



# Policy and Guidelines

Dear Team Member, Support Friend, Advocate, and/or Foster Family,

Welcome to Foster the City!

At Foster the City, we take our responsibility to care for Foster Families very seriously as they are caring for vulnerable children. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which Foster Families continue to care for children in foster care in a sustainable way.

The pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for Foster the City team members and volunteers. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for the Foster Family and Support Friend relationship to grow. The following procedures have been adopted and will be strictly enforced.

After you have carefully read this policy manual, please sign the agreement form located on the last page and it will be automatically sent to our team.

Sincerely,

Foster the City Team

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In this document:

**Foster the City Team Members** are staff and leadership volunteers (Advocate Coaches, Vision Team, and Central Volunteers).

**Volunteers** are Advocates, Support Friends, or additional volunteers (not childcare volunteers, see additional form for that policy and guidelines)

**FTC Trained Adult** is an adult who has attended their orientation, completed their SAAT, signed the Policy & Guidelines, and completed their background check(s)

Throughout this document we refer to the **child or children** in the Foster Family's home. For clarity, this means **both children who are permanently part of the family** (guardianship/adopted/biological children) **and children in foster care.**

# Overview of the Foster the City Safety System

Because we love Foster Families and the safe place they are creating for children welcomed into their home, Foster the City requires all team members, Advocates, Support Friends, and Volunteers to complete **FOUR SAFETY STEPS** before serving in any role begins.

## STEP ONE: In Person Training

It is a requirement for all team members or volunteers to meet face to face with Foster the City Leadership for their initial training. This is including, but not limited to:

- Support Friends attending an Orientation lead by their Church's Advocate or facilitated by another Foster the City leader
- Advocates trained by their FTC region's leadership team (Director of Advocate, an Advocate Coach, etc.)
- Advocate Coaches on boarded by Foster the City Leadership team

\*The only person/people involved in FTC who do not need to complete this step is any Foster Parent(s) as their training will be done by their approving agency. However, they will attend a Launch Meeting hosted by Foster the City and/or meet with their Advocate to start the process of being wrapped by Support Friends.

## STEP TWO: Policies & Procedures + Information Forms

Team members and volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this manual and sign the last page indicating that he or she has read and understood the material and agrees to comply with policy requirements.

All volunteers must also complete their Information Forms so we have your information correctly stored in our database and record your connection and engagement to FTC.

## STEP THREE: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training + Reporting

Foster the City policies and procedures require that team members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Team members and volunteers are required to report any policy violations to the Foster the City Central team.

Team members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in 'grooming' a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win the child's trust (and the trust of the child's parent, Foster Parent, or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip Foster the City team members and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, **Foster the City requires all team members and volunteers to complete MinistrySafe's Sexual Abuse Awareness Training.**

This training will be sent to you by FTC's Program Director and covers grooming and abuse of all kinds. **This training will be renewed every 5 years.**

All team members and volunteers **are required to report any grooming, abuse, or neglect to their local county child welfare department or to a local law enforcement agency (local police/sheriff's department)**. Reporting to FTC alone is not sufficient. For additional information on how to report, visit: [fosterthecity.org/reporting](https://fosterthecity.org/reporting)

## STEP FOUR: Criminal Background Check(s)

Foster the City requires that all team members and volunteers undergo criminal background checks. While the Background check varies by state, all will have a background check performed on them through Ministry Safe and anyone in California will have a dual background check that consists of a Live Scan as well. **Individuals who have committed sexually-oriented or sex-related crimes may not serve in any area of Foster the City.** In addition, certain other past criminal acts *may* preclude anyone from serving through Foster the City.

# Child Safety Policy

## Abuse Tolerance

Foster the City has a **zero tolerance for abuse**. It is the responsibility of every team member and volunteer at Foster the City to act in the best interest of all children while working with partner churches and Foster Families.

In the event that team members or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) it is their responsibility to let their Advocate know.

If the inappropriate behaviors are any type of suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) or grooming it is their responsibility to immediately report their observations to **their local county child welfare department or to a local law enforcement agency (local police/sheriff's department) and Foster the City.**

Reporting to FTC alone is not sufficient but is a required step as FTC will need to remove the person(s) from the ministry until the allegation has been investigated. For additional information on how to report, visit: [fosterthecity.org/reporting](https://fosterthecity.org/reporting)

## Reporting Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors

Foster the City is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to the Foster the City Central team and the Police Department or Child Protective Services.

