

# CARE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM GUIDE

LEADER GUIDE

**care communities**





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## WHY CARE COMMUNITIES MATTER

Almost 40% of foster parents stop fostering within the first year and cite lack of support as one of the main reasons. The responsibilities of foster care are demanding, and providing specialized care can feel overwhelming - even for our highly skilled foster parents.

## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

We know that children have better outcomes when they stay connected with their family of origin. Children experience separation from their families when they are removed due to neglect or abuse. Their parents may not have the skills, resources, or support necessary to be safe parents. Children are brought into temporary state custody to be cared for in licensed foster homes, while their parents are given the opportunity to make the changes needed to safely care for their children again.

**The goal of foster care is to strengthen and reunify families.**

## THE ROLE OF FOSTER PARENTS

Supporting the goal of reunification includes significant sacrifices of time and emotional energy for our foster families. In addition to all of the typical parenting responsibilities, foster parents take children to therapy, extra doctor visits, multiple weekly visits with the children's parents, attend court, meet with caseworkers, and participate in ongoing foster parent training. They often welcome children into their homes on short notice and navigate unknown timelines and outcomes. Although our foster parents have support from child welfare agencies, what they truly need is additional care on a personal level.

## HELPING THE HELPERS

Foster parents are natural helpers and are not likely to ask for help. You can help ease their load by providing ongoing and consistent support to one foster family as part of their Care Team.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF CARE COMMUNITIES

A Care Team is a group of individuals who work together to build relationships that support the needs of foster families. The support they receive gives them valuable time back in their lives to better care for the children in their home. The goal is to empower foster parents to continue providing care, which supports better outcomes for children in foster care.

### ACCEPTANCE

The needs of children in care and each foster family are unique. They need unconditional acceptance of the work they are doing to support reunification and meet the needs of children who have experienced trauma. Let the foster parents' needs guide your support.

### SAFETY

As you protect the privacy and confidentiality of the foster family and the children in their home, you will build a relationship of trust. Do not ask for children's phone numbers or contact information. Do not ask for specifics about the case, the children's parents and family of origin, or other sensitive information. As the foster family shares more about their lives with you, treat that information as confidential.

For many of us, receiving physical contact is a typical expression of affection. Children who have experienced trauma or neglect often struggle with accepting physical contact and will react accordingly. Do not initiate touch with the children in care or other children in the home, including hugs, pats on the arm and back, and holding hands. Ask permission from the parents and child for fist bumps and high fives. Being a safe adult in the lives of these children builds trust.

**Remember that the best policy for prevention and protection is to always have another adult, family member, or your own children with you as you spend time with children who are part of the foster family. Whether you are in their home, your home, or someplace public, this two-deep policy is required of all Care Team Members.**

### VULNERABILITY

As we surround foster families with unconditional acceptance and emotional and physical safety for the children in their care, foster parents are more likely to be vulnerable about their needs, and lasting friendships will be formed.





# CARE COMMUNITIES STRUCTURE

## **DIRECTOR OF CARE COMMUNITIES, Tami Carson & CARE COMMUNITIES COORDINATORS**

- Work directly with organization leaders to implement the Care Communities program in your group.
- Match a foster family with the Care Team and provide ongoing support for the family and Care Team.
- Connect the Care Team Leaders and foster family with each other prior to the Building Your Care Team training.
- Schedule and provide training and support for Organization Leaders, Care Team Leaders, and Care Team Members.
- Work with the Care Team Leaders to track the Care Team's completion of each training, keep team information updated, and track the service provided to the family.
- Meet with Care Team Leaders twice monthly for check-ins.
- Receive Care Records from Care Team Leaders to address concerns and share successes.
- Care Communities Director and Coordinators will be available via text, email, and in-person meetings to answer questions, address concerns, and provide support for Care Team Leaders and Care Team Members.
- Connect Care Team Members with additional training, background screenings, and resources to prepare them to provide babysitting and in-home respite for the foster family.
- Connect program participants with the program evaluations.

