

# Section 3:

# Preventing Child Abuse in Foster Care



## Child Abuse in Foster Care:

Any person who knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused, neglected or abandoned by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver or other person responsible for the child's safety and well-being shall immediately report such knowledge or suspicion to the Florida Abuse Hotline of the Department of Children and Families.

To report suspected or confirmed abuse you can call the 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873) or 1-800-453-5145 for TDD (Telephone Device for the Deaf) services. The reporting of abuse can also be done via fax. (The form is available online at <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/howtoreport.shtml>). Once you have completed the form, it will need to be faxed to 1-800-914-0004.

Telephone reporters will always be told prior to concluding the conversation whether the information has been accepted as a report or not. If you have faxed the information, notification will be provided only when additional information is needed to accept a report, or when the report does not fall within the jurisdiction of Children and Families. **REMEMBER: All reports are confidential.**

Knowingly and willfully making a false report is a 3rd degree felony. This can result in a fine or imprisonment if convicted. Section 39.205, Florida Statutes (F.S.) states what the department has to do concerning false reporting for children and Section 415.111, F.S. addresses false reporting for adults.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month





## **State of Florida/DCF Disciplinary Policy:**

### **DISCIPLINE:**

Discipline is an educational process through which foster children develop the self-control, self-reliance, and orderly conduct necessary for them to assume responsibilities, make daily living decisions and live according to acceptable standards of social behavior. Our goal is to work with them until they have the ability to control their behavior until they have self-discipline. When a child has self-discipline, he/she is able to control his/her behavior based on rules he/she thinks are important. Children learn these rules by experiencing the consequences of their behavior. Hence, it is important to let children learn what happens and how people react when they behave a certain way.

### **PROHIBITED DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES:**

Foster parents should understand that the following practices are prohibited and may result in an investigation by Child Protective Investigations and either closure of the foster home or a warning that additional violations will result in closure of the home:

1. Corporal punishment of ANY KIND: including, hitting a child with an object or hand, slapping, spanking, popping, smacking, grabbing, shaking, washing mouth out with soap, or any other form of physical discipline.
2. Verbal abuse such as derogatory remarks about the child and/or family member, yelling or screaming at child.
3. Threats to remove child from the home or to physically punish.
4. Group punishment for the misbehavior of an individual child.
5. Withholding a meal, clothes, shelter, mail, or family visits.
6. Humiliating or degrading punishment which subjects the child to ridicule.
7. Humiliating, degrading, severe, cruel or excessive punishment. For example, washing the child's mouth out with soap, making them eat hot peppers/sauces, kneeling on stones, physical chores or exertion that would deprive the child of sleep or endanger health, etc.
8. Placing a child in a locked room.
9. Delegating authority for punishment to other children or persons. NO OTHER CHILD, ADOLESCENT, OR ADULT IN THE HOUSEHOLD SHALL HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO DISCIPLINE.
10. Punishment for bedwetting or errors occurring during the toilet training process.

**Signed copy on file with FSS, this is your copy for reference.**



**State of Florida/DCF Disciplinary Policy (cont'd):**

**ACCEPTABLE DISCIPLINE METHODS:**

Foster parents should discipline children with kindness, consistency and understanding, using positive discipline methods, including.

1. Reinforcing acceptable behavior such as honest praise, special privileges and treats, extra hugs/kisses, additional time spent with the child, stars/smiley faces on a door/bulletin board.
2. Verbal disapproval of the child’s behavior, never the child, for example, “I don’t like ball throwing in the house.”
3. Loss of privileges. For example, watching television, participating in a special event or playing with a specific toy.
4. Grounding (restricting the child to the house or yard) or sending the child out of the room and away from the family activity (for short periods of time).
5. Re-directing or providing alternatives for the child’s destructive behavior. For example, replacing a sharp object with a toy.

