Family parents are expected to keep their case coaches informed of all significant events pertaining to the safe child. To do this, each family must have a telephone in their home or a cell phone. If you are unable to reach your case coach by phone, you have the option of paging your worker or leaving a message at his/her office.

Contact with Placing Parents

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 support 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 may appear guarded or unappreciative. 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 Safe Family staff do not have because you are caring for their children for free. You might want to keep the following in mind:

1. It is important to maintain an open and positive relationship with the parents. Please remember that they 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 are going through, it is difficult for us to understand the barriers that often arise.

2. Parents' rights are fully intact.
3. Remember that we desire to minister the love of Christ to those we serve.
4. Periodically we may need to establish firm boundaries and guidelines concerning contact with the Safe Family.
5. Our focus is to support the parent and reunify the children. We desire to strengthen the parent so they can better care for their children.

Anything you can do to engage and support the parent will go a long way in helping the parent remain engaged with their child and supporting them to get back on their feet. Phone calls, pictures, etc. are all helpful in communicating that the parent is still the prior in their child's mind and that you have no intent to replace them.

Will the child's parents visit their child while in Safe Families care?

Research shows that parents do better when they are able to have visits with their children while their children are in care. While we hope that the biological parents will still be able to have time with their child/children while they are not living together, this may not always be possible. When visits are possible, Safe Families staff (and sometimes staff from other agencies) will seek to arrange visits on a weekly basis. We also encourage appropriate phone contact between the parent and their child as well as between the parent and Safe Family. It is up to the Safe Family whether they are willing to have the parent visit their child in the Safe Family home. If not, visits will likely occur at a neutral location.

What if the child gets homesick or misses her/his parents?

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 Safe Family can actually facilitate healing and a healthy bonding with the Safe Family.

What if the biological parent and I have a disagreement about caring for the child?

Even biological extended families have these kinds of disagreements (sometimes even the biological parents between themselves!) It is important for Safe Family parents to strive 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. The parent(s) may feel threatened or troubled by having to leave their children in someone else's care (even when they KNOW it is necessary and something they themselves requested).

Unless it is clearly against policy or the values of the Safe Family, every effort should be made to accommodate the biological parents' preferences and include them in the decision. This may include very simple things such as cutting a child's hair. In case of ongoing conflict or failure to reach resolution, please contact Safe Families staff.

Confidentiality

For you to work effectively with the children referred to our program, it is essential that you have information about the child's family and background. However, because this is personal information, it can be misinterpreted by others in the community. It is legally necessary that

you, as a Safe Family parent, hold this information in confidence. For example, the parent's full name and contact information should probably not be shared with others who will not have contact with or reach out to that parent. It is probably fine to share with your friends and family why the child is in your care but not the specifics regarding the parent's information. A general rule to consider is if you were in that parent's situation, what information would you want your Safe Family saying to others? Taking pictures of the child and showing them your family and friends is fine. However, if those pictures will be used in some public situation (church, etc.) we would need to get the parent's written permission.

What if a non-custodial biological parent shows up to remove the child from my care?

This has never happened. In fact, no custodial parent has ever showed up to remove his/her child without the prior notification. Assuming that the non-custodial parent does not have this legal right, he/she should not be allowed to remove the child. Please contact the Safe Family staff immediately if this happens, so the situation may be clearly discussed with the custodial parent. It is important for the child to only be returned to the parent who makes the placement unless other arrangements have been made.

Can I bring the child to church?

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 Safe Family parents can include the children placed with them in as many of the family's normal routines and support networks as possible. That would certainly include 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 the child to attend your church. We do want to respect the parent's wishes. It is important to get consent from the biological parents if the child is going to be baptized or confirmed.

Can the child have overnight visits and babysitters?

Yes, the child can have overnight visits with people you know and be cared for by babysitters. If this will be a regular occurrence and certain people will be regularly caring for the child, Safe Family staff will want to know and will likely run a child abuse and law enforcement check on the caregiver.