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to a supervisor or a member of the Foster the City Safety Committee. Because sexual abusers ‘groom’ children for abuse, it is possible a team member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to ‘groom’ a child for sexual abuse. Team members and volunteers are required to report ‘grooming’ behavior, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to Foster the City through **[fosterthecity.org/reporting](https://fosterthecity.org/reporting)** and any suspected abuse, grooming, and/or neglect to the Police or Child Protective Services. Information on how to do that can also be found at the same link: **[fosterthecity.org/reporting](https://fosterthecity.org/reporting)**

## Enforcement of Policies

Foster the City team members and volunteers who supervise other team members or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all Foster the City policies. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from a position – for both volunteers and team members. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of Foster the City’s Central Leadership

# Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse

## Reporting Violations of Policy

In order to fight for a safe environment for our children, Foster the City team members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to an immediate supervisor: Advocate at your local church or FTC Central Team. Refer to [fosterthecity.org/reporting](https://fosterthecity.org/reporting)

## Consequences of Violation

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by Foster the City to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from participation in Foster the City. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective agencies.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act should be prohibited from future participation as a team member or volunteer in all activities through Foster the City.

If the person is a team member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment or involvement from Foster the City.

Failure to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination (employee) or removal (volunteer). Team members or volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities through Foster the City.

## Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse

Foster the City is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for Foster Families and the children in their care. To this end, any report of inappropriate behavior or suspicions of abuse or neglect will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to Child Protective Services or criminal law enforcement.

Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible that a team member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to groom a child for sexual abuse.

As a reminder from the above section Child Safety Policy:

If a team member or volunteer observes any inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) that are not considered abusive, it is their responsibility to let their Advocate know.

If the inappropriate behaviors are any type of suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) or grooming it is your responsibility to immediately report the observations to **local county child welfare department or to a local law enforcement agency (local police/sheriff's department) and Foster the City.** Information on how to report is found at [fosterthecity.org/reporting](http://fosterthecity.org/reporting)

### **When in doubt, report.**

Policy violations that are not abuse, grooming, etc. do not need to be reported to the authorities, just your Advocate so the person(s) can be corrected and the incident documented.

## Reporting Allegations or Suspicions of Abuse to Law Enforcement

*Foster the City requires all team members and volunteers to report all suspected or alleged abuse or neglect of children to the appropriate county hotlines, which can be found on our reporting landing page: [fosterthecity.org/reporting](http://fosterthecity.org/reporting)*

Because many adults are unfamiliar with reporting requirements and may be fearful of the process, Foster the City utilizes a 'tandem or dual report' model, where permitted. A 'dual report' occurs when a Foster the City Leader reports the suspicion or allegation *together* with the individual who saw, heard, or received information causing him or her to suspect abuse or neglect.

THIS PRACTICE IS NOT REQUIRED, OR INTENDED TO INHIBIT ANY TEAM MEMBER OR VOLUNTEER FROM REPORTING TO LAW ENFORCEMENT, CPS OR THE ABUSE HOTLINE *DIRECTLY*. Instead, it is meant to facilitate reporting, protect children, and support individuals who may not feel able or willing to report alone.

*NO PERMISSION IS NEEDED from Foster the City before reporting to law enforcement personnel or the Child Abuse Hotline.*

Please report all suspicions of child abuse or neglect (or any inappropriate or 'grooming' behaviors) to Foster the City through our website and your church's Advocate. This request is intended to assist our partner churches and families in properly protecting children involved in Foster the City ministries.

***When in doubt, report.***

## Safety Committee

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### Safety Committee

Recognizing the importance of providing and maintaining a safe environment for Foster Families and the children they care for, Foster the City will appoint and maintain a Safety Committee, which will meet once each quarter.

The purpose of the Safety Committee is to enable Foster the City Ministries to carry out appropriate ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.

### Composition

The Safety Committee will be composed of the following members:

- Executive Director
- Director of Operations
- Foster the City Central Leadership Team

### Responsibilities

The Safety Committee will be charged with the following duties:

- Applying existing Foster the City policies and procedures related to children's safety and risk management issues.
- Monitoring all training, protocols, and processes for ongoing compliance with safety policies.
- Making recommendations to Foster the City regarding safety issues.