**VIOLATIONS OF THIS POLICY:**

When it comes to the attention of the Department that a foster parent has violated the provisions of this policy, a foster care counselor will immediately meet with the foster parent to discuss the incident. If during this discussion it becomes apparent that a child may have been neglected or abused, the foster care counselor will immediately report the incident for investigation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Foster/Shelter Parent Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Foster/Shelter Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Foster/Shelter Parent Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Foster/Shelter Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Signed copy on file with FSS, this is your copy for reference.**



## **Incident Reporting Procedure:**

An incident is any occurrence or event that interrupts normal procedure or precipitates a crisis. There are two types of incidents: critical and non-critical. A critical incident is one that is likely to have an adverse impact on the CMO's ability to protect and/or serve its clients. Some examples of critical incidents include the following:

- Abuse/ Neglect/Exploitation/Threat of Harm;
- Aggression/threat;
- Altercation;
- Baker Act;
- Bomb Threat;
- Client Injury (requiring medical attention);
- Child Born to an Active Client (if minor child is in foster care and gives birth while living in out-of-home foster care);
- Client death;
- Criminal activity;
- Damage;
- Drugs;
- Elopement/runaway;
- Emergency room visit;
- Escape (from a locked facility);
- Foster Home/Facility Complaint;
- Hospital admission;
- Media coverage;
- Physical aggression;
- Self-injurious behavior;
- Sexual battery;
- Suicide attempt;
- Suicide ideation/threat;
- Theft/Vandalism/Damage; and
- other incidents (unusual occurrence or circumstance initiated by something other than natural causes or out of the ordinary such as a tornado, kidnapping, riot or hostage situation, which jeopardizes the health, safety and welfare of clients who are in the physical custody of Our Kids).

The Child's FSC must be notified within one (1) hour. If the Child's FSC or Supervisor cannot be reached you will be asked to contact FSS Placement or FSS on-call Placement Specialist. This reporting assists in a confidential incident report to be generated. Immediate reporting of an incident is critical as all parties need to be aware: Birth Parents (that have not had their rights terminated), legal counsel, Guardian Ad Litem, and the CMO's Executive Director MUST be notified of the incident within 24 hours.



## Foster Parent Runaway Reporting Policy:

1. If a child has an assigned curfew, wait four (4) hours AFTER their curfew time to report run episode. At 4 hours, notify Law Enforcement to report child missing and obtain a CCR#.
  - If more than one child runs at the same time, a separate report **MUST** be issued for EACH child, no exceptions.
2. During the 4 hours, efforts to locate the child by the foster home should include, but not be limited to (if applicable):
  1. Searching the child's belongings
  2. Calling/texting the child's cell phone
  3. Checking the child's computer, social media accounts, or other online accounts
  4. Contacting the child's friends, relatives, or known associates
  5. Searching areas that the child is known to frequent
  6. Contacting the child's school
  7. Contacting the child's employer
3. ONCE DETERMINED CHILD IS MISSING – call law enforcement and obtain a missing person's police report number. (*Must be missing person's report, not an information only report*).
4. After CCR# is obtained, contact Kids Central (after hour's number is 904-265-6804 or [kcrunaway@fssnf.org](mailto:kcrunaway@fssnf.org)) and report child as missing. Provide all required information on child:
  - Date/time of run
  - CCR#
  - Description of child's clothing, if known
  - If child left with someone, provide that information
- Information needed for law enforcement report:
  - Provide demographic information, clothing information, previous run episodes and where child was found if known, medications, mental health, medical health, direction of travel.
5. Once child returns immediately call law enforcement to cancel CCR# and Kids Central to cancel child's run episode.

