

## **ABUSE OR NEGLECT ALLEGATIONS**

This document explains what happens when an allegation of abuse or neglect is made against a foster home.

What the terms in this brochure mean:

**Allegation:** A statement made that a foster parent has abused or neglected a foster child. An allegation is just that. The allegation needs to be investigated to see if it is supported by facts.

**On hold:** A home is placed "on hold" after an allegation of abuse or neglect is made against the foster parent, pending the outcome of the investigation. A foster home that is placed "on hold" cannot have children placed in it until the "hold" is taken off. This action is standard practice, taken to protect all parties, and does not indicate belief or disbelief of the allegation.

**Investigation:** Studying all the facts related to an allegation.

**Independent investigation:** An investigation that is done by another county human services department to look into an allegation of abuse or neglect against a foster home. The investigation is done "independently" by an agency not affiliated with Rock County Human Services Department (RCHSD) to make sure that all sides of the story are considered fairly. Rock County HSD cannot influence and does not have any say in decisions made by the investigating agency. This is required and cannot be waived by RCHSD.

### **STEP 1:**

A referral of alleged abuse or neglect in a foster home is documented after someone reports to the agency that a child has been abused or neglected.

### **STEP 2:**

Rock County staff will determine whether the referral requires an assessment for immediate safety issues. It is Rock County's job to make sure the children are safe while an investigation into the allegation takes place. If it is determined that it is not safe for the child to stay in the foster home, the child will be taken to another home by a Rock County social worker.

### **STEP 3:**

A foster home that has a pending abuse or neglect investigation will be placed "on hold". This means that no children can be placed in the home until the investigation process is done. A staff person from the Substitute Care Unit will send a letter to let the foster family know that their home is "on hold".

### **STEP 4:**

The case will be referred (passed on) to another agency for an independent investigation, which will involve asking the foster family and the foster children questions to figure out what happened. Other records (or information related to the foster family and the abuse/neglect allegation would also be reviewed.) This can take up to 60 days to finish. During this period, RCHSD cannot share information. Requests for information and questions must be directed to the investigating agency.

*What can a foster parent do to speed up the investigation?*

Foster parent(s) should make themselves and the foster children (if they are still in the home) available for questions. Answering questions honestly is important, and keeps the investigation moving along in a timely manner.

## **STEP 5:**

After the independent investigation is finished, the investigating agency will determine if the report of abuse or neglect is found to be "unsubstantiated" or "substantiated".

### *What does unsubstantiated mean?*

"Unsubstantiated" means that there was not enough evidence (or facts) to prove that the allegations were true. The Substitute Care Unit will review a copy of the independent investigation report and decide whether to remove the hold or not, based on the report. Foster parents will receive a letter from the Substitute Care Unit when the hold is taken off their home.

Although the allegation may be unsubstantiated, a decision will be made regarding whether or not an HFS56 rule violation has occurred.

### *What does substantiated mean?*

"Substantiated" means that the investigation found that there is a preponderance (51%) of belief that abuse or neglect likely did happen. The foster parents' license will be revoked (taken away) and the foster parent will no longer be able to take care of foster children. A letter saying that the foster parent license is revoked will be sent to the foster home. This letter will give an address to which the foster parent can write to appeal (argue) the substantiation decision.

Foster parents will also be given information about a Rehabilitation Review.

### *What can I do to prevent abuse or neglect reports?*

1. Learn and follow the foster care rules and regulations (HFS56).
2. Have every child placed in your home examined (HealthCheck) by their physician when they arrive at your home. At this exam, the doctor will record all the scars, bruises and marks on the foster child. This will help document that you are not the person who caused these, should such be alleged.
3. Follow the rule of NO physical discipline. You cannot hit a foster child. Ask your social worker about other ways that you can discipline foster children.
4. Document all injuries, falls, etc. the child receives at your home or elsewhere.
5. Maintain good communication with the child's social worker and your specialist.
6. Reach out for assistance when you are stressed or needing support.

### *Who can I call with questions?*

Call the investigating social worker with any questions about the investigation or its status. Call your department social worker with questions not related to the investigation.

### *Additional Note:*

Any allegation, even if determined unsubstantiated is upsetting. RCHSD understands the impact this can have on our valued foster parents, just as we are aware of similar impact when/if allegations are made against staff. Allegations are a small, but real possibility for any of us. Although the independent investigation procedures may cause feelings of not being treated as the agency partner that you are, they are in place to assure objectivity, fairness, and safety. Following the investigation, RCHSD will make every effort to address your concerns.

# **ABUSE OR NEGLECT ALLEGATIONS INVOLVING FOSTER HOMES ROCK COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

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Cheryl Salava, Supervisor, 608-757-5124**