

Host Family Summary Manual

Introduction

Safe Families is a movement of the Church to care for the most vulnerable people group in our society, our vulnerable children and their families. The Church is commanded (Care for orphans and widows) and best equipped to meet this need. Additionally, the church has the most experience as it has been doing it throughout history (until foster care was created 50 years ago). Safe Families is a vehicle to prevent child abuse and return the church back to the forefront of caring for children.

Brief Description

Safe Families for Children hosts vulnerable children and creates extended family-like supports for desperate families through a community of compassionate volunteers motivated by their faith to keep children safe and ultimately together with their families.

The cornerstone of Safe Families is hosting children before children are harmed and in need of foster care. That is what sets us apart from all other efforts to help struggling families. Host families take in children and care for them without compensation. 70% of children are below the age of 5 and children stay an average of 44 days. Parents place their children with host families because of depression, homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse, etc. Host families are screened and approved similar to foster care (background checks, home assessment, references, and training) and a representative of Safe Families monitors kids in host family homes similar to foster care (a visit within 48 hours of coming to your home and weekly thereafter). Over 90% of kids return home. Safe Families works to prevent harm to children (child abuse) and the need for foster care. It also serves to support families who are going through a difficult time.

Volunteer Roles in Safe Families – There are a number of key volunteer roles in Safe Families

1. **Host Families-** Screened and approved volunteers who take in children from parents in crisis
2. **Family Friends:** Volunteers who befriend and support placing parents or come along side host families by offering babysitting, meals, etc.
3. **Resource Friends:** Volunteers who donate a variety of items (beds, clothes, etc) to families.
4. **Family Coach:** A volunteer (occasionally a staff) who visits kids in host family homes to make sure they are adjusting well and reaches out to placing parents to ensure they are getting the resources they need to get on their feet. The family coach is usually the coordinator of activities/services.
5. **Ministry Lead:** A volunteer who coordinates and supports activities of Safe Families under a Safe Family Church.
6. **Safe Families Plus volunteers:** Youth aging out of foster care and others struggling with transition to adulthood are connected with host families and other volunteers willing to support them

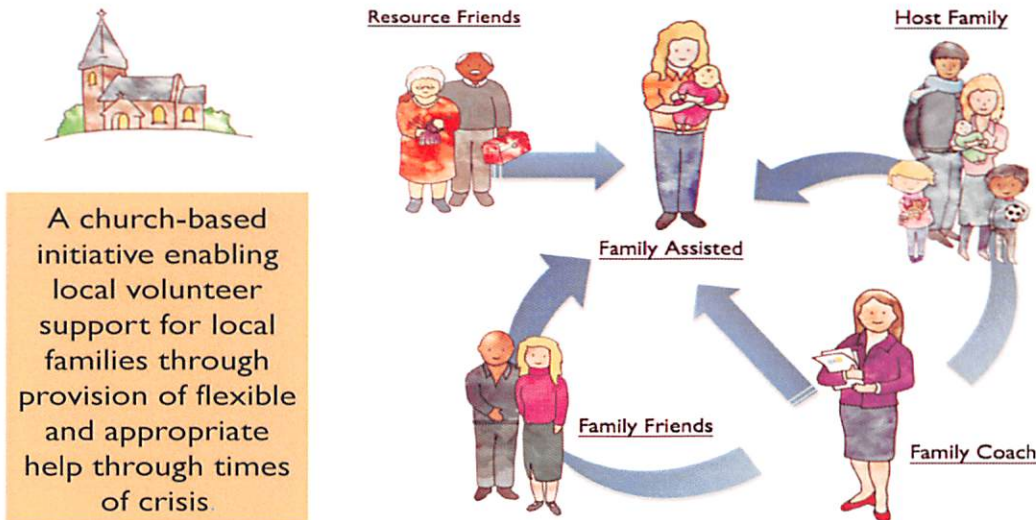
Host Family Requirements: To qualify as a host family, the parents need to: have sufficient financial resources to care for a child without undue strain; be 25 years or older; stable, mature and law abiding; be free from the use of drugs and not overly use alcohol; provide a home that is in a satisfactory condition; agree to build a relationship and befriend the placing parent; refrain from profanity and other potentially damaging behavior to a child; be capable of providing for the health and safety of the child; be in sufficient health, strength, and mobility to care for a child; willing to serve under the support of a Safe Family Church

“The problem with our world is that we draw the circle of family too small.”