### **Exigent Circumstances:**

#### **DO NOT WAIT 4 HOURS WHEN:**

- **Child is under the age of 12;**
- **Child has mental or medical issues**
- **Suspected abduction**
- **Human trafficking victim**



## **Acknowledgement of Runaway Reporting Policy:**

**Florida Abuse Hotline: (800) 96-ABUSE**

I have received and read a copy of the Family Support Services Foster Parent Runaway and Incident Reporting Policy. I understand that I will receive in-service training for review in the event I do not comply with FSS reporting policies.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Foster Parent Print (Caregiver 1)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Foster Parent Signature (Caregiver 1)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Foster Parent Print (Caregiver 2)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Foster Parent Signature (Caregiver 2)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## Investigating Allegations of Abuse or Neglect in the Foster Home:

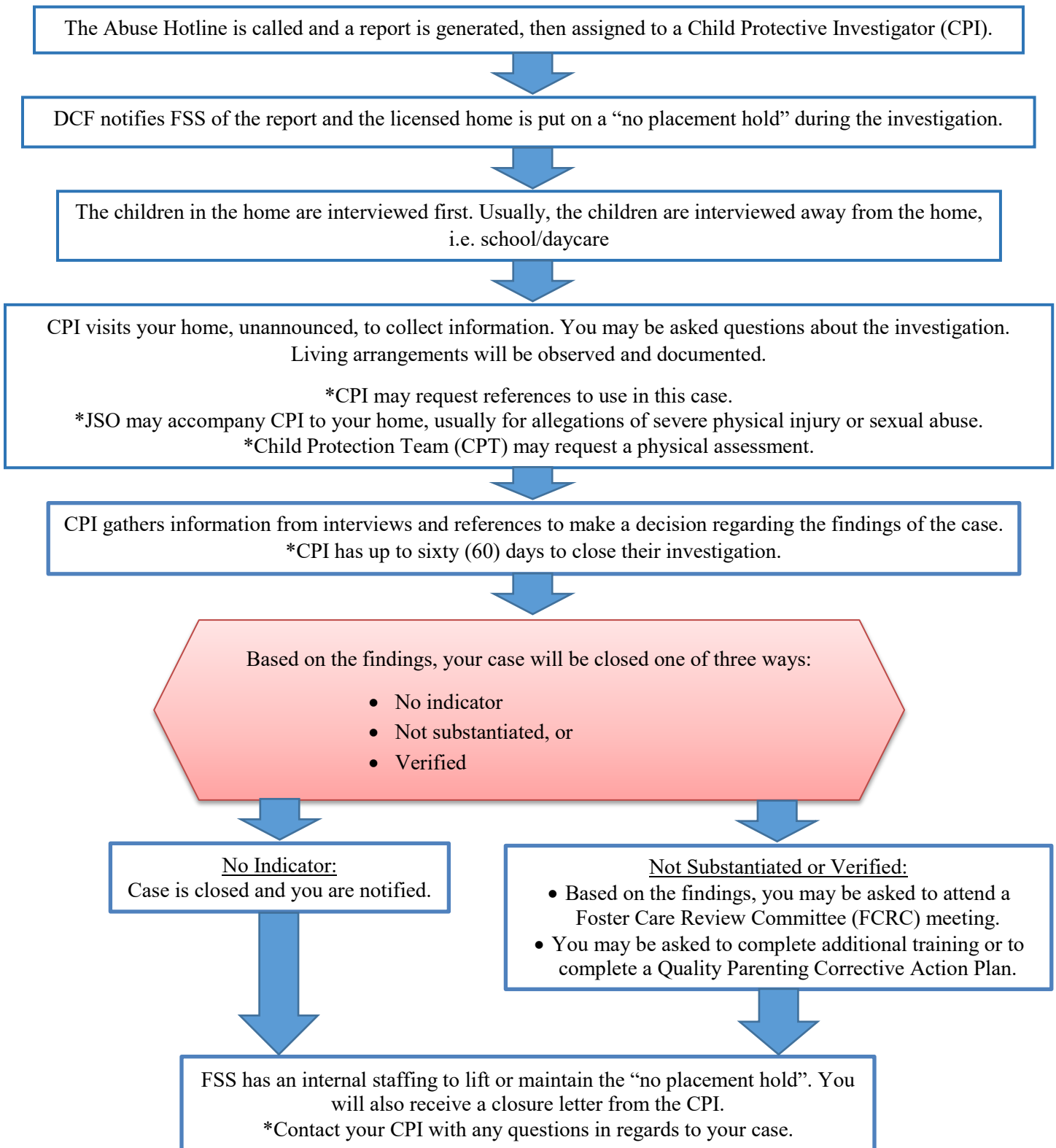
In order to ensure our children's safety and well-being at all times, **ALL** abuse reports, licensing complaints and foster care referrals must be addressed by DCF and FSS, collaboratively. Following this page are two flowcharts that display the process for each investigation. Investigations may take up to sixty (60) days to investigate, before closure. How the investigation is closed will determine the direction DCF and FSS must proceed with your licensed home. We at FSS try our best to keep our Foster Parents as informed of the process as necessary, while protecting confidential information.