Can I take a child out of state?

When you plan to leave the area on vacation, we ask that you notify us as soon as possible. If you are leaving the state, we would like to get the parent's permission to take the Safe Family child with you.

Some Safe Families have had difficulty getting kids through the airport. Please 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 Safe Families tell just authorities that this is their foster child.

Ending Placements

There are a number of ways placements may end.

1. **Planned return home date:** At placement, we work with the parent to identify how long they think their child needs to be in care with a Safe Family. This is how we determine how long a placement is expected to last when we call you. It is important to note that

many times parents underestimate how long it will take them to get back on their feet. Many times they are being optimistic. However, it is important to note that there are some social conditions that are very difficult to overcome. For example, homelessness is a very difficult societal problem that often takes longer than a parent might want.

2. **The parent may decide to take the children back earlier than originally planned.** Although we attempt to return children to their original homes in a planned manner, the parents can decide anytime they want, with little to no warning. If this occurs, we apologize to you ahead of time. There is little we can do.
3. **You may choose to end the placement.** If things are not going well, you can choose to end the placement. We will either find another family or return the child to his/her parent. It would be helpful if you give us some warning that this may occur. However, we understand that you may have some crisis come up that a change in placement is needed.

Reuse of Safe Families

We understand that the path to becoming an effective parent is often fraught with periodic setbacks, many of which are beyond the parent's control. Because of that, we view the reuse of Safe Families as generally a positive step. If a parent needs a replacement of their child, we will first contact the Safe Family that last had the child to see if they will be willing to take them back. That Safe Family is certainly not obligated to take the child back. However, not staying with the parent can be somewhat difficult for a child so we hope that a replacement would be with a Safe Family that is familiar to the child.

It is not uncommon for the Safe Family to know that a replacement is needed before we do. If a Safe Family has ongoing contact with the parent (as intended by the program) they will likely be asked first by the parent whether they would be willing to take the child back. If that does occur, we ask that you notify us so that we can help support the parent and monitor the child that is in your care.

Chapter 3 - Discipline and Supervision

Discipline Of Children

Physical and/or mental abuse has no place in an agency dedicated to the welfare of children and ultimately to society as a whole. It is our intention that no staff member or Safe parent be allowed to engage in abusive behavior toward another person. Abuse includes any attempt to do physical harm to another. The use of any form of physical punishment, including spanking, is prohibited. Here are some guidelines:

- a. Discipline shall be appropriate to the age of the child, related to the child's act, and shall not be out of proportion to the particular inappropriate behavior. Discipline shall be handled without prolonged delay.
- b. The Safe Family parent shall be responsible for the discipline of the child. Discipline shall never be delegated to a child's peer or to persons who are strangers to the child.
- c. No child shall be subject to corporal punishment, verbal abuse, threats, or derogatory remarks about him or his family.
- d. No child shall be deprived of a meal or part of a meal as punishment.
- e. No child shall be deprived of visits with family or other persons who have established a parenting bond with him/her.
- f. No child shall be deprived of clothing or sleep as punishment.
- g. The child may be restricted to an unlocked bedroom for a reasonable period of time. While restricted, the child shall have full access to sanitary facilities.
- h. The child may be temporarily restrained by a person physically holding the child if he/she poses a danger to himself or others.
- i. Special and additional chores may be assigned as a disciplinary measure.
- j. Privileges may be temporarily removed as a disciplinary measure.
- k. Children should generally not be disciplined for something they cannot control (e.g. bedwetting).

Corporal Punishment

Corporal Punishment is not allowed on Safe Family children. Although this is a very effective means to manage behavior, the background of the child is not known, so we are often not sure what a spanking might mean to them. Spankings can also be misinterpreted, which can create difficulties for the Safe Family parent.