Mother Teresa

How do we work?

The Safe Families for Children model



What we have to offer?

1. Space and time for a parent to take a breath and get on their feet
2. A break from the daily pressures and challenges of caring for their children
3. Prayer and a willingness to discuss spiritual issues
4. Help with problem solving
5. Connections and support to address social isolation
6. Hospitality – **not** the promise that we will address all the problems
7. Family Friends and others to support.
8. Our resource network

Φιλοξενία – Love of Stranger

An ethos of compassionate hospitality...

- Our aim is to mobilize a movement of people who will reach out to families suffering the anguish of crisis
- Our passion is to connect people willing to be 'spiritual extended family' or a kind of "God parent" to those who lack such support at their point of most need
- Our understanding is that biblical hospitality has become a lost practice but at one point was a foundational ministry of the early church. This type of hospitality is dangerous, demanding, and must be deliberate.

Connecting to the Placing Parent: The power and uniqueness of Safe Families is the connection between the placing and host parents. Because host families care for children without compensation, they have a unique opportunity to befriend and connect with the placing parent, like becoming part of their extended family. Our hope is that this relationship will continue after the children are returned home. This doesn't happen all the time but it certainly is our desire.

Placing Parents Often Have Mixed Emotions: These emotions, if misunderstood by the host family, could stand in the way of building a relationship.

- Grateful and jealous (they cannot meet their child's needs at the moment)
- Trusting (with their most precious possession) and distrustful (many in their lives have failed them)
- Relieved and anxious (uncertain their child will be cared for and afraid they will like the host family more than themselves)
- Demanding and intimidated

We Need to Guard Against:

Our own prejudices: Many of us will quickly conclude that we are not prejudice. However, watch closely your reactions to the placing parent and you might find some prejudices surface.

Rescue mentality: We might feel an urge to rescue the parent/child and be seen as their "savior." It's important to guard against this because it communicates the parent is not capable.

Negativity: We can easily get caught up in the parent's negative situation. We need to rise above this and be a constant messenger of hope, because of the hope we have in Christ.

Distance: The parent's problems are overwhelming. A natural coping mechanism is to distance ourselves from them. We might be thinking that we are setting boundaries but in fact we are creating distance for our own benefit and protection.

Unfair expectations: Many of us may feel that once we help a parent figure out what they should do, they should do it. We then become frustrated that they don't. It's important for us to hang in there with the parent. If they don't follow through on something that is simple, we need to break the task down to find out what went wrong. It took years for a parent to get into the place they are now. We certainly can't expect all problems to resolve in 44 days. Additionally, we are commanded to love and show hospitality with little concern for the outcome (parents getting better).

Empowering the parent

Family Friends and Host Families have a very important role in empowering the placing family:

- Help parents develop the skills necessary to care for their child
- Listen to, encourage, reinforce and respect them as parents
- Encourage them to participate in decisions that affect their child, seek their feedback
- Support them in developing their protective factors
- Recognize their skills and efforts to cope with difficult life circumstances

Good Enough Parenting - Our goal is to support the parent to be "good enough for their kids". We support parents through a crisis or period of time when their support or existing resources are inadequate to safely parent their children or care for themselves. Strengthening and supporting the parent's protective factors will help them deal with situations that might be beyond their control. We want the parent to be "good enough." We have to guard against having too high expectations.

5 Protective Factors – Research has shown that if parents develop 5 protective factors, they can be "good enough" for their children despite having ongoing challenges.