## **ORGANIZATION LEADER**

- Sign the confidentiality agreement.
- Identify two individuals from within your organization who will serve as the Care Team Leaders.
- Complete the prerecorded Welcome to the Care Team training.
- Ensure your Care Team Leaders complete the Care Team Leader training and the Welcome to the Care Team training.
- Ideally, attend the in-person training: Building Your Care Team.
- Check in with your Care Team Leaders often to resolve concerns, provide support, and maintain confidentiality.
- Work with your Care Team Leaders to replace members of the Care Team as needed.
- As part of the Care Communities program, you will be invited to participate in surveys about your experiences, which will be sent by the Sorenson Impact Institute. Your voluntary participation in this survey will remain confidential and helps us improve the program and its ongoing development. The Director of Care Communities and Care Communities Coordinators will only see anonymized data.





# CARE COMMUNITIES STRUCTURE

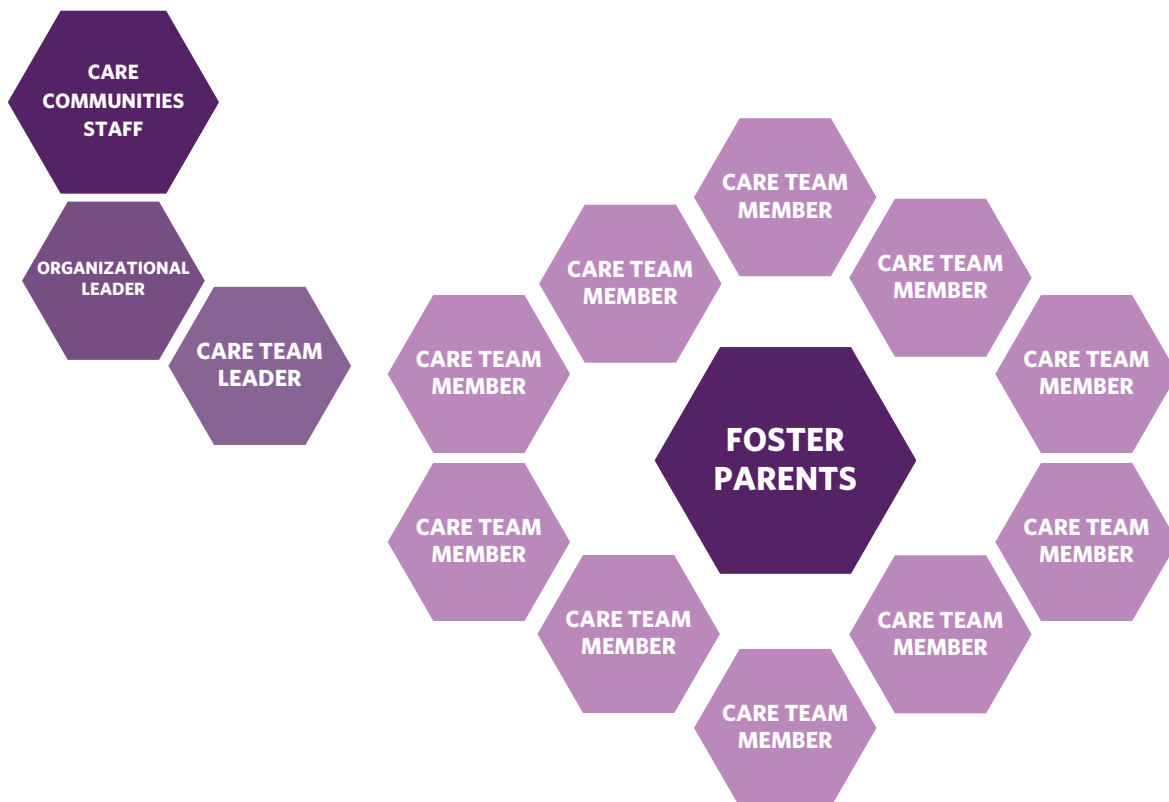
## CARE TEAM LEADERS

- Sign the confidentiality agreement.
- Participate in the live, virtual Care Team Leader Training.
- Help your organization leaders choose 8-10 Care Team Members. Select individuals who will work well together, with a variety of strengths, availability, and capacities.
- Review “Care Team Member - Your Strengths” found in this guide with each member of the Care team to help them identify potential ways they can serve. Encourage them to review the program guide.
- Meet the foster family prior to the Building Your Care Team training. Care Communities Staff will connect you with them for a meet-and-greet.
- Complete the prerecorded Welcome to the Care Team training.
- Track completion of the confidentiality agreement, Welcome to the Care Team training, and Building Your Care Team training by each Care Team Member.
- Build a Care Plan at the Building Your Care Team training.
- Complete a background screening with Utah Foster Care as needed.
- Use calendaring and communication tools that maintain confidentiality and help your Care Team stay informed.
- Connect with the foster family throughout the week and continue to build and adjust the plan. Help the foster family build relationships of trust with members of the Care Team.
- Ensure that team members know the plan and have opportunities to share their ideas.
- Complete a weekly Care Record using the online form.
- Meet with assigned Care Communities Staff for a brief, twice-monthly virtual check-in to address concerns and share successes.
- See the Care Team Leader Tools section of this guide for more information.
- Check in with your Organization Leader often to resolve concerns, provide updates, and maintain confidentiality.
- Consult with Care Communities Staff about Care Team Members who have the capacity to care for children more regularly to connect them with the Caring for Children training.
- As part of the Care Communities program, you will be invited to participate in surveys about your experiences, which will be sent by the Sorenson Impact Institute. Your voluntary participation in this survey will remain confidential and helps us improve the program and its ongoing development. The Director of Care Communities and Care Communities Coordinators will only see anonymized data.