All allegations are closed one of three ways:

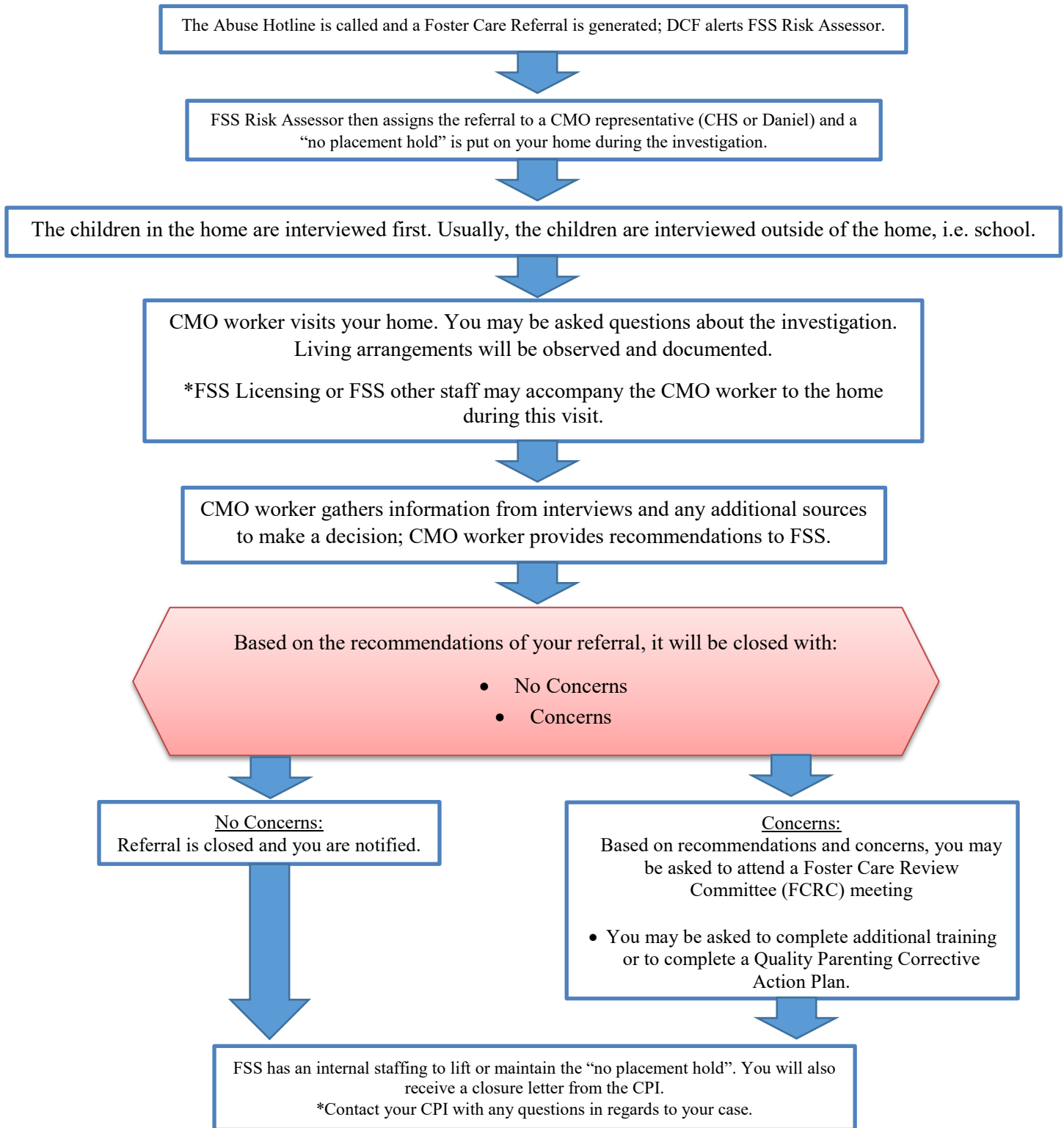
1. No Indicator: Meaning that the CPI found no evidence to prove the allegations during their investigation. Placement hold will be removed from the licensed home.
2. Not Substantiated: Meaning that the evidence for the allegations were present but inconclusive evidence to support the responsible party. Placement hold is staffed between DCF and FSS to come to a conclusion on further steps of action. Often times a QPI Agreement Plan is drafted and additional training is requested to help avoid similar situations in the future.
3. Verified/Substantiated: Meaning that evidence was present that there is reasonable cause to believe that child abuse or neglect has occurred and that a specific party is responsible for the given acts. DCF and FSS will staff to discuss potential license revocation.