1. Parental resilience- Managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity and trauma
2. Social connections - Positive relationships others that provide emotional, informational, and spiritual support
3. Knowledge of parenting and child development - Understanding child development and parenting strategies that support the development of their children

4. Concrete support in times of need - Access to concrete support and services that address a family's needs and help minimize stress caused by unmet needs
5. Social and emotional competence of children - Family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions and establish and maintain relationships

How families are referred:

- A parent is identified as needing help. They may be referred to us, or call in to ask for help themselves. Situations include homelessness, mental illness, physical illness, unemployment, post-partum depression.
- The Safe Families Intake worker will screen the parent and child. We will obtain as much information as we are able to, based upon the parent's or referral sources information. Certain situations may be screened out, such as children with severe behavioral issues or medical issues that we are unequipped to manage.
- If screened in, the intake worker will reach out to available host families through a variety of methods (depending on your site), including working through your church ministry lead, a match/notification through the data management system, twitter, texting, facebook, email, or telephone. They will contact you with basic information about the parent/child and how long hosting is needed.
- You may choose to either accept the hosting, or you may say no if it is not a good fit at the time.
- The intake worker will communicate details to you regarding the actual intake. They will relay all information that they have, but we frequently find new information as the hosting progresses.
- Many hostings are emergencies and require same day placement.
- Host family may pick up the child or a worker may deliver. If possible, it would be great if the parents meet you, and begin to develop relationship.
- Children often come with few clothes and other possessions. They may be sad, anxious and uncertain about what is happening
- Parents decide how long they need and when they are ready to have the child back. It's possible they can change their mind or underestimate the time they need to get back on their feet. This is a projected length of stay, and may vary as the hosting progresses.

Paperwork – all children will come with the following paperwork. It may be called different things for different locations but has the same basic content.

- A consent signed by the parent saying they give you permission (Short-term guardianship, consent for placement, etc.)
- Power of attorney for health care giving you permission to seek medical care
- Child Information form – Providing information about the child
- Parent information form- Providing you information about the parent and how to contact them
- Your agency may have other information that accompanies the child

A Child's Perspective – Just as parents can be ambivalent; children have mixed emotions as well.

- Joy/confusion/anxiety to be in a safe and stable environment.
- Grief/anger/relief at being separated from their parent or guardian.
- Guarded/open/anxious to live with people (you!) they've never met.
- Confusion- this new environment is completely different. The smallest things we take for granted need to be explained clearly.

Tips for Welcoming a Child

- **What to expect?** Children have a variety of reactions to being placed with a Host 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.

- **Making a child feel comfortable:** No matter how fun and exciting the new host family home might be, the child will likely have some transition problems. Expecting some challenges might help prepare you for this. The sooner the child feels comfortable, the better. The best way for the child to feel comfortable is for the host family to be comfortable within themselves. Kids can sense discomfort and will adapt accordingly. The best way of being comfortable within yourself is to bring who you are into the encounter with the child. Know yourself and be yourself. If your strength is to be funny, then be funny. If you are nice, then be nice, if serious, then be serious. Routines also are very helpful with the transition. Realize that the child may not follow rules and routines immediately. Also, they may have feelings of sadness and loss that will eventually resolve. You may have to help the kids work it through.
 - Introduce the child to all your family members. Make sure they know what name to call you.
 - If you have children, have them give the child a tour of the home especially where they will be sleeping. Have them explain some of the basic rules (in their language and level) and routines. Point out toys they can play with. For older children, it might be helpful to have rules/expectations written out.
 - If possible, have items from their home available: stuffed animals, pictures of parents, etc.
 - Explain to the child when they will be seeing or speaking with their parent next.
 - Explain rules/expectations about food and access to it (need to ask permission).
 - If the child comes with few personal items such as clothes, explain to them that you will be getting them some additional items.