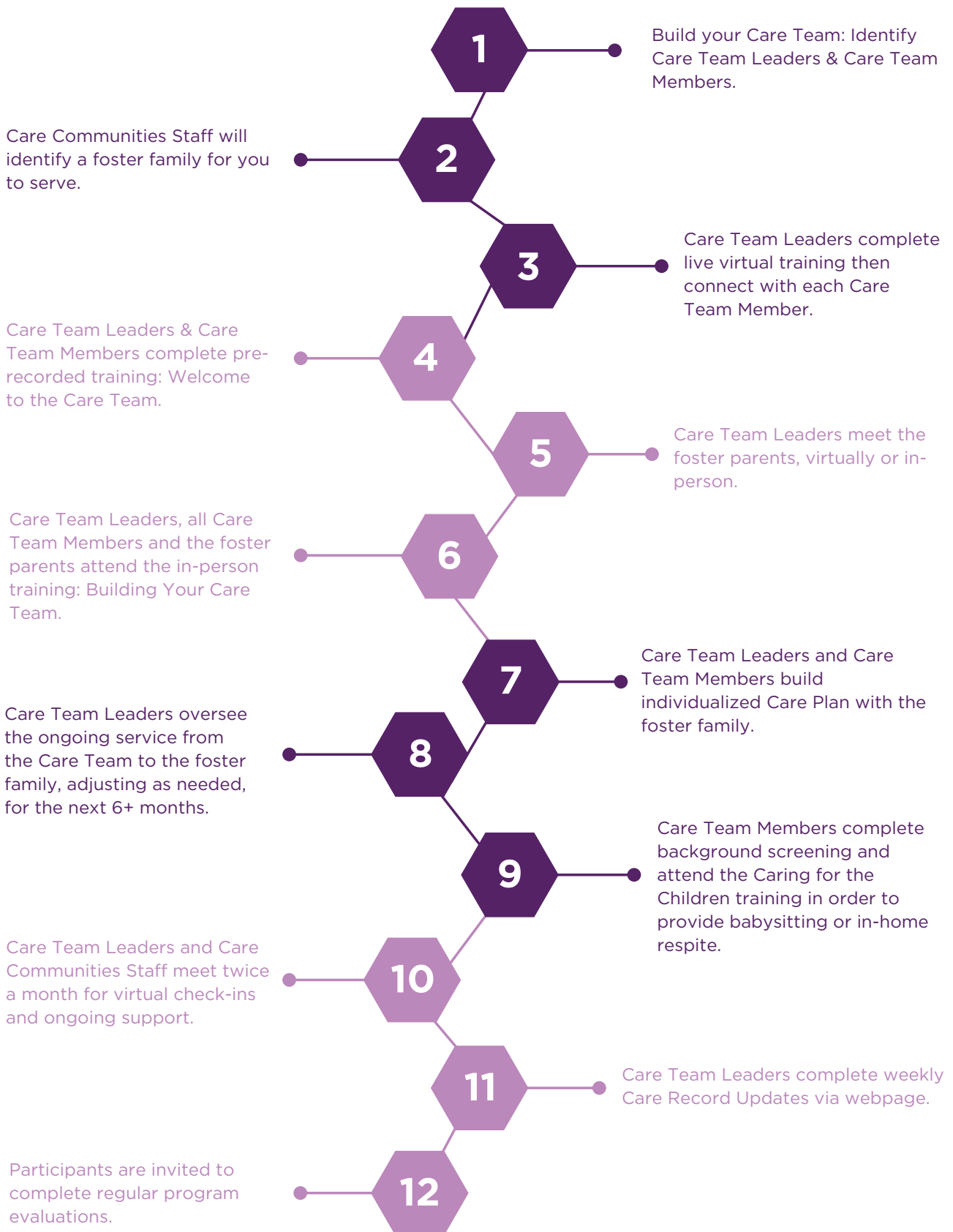
# CARE COMMUNITIES STRUCTURE

## CARE TEAM MEMBERS

- Sign the confidentiality agreement.
- Meet with your Care Team Leaders to review the program guide and evaluate your strengths, availability, and capacities. This will help you identify ways you can serve.
- Complete the prerecorded Welcome to the Care Team training prior to the second training, Building Your Care Team.
- Attend the in-person training: Building Your Care Team and help build the Care Plan.
- Complete a background screening with Utah Foster Care as needed.
- Check in with your Care Team Leaders and other members of the Care Team each week to offer help and identify needs you may be able to help with.
- Continue to help build and adjust the plan for serving the foster family.
- If you spend time with children in the foster family, complete the Caring for Children training. Your Care Team Leader or assigned Care Communities staff will connect you with training dates.
- Check in with your Care Team Leaders often to resolve concerns, provide updates, and maintain confidentiality.
- As part of the Care Communities program, you will be invited to participate in surveys about your experiences, which will be sent by the Sorenson Impact Institute. Your voluntary participation in this survey will remain confidential and helps us improve the program and its ongoing development. The Director of Care Communities and Care Communities Coordinators will only see anonymized data.



# TIMELINE OF A CARE TEAM







## CARE COMMUNITIES TRAINING

### CARE TEAM LEADER TRAINING

Care Team Leaders attend this live and virtual training. The goals of this training are to prepare you to build relationships on the Care Team and with the foster family, give you tools for organizing the team and the service for the family, and to establish a working relationship with us. We will share insights from previous Care Team Leaders to get you started and teach you how to use the program tools.