Tips from Experienced Caregivers

- 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, 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 of developmental level.
- Respond to the child's feelings first, then the behavior. After the child is calm, 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 his/her behavior well.
- Be sensitive to your own children's needs during this time

Chapter 4- Health and Safety

Safe parents are responsible for tending to the medical needs of all children placed in their home. When a child is placed with you, you will be given a signed form called Power of Attorney for Health Care. This form is needed whenever you will be seeking medical attention. This gives you the authority to seek medical care on behalf of the child. In nearly every situation, we attempt to include placing parents in any medical decision. However, if they are not available, you are the decision maker.

In most situations we have a good sense of the child's health status. However, it's important to note that we may not know everything about a child or the parent may tell us inaccurate information. For example, a parent might believe their child no longer has problem with asthma because they have not had an incident for awhile. Please be alert to any potential medical concerns.

Health Care Coverage

In nearly all situations a child should come with a medical card. This will likely be public aid (state medical care). Most physicians are required to provide services for patients on public aid, but many have reached their maximum public aid patient load. You might want to call your own doctor to see if they would be willing to take a child on public aid. There will be NO 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. Please call the after-hours pager if you are going to the emergency room.

Behavioral/counseling Services

If you are in close proximity to the Safe Families office, counseling services would be available for the child and his/her parent. Your county also has services for residents with limited resources. We are developing a network of mental health personnel willing to see Safe Family clients for little cost.

Universal Precautions

It is 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.

1. Use a cloth barrier or wear gloves when caring for bleeding wounds, nosebleeds, bloody diarrhea and diaper changes.

2. Clean surfaces exposed to blood with a bleach solution.
3. Consistently wash hands (and teach children to wash hands) with soap and water.
4. Children in the home should not share teething toys, feeding bottles or toothbrushes.

Safety Precautions

The following general safety precautions should be maintained.

- No firearms should be kept in the home unless they are locked up.
- All chemicals and medications should be secured and out of a child's reach.
- Fire and smoke detectors should be operational.
- Everyone living in the home should know how to get out of the house in case of fire.
- Young children should not have access to matches and lighters.
- 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.
- No extension cords should be under rugs.
- Electric outlets should be covered when not in use.
- Infants should sleep alone in a crib, on their backs, without 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.
- Baby pools should be drained when not in use.
- Always supervise children when they are near water.
- Pools should have a security fence or alarm.
- Never leave an infant alone while they are on changing tables.
- Do not use a baby walker.
- Do not place furniture a toddler can climb on near a window.
- Never shake a baby.
- Always leave the children with an appropriate caregiver.
- Younger children must ride in car seats and older children must have seatbelts on.
- Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle.
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers posted near the telephone.
- If your child has asthma, Safe Family staff has an asthma action plan to assist you.

Chapter 5 – Education

Every attempt will be made to keep the child in the same school which they have been attending. Our aim will be to place children with Safe Families whose home is geographically close to where the child has been living and goes to school. If that is not possible, we hope to facilitate transportation arrangements for the child to attend the same school they have been attending. If that is not workable and the placement is longer than a couple of weeks, we will help to enroll the child in the school most convenient to the Safe Family home.

Enrolling the child in school

In most school district, the Short-Term Guardianship Form should be sufficient to enroll the Safe Family Child in the local school. You will likely need prior school records, birth certificate, and immunizations and any current or prior Individual Education Plan (IEP) if the child has special educational needs. This information may be difficult to obtain because of the crisis nature of the placements. Some schools are willing to contact the previous school for that information. You might ask the school if they would be willing to do that.

Home Schooling

We are very supportive of families who are interested in Home Schooling the Safe Family Child in their care. We would like to know that you are intending to do that, once placement occurs. If you have any difficulty with the home schooling process, please let us know.

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. For Example, 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
- Bus

However, lunch and afterschool fees might not be covered. In schools that have a free or reduced lunch program, Safe Family children would definitely qualify. Contact your case coach if you have additional questions.

Day Care

The parents in many Safe Family homes work outside the home. If you take in a child of day-care age, please inquire whether the biological mother was ever approved for state subsidized day care (Action for Children in Illinois). If she had been approved, it is likely this day care resource may continue when they are placed in your home.