## Abuse Report Process Flowchart:



## Foster Care Referral Process Flowchart:





## Foster Allegation Support Team (F.A.S.T.):

**F.A.S.T.** provides support to foster parents when an allegation has been, or might be brought against them. Foster parents need to be kept informed of the procedures and the process throughout an allegation. F.A.S.T. was created to provide support without judgment and in an environment that provides the least amount of damage or harm for the foster parents and their families while an investigation is ongoing.

F.A.S.T. can offer the foster parent the following services:

- Provides an immediate response as well as support to foster parents when an allegation has been, or might be, brought against them by clarifying the process, and providing clear communication.
- F.A.S.T. volunteers will be there when any foster parent asks for help or support.
- F.A.S.T. volunteers will keep you informed of the procedures and the processes a foster parent can expect during an investigation.
- F.A.S.T. volunteers work toward better investigations, more compassion, tolerance and respect for foster parents, children and families.
- F.A.S.T. volunteers have a firm commitment to maintain the confidentiality of the reports.
- F.A.S.T. volunteers support and help, which means listening to foster parents when they have a need to vent a sense of hurt, anger and shock at what has happened to them.
- F.A.S.T. volunteers never allow themselves to get involved in name calling, accusations, or other counterproductive behaviors.
- F.A.S.T. volunteers help foster parents learn the concept of "fair fighting". You must remember to treat the other side with absolute respect and insist on the same.
- F.A.S.T. volunteers help foster parents gain an attitude of honest and straightforward integrity which allows their point to be viewed.

Families accused of neglect and abuse experience the accusation of integrity as a form of assault or victimization. People who have been accused of abuse often experience the same types of symptoms as those who have actually been abused:

- **TRAUMA:** Many foster parents express shock and disbelief.
- **BETRAYAL:** They feel their main source of support can no longer talk to them.
- **STIGMA:** Foster Parents report feeling shame, humiliation, inadequacy and a decline in self-esteem.
- **POWERLESSNESS:** The process can be lengthy and complex and often feel they have little information regarding the allegation.

Above all, do not forget that when you are the subject of an investigation, you need to ensure the following: (a) Begin a dated, written journal of events and communications; (b) Keep good records; (c) Insist on giving full input into the investigations; (d) Request assistance from your agency in explaining to the children what is happening and why; (e) Maintain your sense of professionalism as a foster parent; (f) Cooperate with the investigation; and most important, call **FAST** for the needed support at:

**1-800-FAST-119**  
(1-800-327-8119)

Or by email at [fast@floridafapa.org](mailto:fast@floridafapa.org)