### WELCOME TO THE CARE TEAM

All program participants need to complete this pre-recorded training. This introduction to the Care Communities program includes an overview of the structure and timeline of the program, terms and principles of child welfare, and the basics of trauma. Safety guidelines will be covered and you will learn the importance of prevention and protection in your interactions with children in care.

### BUILDING YOUR CARE TEAM

Each organization will schedule a date for this live, in-person training, which Care Team Leaders, all Care Team Members, and foster parents will attend. Your Care Team Leaders will inform you of the selected date. During this training, you will gain insights into the unique role of foster parents as they help children heal from trauma and support their family relationships.

Building caring relationships positively impacts both the children in care and their foster families. This time together will help everyone on the team, including the foster parents, get to know each other better. You will also develop a deeper understanding of the foster family's needs, and your team will leave with a plan to support them.

### CARING FOR CHILDREN

All Care Team Members who spend time with children in the foster family are asked to attend this one-time training. Participants develop essential skills vital for understanding how to interact thoughtfully and safely with children who have experienced trauma. Each participant will go home with a Caregiver Kit filled with sensory items and activity ideas. This training is held quarterly around the state, and dates will be shared by your Care Team Leader and announced in the regular Care Communities Newsletter, *Care Communities Corner*, which is sent via email.



## CHILD WELFARE TERMS

**FOSTER CARE:** When a child is legally taken into the temporary custody of the state. The goal of foster care is to provide immediate protection for a child while working with the family of the child to reunite the family. Foster care is considered only when a child cannot be kept safe in their own family.