Chapter 6 – Miscellaneous Items

Mandated Reporters

In all states, there are certain groups of people who are identified by law as mandated reports. This means that they are mandated to contact the child welfare hotline to report the suspicion that a child has been abused or neglected. Mandated reporters are professions such as doctors, nurses, therapists, teachers, foster parents, etc. Since Safe Family parents are not foster parents, they do not fit under the mandated reporting requirements. However, any citizen has the right to make a report on any child that they are concerned about their safety. In Illinois, for example, this would involve making a call to the hotline at 1(800)-25ABUSE. If you have concerns regarding the health or safety of a child and/or are concerned that they might have been a victim of abuse or neglect, we suggest that you contact your case coach who can help with making the determination whether or not to report the incident. In fact, the coach may offer to call the hotline (as they are mandated reporters) if the concerns rise to a significant level. Because Safe Families Program intervenes prior to abusive and neglectful behavior, calling the hotline has not been a frequent activity. Also, if the family is referred by a state child welfare worker, a report has already been made which resulted in their involvement.

Cultural Sensitivity

In every case, efforts are made to place children in homes with minimal cultural differences. However, this cannot occur all the time. In order to make out of home placement the least disruptive for the child, the Safe Family parent may ask the placing parent about typical food, routines, hygiene, etc. Not only does this reduce the trauma to the child, engaging the parent also helps them feel less ostracized and reduces their fear that the Safe Family parent will take their place.

Emergency Coverage

If there is a medical emergency, immediately seek medical attention. Please inform your case coach and the placing parent as soon as you possibly can. Each region will have an on-call number for you to call if you need advice after hours. Please contact your case coach for that number.

Adoption and Court Appointed Guardianship

The objective of the Safe Family program is to provide support to parents until they can get back on their feet. 85-90% of children are returned back to their parents. However, there may be an occasion where the child cannot go back home. If that does occur, usually court appointed guardianship is sought. Court appointed guardianship is typically good until the child turns 18. Adoption may be an option in some situations if a parent agrees to have their parental rights terminated. Your case coach can provide more information if this direction is needed.

Parent wanting to stay with the Safe Family

There are some situations in which a Safe Family would prefer to take in the parent as well as their child. This is certainly allowed if the Safe Family is open to that. In fact, in many situations, this allows the Safe Family to have greater impact on the parent and helps to reduce trauma to the child. However, this is certainly not an expectation of all Safe Families. If a parent makes a request to stay with you and this is something you do not feel comfortable with, simply inform them that this is not something you are able to do. If it becomes awkward or the parent persists, inform your case coach and they can help intervene.

Safe Families Data Base

Safe Family Manual

Safe Families data base (www.safe-families.net) was created to help streamline the management of the Safe Families program. It is a web-based system that can be accessed by any computer that is able to log onto the internet. This tool is also meant to be helpful to you. When you become an approved Safe Family, you will be given a log-in and password to enter the system. You will then be brought to your home page that has your contact information and the ages and types of children you are able to take in. We use that information all the time to locate a Safe Family placement. We ask that you would keep this information up to date. It also gives you an opportunity to put in blackout dates (dates that you are not able to take in children) so that we won't bother to call you during times you are not available. When you have a child in your care, your home page will also include basic information on the child and contact information for their parent and the referral source. There is also a section for you to write notes on the child. If there are certain events that have occurred in the life of the child or information that you have gathered from a conversation with a parent, we ask that you type this into the note section. This will become part of the child's record and also help to keep the case coach informed. There is also a section on your home page for community support time. We found that Safe Families are constantly engaging others in providing support and care for the child and their family. We've been advised by many Foundations to keep track of all the donated activities, goods, and services that the family receives. However, we are often not aware of all that you are doing on behalf of the child and family. So... if you have someone providing child care, a dentist willing to treat the child for free, or goods that someone has donated to you, please include this information in the "community support time." This will certainly strengthen our position when we seek support from local foundations or churches.