The importance of establishing routines

- Establishing firm and consistent routines is one of the most important things you can do for the child. Many kids come from very chaotic environments where routines have been up for grabs. Developing clear and consistent routines will go a long way in helping the child adapt to their new environment. Explaining how things are done and why will be helpful. The following are some areas to develop routines in.
- **Meals** – There is a strong possibility that meals may have been quite irregular. Food is a basic need so when meals are irregular, having food is a priority. Please be sensitive to that. Some kids have a sense of security taking some food with them to bed or they may always be hungry. Consistency in meals may alleviate some of their anxiety and communicate to them their importance to you.
- **Bedtime** – Bedtime is often a difficult time. This is when many ambivalent feelings come to the surface. Many kids express sadness at being separated at bedtime because this is when they are processing them. Consistency in bedtime schedules and routines (reading a book, rocking, staying in the room until the child is near sleeping) maybe important interventions.
- **Following Rules** – Most likely your rules will be very different than what the child is aware of. Be sensitive to that. So many rules and expectations are unspoken.

Enrolling in school/homeschool

Schooling is another way we can serve the parent, when their child is returned home. Many Safe Family children are struggle with school. Some may have undiagnosed learning difficulties. It takes a self-assured parent to advocate for

their children to make sure they are getting what they need. Many placing parents lack that assurance and sophistication needed to advocate for their academic rights. We could be a huge resource to parents if, while they are in our care, we can get a good understanding of their academic needs.

It would be important for the child to be enrolled in school right away. Priority is always to try and keep a child in their previous setting for consistency sake. Some schools will even provide transportation under a federal law. You can certainly advocate for that. However, it might be more convenient to enroll them in the local school, especially if the child will be there for a number of months. The consent forms you have give you permission to enroll the child in your local public school.

Children can participate in homeschooling if the parent agrees.

Other areas of consideration:

- Children can attend church with you. However, if a child is to be baptized, dedicated, etc. please get parental permission and invite them to the event.
- You can take the child out of state with parental permission.
- You will be given consent to seek medical care and a medical card (if available). You don't need parental permission for this. However, just like you would want to be notified if your child needed medical intervention, we ask that you do the same for the parent.

What if you need help? Family Coach is there to...

- 1) Support the host family – You are the key to providing a safe and secure environment for the children as well as developing and positive relationship with the placing parent. The family coach is there to ensure that you are supported and get the resources that you need. We will have a Safe Family Coach come to your home within 48 hours of hosting to make sure everything is going well. The Family Coach will also visit your home weekly for the first 4 weeks. If hosting lasts longer than four weeks, the visits from the Coach may decrease. If you have any questions or concerns, they should be contacted first.
- 2) Monitors the safety and care of the child - The most important responsibility is monitoring kids that are currently in a host family home. It's important for the family coach to make sure the child is adapting well to the home and the child is being well cared for. It would be important for the family coach to be aware of potential difficulties that may lead to a hosting disruption if not addressed. Many potential disruptions can be avoided with early intervention.
- 3) Provides resources to the placing parent to help them get back on their feet - This may include making referrals and helping the parent get to any necessary appointments by making sure they know how to get there, etc. If there is another case worker involved, they will certainly take the lead here. However, the family coach may need to fill in the gaps.
- 4) Facilitates the relationship between the host and placing parent – If you are having difficulty connect with the placing parent, your family coach may help. Please let them know.

The Family Coach is your advocate. 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 in order to get their children back. If things are not going well, it is important for you to let your Family Coach know.

Other Supports for you:

- **Family Friend:** Your family coach can request Family Friends to provide additional support for you or the placing parent. The Family Friend can provide you with respite and other supports, if needed.

- **Ministry Lead:** All volunteers serve under a Safe Family Church. The SF Church might not be the church you attend but would be the church you get support from. The SF church may have pastors come pray with you (if yours is not available), periodic gatherings of host families for ongoing training and support, etc.