**KINSHIP CARE:** When a child needs to be brought into foster care, the state will first seek to place the child with extended family. Some children placed with kin do not officially come into foster care. Kinship keeps many children out of foster care.

**RESOURCE FAMILY CONSULTANT (RFC):** RFCs are assigned to the foster families. Their primary role is to provide support to the foster family that will assist them in meeting the child's needs.

**KINSHIP FAMILY CONSULTANT/KINSHIP WORKER:** KFC's are assigned to the kinship foster family. Like RFC's, their role is to provide support to the foster family in meeting the child's needs.

**DIVISION OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS):** DCFS is the child welfare agency in Utah. They are a part of the child welfare system. The system includes other agencies and entities that serve children and families in Utah.

**CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES (CPS):** Part of DCFS that investigates child maltreatment referrals. CPS workers are generally only involved at the beginning of a case.

**GUARDIAN AD LITEM (GAL):** The attorney that represents the child's best interests in court.

**CASEWORKER (CW):** Each child in foster care has a caseworker. Generally, these caseworkers are assigned to the children and the family. Their role is to provide support and services to reunify the family. While they can be a support to the foster family, that is not their primary role.

**VISITS:** Typically, weekly, but can happen more often. Visitation is to provide family-time for the child and their family. At the beginning of a case, these often occur at a DCFS office but may move "off-site" as the case comes closer to reunification.

**FOSTER TO ADOPT OR CONCURRENT PLANNING:** As permanency is the ultimate goal for each child, DCFS asks foster families to work toward reunification but also be willing to potentially adopt. While this importantly reduces moves for the child, foster families may struggle with keeping two apparently contradictory goals in their hearts.

**CHILD AND FAMILY TEAM MEETINGS:** The DCFS workers assigned to each placement meet regularly with the foster parents, family members of the child, professionals, and anyone identified by the team to provide support to the child in care to discuss the child's safety and needs of the family.

**CASA WORKER:** This court-appointed special advocate is a trained community member assigned to advocate for the best interest of children in care who have experienced abuse and neglect. They attend court, child, and family team meetings and help support and guide decisions about the case.



## TRAUMA TERMS

**TRAUMA:** An event that threatens the well-being of an individual that overwhelms that person's capacity to cope. Traumatic events can be acute or chronic—and often both.

**TRAUMA-INFORMED:** You may also hear “trauma-responsive,” “trauma-sensitive,” or other related terms. This is the shift in thinking from “What is wrong with you?” to “What has happened to you?”

**RESILIENCE:** Though asking “what happened to you?” is valuable, people are so much more than only what happened to them. Many factors play into resilience—but the one that shows up in all research is supportive relationships.

**WINDOW OF TOLERANCE:** The window of tolerance can be thought of as an emotional comfort zone. Within this window, we handle daily life relatively well, processing events and feelings smoothly. Outside this window, we might react negatively or shut down. Some folks have a narrow window, easily overwhelmed, while others can handle more stress. This window can also fluctuate day to day, affecting how we may cope with challenges.

**SECONDARY TRAUMA:** Secondary trauma can affect people in helping roles. By being exposed to others' trauma, they may start feeling the weight of it themselves. This emotional ripple effect shows how deeply interconnected our experiences can be. It's a reminder that even when supporting others, we need to pay attention to our own mental health.

**DEVELOPMENT:** Child development is about how kids grow and change. It's not just about getting taller - it's also about how their brains develop, how they learn to handle feelings, and how they figure out how to get along with others. It covers everything from learning to walk and talk, to understanding math, to making friends.

**EFFECTS OF TRAUMA:** Trauma may affect people in various ways: emotionally (fear, anger, sadness), mentally (anxiety, depression, trouble focusing), physically (headaches, fatigue, sleep issues), and behaviorally (risky actions, relationship problems). It can also disrupt children's learning and emotional growth. Healing often requires support and intervention.

**FELT SECURITY:** Felt security is about how subjectively safe a person feels in their environment and relationships. This feeling is key for emotional well-being—influencing how people manage stress, and form relationships. We offer children felt security by giving clear signals of safety, such as being consistent, modeling positive behavior, using a kind voice and soft eyes, and physically lowering ourselves to their level.