# Caring for Children Guidelines

## Supervision

**Two Foster the City trained adults must always supervise children.**

Avoid being alone with an individual child in any room or during any childcare/babysitting offered. The *Two Adult Rule* needs to be followed.

If an unusual circumstance occurs and you find yourself alone with a single child, take the child to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others.

If you need to talk with a child alone, do it in the hallway or a highly visible area, or have another Support Friend, trained adult, or FTC leader with you.

## Discipline

It is Foster the City's policy that team members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. Remember that children who have experienced trauma will need to be disciplined in ways that may be different than when you were a parent. For example, time outs can trigger a child to feel neglected or abandoned and may not be an appropriate form of redirecting behavior.

All Foster the City volunteers will honor the Foster Parent(s) by following their lead and parenting style. If their parenting style is more strict than Foster the City's policy, adhere to the Foster Parent(s) standard.

When a child is misbehaving:

- Go to the child and calmly ask him or her to stop the behavior. Give a warning and redirect the child to a positive behavior. Do this in a loving manner that does not shame or embarrass the child(ren).
- When working with younger children, some physical redirection may be necessary: for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child who is hitting another.
- Update afterwards or communicate in real time with the Foster Parent

NEVER...

- Never yell at a child.
- Never grab a child.
- Never threaten a child. Always follow through with your word.
- Never hit a child.
- Never confront a parent in front of others.
- Never openly humiliate a child.

## Restroom Policies

Foster Parent(s) set the standard on whether they are comfortable with you helping their children when it comes to diapering.

### Diapering

- Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of another FTC trained adult.
- Children will never be left unattended on changing tables.
- Any special instructions given by Foster Parents must be followed.
- Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.
- Children should be changed in designated changing areas only.

### Toilet training

- No child will be forced to use the toilet or toilet train, please follow the lead of the Foster Parent.
- If you must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, seek out another FTC trained adult to accompany you. If another FTC trained adult is attending to another child and is not available to help when needed, stand outside the bathroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance. Do not enter the restroom.
- If a child requires immediate assistance, have another FTC trained adult nearby and leave the bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing his or her toileting activities, while the child remains behind the door of the bathroom stall. Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another FTC trained adult.

## Physical Contact

Foster the City is committed to protecting children in its care. To this end, Foster the City has implemented a 'physical contact policy' which promotes a positive, nurturing environment while protecting children. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone serving through Foster the City.:

- Side hugs, pats on the shoulder, high-fives, fist bumps, and other forms of appropriate physical affection between adults and children are important for children's development. If the Foster Family's boundaries around this are stricter than Foster the City's, you are to follow theirs instead.
- Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching, or displays of affection should be immediately reported to the authorities, Advocate, and Foster Family.
- Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child, and never be based upon the emotional needs of an adult or volunteer.
- Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other adults. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.

- Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of adults involved with Foster the City must foster trust at all times. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
- Do not force physical contact, touch or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched must be respected.
- Foster the City team members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.

## Intoxicants & Tobacco Use

Team members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol, any illegal or recreational drugs, and/or tobacco while supervising children or fulfilling any of their duties as a team member or volunteer.

## Sexually Oriented Conversations

Team members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with children and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any child in the program.

## Sexually Oriented Materials

Team members and volunteers at Foster the City are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property, in any home where children in foster care are present, or in the presence of children.

## Nudity

Team members and volunteers in Foster the City should never be nude in the presence of children in their care.

## Medication

Do not administer medication of any kind to any child unless you have been trained and given permission by the Foster Parent(s) to do so. You need to have documented/written consent to do this.

## Transportation

Team members and volunteers may from time to time be able to provide transportation for children if the Foster Parent(s) have asked for help in this way. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when volunteers are involved in the transportation of children:

- Children should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided
- The two adult rule must be followed
- Physical contact with children while in vehicles should be avoided except for helping with and making sure they are securely buckled

- No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving any child unless in an emergency
- Volunteers may need to go through additional steps required by the Foster Family's Approving Agency to be cleared to drive any child in foster care

## Verbal Interactions with Children

Verbal interactions between Foster the City volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. Foster the City volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of our mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of children.

To this end, team members and volunteers should not talk to children in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, team members and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children.

## Two Adult Rule

Adults should never conduct one-to-one, unobserved meetings or interaction with children while participating in Foster the City. Another Foster the City trained adult must always be present.