Safety in your home: There are a number of things you should be aware of.

1. **Fires and burns:** Working smoke detector near sleeping areas; young children do not have access to matches or lighters; oven and burners never used to heat the home; hot water is not scalding- below 120 degrees; hot items are not in reach of young children; handles of pots are turned toward the back of the stove when cooking; electrical appliances are kept out of the reach of children; outlets are not overloaded; extension cords are not under rugs or furniture; electric outlets are covered when not in use; avoid use of electrical heaters;
2. **Infant/toddler Safety – Sleep:** Babies sleep on backs; never let a baby sleep with an adult or older children; place crib away from window blinds to prevent strangulation; remove bibs before putting babies to bed; never cover a mattress with plastic or a plastic bag; remove crib gyms or mobiles as soon as child can push up with hands
3. **Choking and Drowning:** Children have child safe toys; choking hazards are kept out of reach; never give young children small balls or balloons; supervise children’s crafts (scissors and glue); baby pools are drained when not in use; children are always supervised when they are near water; pools have safety gates/fence that keep children out when not supervised; never rely on life jackets to protect a child; never leave a young child alone in a bathtub; collect all the bathing supplies you need before you run the bath water; do not use bathtub seats or suction cups; check water temp to make sure not too hot or cold (Ideal is 98 degrees); be careful – waterspout can get hot
4. **Falls and Poisons:** Infants/toddlers are never left alone when they are on changing tables; furniture that toddlers can climb on is not near windows; baby walkers are not used; children should wear helmets when riding a bike; keep hair dryers, radios out of reach of children; remove glass cups from bathroom; cleaning products, pesticides, medicine and liquor are kept out of reach of children
5. **Violence and Supervision:** Know how to calm a crying infant (Take a break if needed); know never to shake a baby; fire arms and ammunition stored in home are kept in separate locked locations; children are left with an appropriate caregiver when parent is not home; adults who are known to be violent are not left alone with the children
6. **Discipline:** No corporal punishment
7. **Car Safety:** Make sure young children are secured in an approved car seat.

Supporting Family Relationships: contact with parent and visits

- The possessions given to the child by his or her family should be respected and returned to family with the child.
- Pray for the parents at the child’s bedtime.
- Reassure the child that their family cares for him or her despite the difficulties the family has had.
- Be courteous and respectful to their family in front of the child. Don’t talk negatively about their family.
- Ask the parents’ input or assistance on a parenting issue (such as what kinds of foods does the child eat? What are the child’s favorite toys?...). Keeping them included in parenting communicates respect.
- **Parent visits:** Helps the child to know his or her parents are all right; demonstrates to the child that the parents care and love him or her; gives the child a sense of hopefulness; helps alleviate the child’s guilt and reinforces family strengths and competence; visits and phone calls should occur regularly.

Saying Goodbye and Maintaining Contact

- At some point the child will return to his/her parents. Just as the initial transition is difficult so the return may be difficult.
- Prepare for returning home the first day of hosting. Frequently talk about going home.
- Always be open and honest with child. It's ok to acknowledge to the child that they might have ambivalent feelings. If the child mentions they don't want to go home, you can pursue that to find out why. If it's because the host family is more fun, then we need to matter of factly appreciate their thoughts but affirm the return home. However, there might be other reasons.
- Create a schedule or calendar to help the child understand the timing (if old enough).
- Plan a goodbye party for the child. This can be as simple as a special dinner with the child.
- Create a book with pictures of their experience.
- Make sure to honor the placing parent when they return for their child.
- Our hope is that you will remain in contact with the parent after children are returned home – spiritual extended family
- Consider having the parent and their child over for a holiday? Consider calling them on a regular basis.
- Offer to give the parent a break for a day or weekend.
- Find out what other supports they might need to care for their child
- Thank them for giving you the opportunity to care for their child
- Make sure the parent has everything they need to care for the child
- Give them your number and tell them they can call anytime