## PREVENTION AND PROTECTION

Spending time with children in care helps them form positive, nurturing relationships with caring adults. Whether you are with them and their foster parents, playing with them, or babysitting to give foster parents a break, your time makes a difference. Here are some guidelines to keep everyone safe.



### SAFETY PRACTICES ALL CARE TEAM MEMBERS ARE ASKED TO FOLLOW:

- Always have someone else with you when spending time with the child.
- Stay in the “line of sight” of another adult, Care Team Member, or family member.
- Do not ask leading questions of the child.
- Always defer to the foster parents when they are present about how to respond to the child.
- Inform the foster parents of any issues a child mentions to you.
- Respect the child’s “no”.
- Never ask a child in care to keep a secret.
- Encourage them to share about their time together with their foster parents.



**Remember** to maintain good personal boundaries. Avoid skipping your own important family outings to spend time with the children in care. Consider inviting them to **join your family fun** instead!



### HOW TO MAKE ORDINARY TIME TOGETHER MEANINGFUL:

- Avoid setting unrealistic expectations.
- Avoid spending money on the children; rather, ask their foster parents for tips on homemade and inexpensive ways to show them you care.
- Aim for ordinary kinds of activities, not “Disneyland” fun!
- Ask their foster parents what the child enjoys: games, foods, activities, places, and hobbies.
- When children are discouraged by your “no”, try saying, “That’s just the rules”.
- Give the child two realistic options to choose from. “Would you like to sit on the couch or the floor to play the game?”
- If the child is overwhelmed or frustrated, suggest you take a walk to the kitchen to get a drink or snack.

# IDEAS FOR SERVING

## ON VISITATION DAYS:

- Drop off a meal
- Send texts to let them know you care
- Help with other children in the home
- Treat drop-off
- Gather fun activities for kids to take to visitation

## THERAPY OR APPOINTMENT DAYS:

- Help with other children in the home
- Drop off a meal
- Offer to run errands for the family
- Texts to check-in on their needs
- Put together activities or games for car rides and waiting rooms
- Offer to watch kids in the waiting room while parents attend appointments

## COURT DAYS:

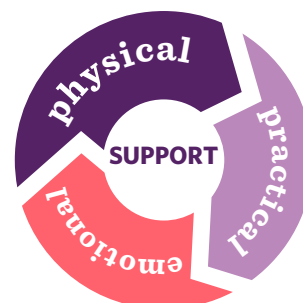
- Offer to attend court with the family
- Offer to care for children in the home
- Drop off children's favorite snacks
- Ask if texts or porch visits would feel supportive

## REUNIFICATION DAYS:

- Ask the family if they need their own family time or an activity with others for a fun distraction
- Drop off the family's favorite meal
- Help put notes & pictures together for the children to take home

## BUILDING CONNECTION AND RELATIONSHIPS:

- Attend a child's activity - sports, dance recitals, games, etc.
- Send "real" mail to the family with stickers, jokes, and encouragement
- Celebrate every birthday in small and simple ways
- Drop off a plant or flowers
- Help the kids with a lemonade stand or other neighborhood activity
- Drop off popcorn and goodies for an at-home movie night
- Help decorate for a holiday
- Play with kids while parents make dinner or complete tasks at home
- Tutor or help with homework
- Offer to take a family photo
- Teach the family a new board, card, or yard game
- Invite the family to your home for an activity
- Mow the lawn, shovel the snow, help with yard work
- Pick up donations for the family from Utah Foster Care
- Walk their dog or care for their pets
- Listen without judgment or offering solutions





# CARE PLAN

Help foster parents fill this space with things they do each week. Include visitation, appointments, therapy, meetings with DCFS, household projects, etc. Include monthly and weekly items.

Use the column on the right to record which team members are willing to help with specific tasks and add in ideas that team members share.

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## QUESTIONS TO ASK FOSTER PARENTS:

What are your **top priorities** this week?

Where could you use **extra time** in your day?

What items on your **to-do list** can we check off for you?

What household **chores or projects** can we take off your plate?

What could a parent helper **do for you today** or this week?

Which days are your **busiest** this week, and would food, errands, or help with children be best?

How can we give you and your spouse **time together** this week?

How can we give you **time for yourself** this week?

What can we do to **help you** spend less time in the car this week?

Do the foods/treats we are dropping off match your **family's dietary needs** and preferences?

What needs do the **children in your home** have that we can understand better?

Which family member needs **extra attention** or time with you or another safe adult this week?

Are there **special events or celebrations** we can help with? Can we deliver treats, drop off party supplies, or help on the day of the event?

What is the most challenging part of the day, and how can we **lighten that load**?

Would you prefer a porch drop-off or a **brief visit** when a meal (or other items) are delivered by a member of the team today?

Are there things you've **asked for help** with that we have overlooked?

Does your family need some space or more connection with **someone on the team** at this time?

What can we add to your "**wish list**" that we haven't thought of?

What does **support look like** for you today?



# CARE TEAM LEADER TOOLS

## TIPS FROM CARE TEAM LEADERS AND FOSTER PARENTS

### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

- Set a weekly check-in with foster parents and stick to it.
- Help foster parents assess their changing needs, expectations, and hopes for the team’s interaction and service with the family—this builds trust!
- Be curious about the foster family and their needs - there is not one right way to do things.
- Advocate for the foster family.
- Hold regular in-person team get-togethers, knowing not everyone can attend every time.
- Ask for input from all team members—everyone has valuable ideas.
- Share foster family successes and gratitude with the whole team via group text or email.
- Help your team be adaptable.
- Remember you are serving the family as a whole - biological, foster, and adopted.

### DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION PLAN

- Keep all communication confidential.
- Follow up with individuals if they don’t respond to group texts.
- Use a calendar tool with automatic reminders.
- Create a directory with team members’ photos and skills for the foster family.
- Send reminders about assignments regularly.
- Have two group text options: one that includes the team and the foster parents, keeping those texts to a minimum, and a separate one for just the team.
- Help the team understand that foster parents may not always respond to texts.
- Include team members who may be uncomfortable with technology through other communication methods.

### BUILDING AND ADJUSTING THE CARE PLAN

- Help foster parents create and regularly update a “wishlist” that you share with the team.
- Create a “menu” with offers from team members and share that with the foster family.
- Help set expectations for the amount of interaction foster parents need from the team, and remember this will change over time.
- Rotate assignments to give all team members regular breaks.
- Know which team members can help at the last minute and which need advance notice.
- Help the team understand and respond to the foster family’s changing needs.

## CARE TEAM LEADER TOOLS

- Program Guide - also found on the webpage
- Care Team Member - Your Strengths! - found on the webpage
- Care Team Tracker - google document shared with Care Communities Staff
- Welcome to the Care Team - recorded training
- Care Plan Document - in this Program Guide and on the webpage
- Care Communities Corner - monthly newsletter from Care Communities Staff
- Webpage - [www.utahfostercare.org/care-communities](http://www.utahfostercare.org/care-communities)
  - The place to submit weekly Care Records
  - PDF version of the Program Guide and Care Plan
  - The digital version of the confidentiality agreement
  - Resources, support tips, and Care Communities Staff Information
  - Caregiving Tips Flyer
  - Tips for Working With Youth Who Have Experienced Trauma Flyer

### IMPORTANT TOOLS YOU CHOOSE

- Texting or messaging apps that are confidential: Group text, GroupMe, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, etc. Choose one that works with both iPhone and Android.
- Calendar tools: Google Calendar, Outlook Calendar, Calendar.com, Calendly, “old school” paper calendars, etc. Ask your Care Communities Staff for ideas and calendaring tools available through Utah Foster Care.

### WORKING WITH US

- Each Care Team gets a Utah Foster Care Communities staff member.
- We’ll have virtual check-ins twice a month to discuss concerns, successes, and solutions.
- We’ll help you keep the Care Team Tracker updated, and the weekly Care Record you submit will be sent directly to us.
- Local Utah Foster Care Retention Specialists will connect you with resources and events; we’ll introduce you to them.
- Our role is to support you in creating the best plan for the foster family and your Care Team!



**care communities**



**SHOW UP for  
FOSTER  
CARE**



**Utah  
FosterCare**