



## Initial foster care phone calls: Information for parents, foster parents and facility staff

Initial foster care phone calls, also referred to as “comfort calls,”<sup>1</sup> are conversations between parents and caregivers of children in foster care to discuss efforts to ensure child well-being.

County and tribal social service agency caseworkers should attempt to coordinate initial phone calls between foster parent/s or facility staff and a child's parents or legal guardian to establish connections and encourage ongoing information-sharing. When children are separated from their parents and placed in foster care, they often experience significant stress and confusion. At the earliest stage of placement, an initial call builds connections between parents and foster care providers, supporting children's transitions.

Parents know their children best and can help foster providers understand how to best meet their individual needs and preferences. A conversation between parents and foster care providers may minimize the impact of separation for children/youth and parents. Initial calls begin an established partnership between parents and foster care providers for shared caregiving. Direct contact with children requires prior authorization from the placing agency.

### Options for initiating a call

When possible, placing caseworkers inform and prepare parents and foster parents/facility staff of an initial call, providing an explanation and purpose. Staff from the placing or licensing agency can assist parents and foster parents/facility staff during or after initial calls if questions or concerns arise.

Initial calls are made at the time of placement,<sup>2</sup> outside the presence of children/youth. Calls may be initiated in several ways, as follows:

- After children arrive at a foster home/facility, placing caseworker and foster parents/facility staff can call parents together

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<sup>1</sup> Comfort calls have been championed in Minnesota by the Quality Parenting Initiative – Minnesota (QPI – MN), a movement dedicated to strengthening the child welfare system in Minnesota. QPI – MN values birth families, relatives, and foster parents, creating mutually healthy relationships to care for children and youth. Recommendations are based on a guide created by QPI – MN.

<sup>2</sup> A placing agency may determine that an initial call will not be made because it poses danger to the mental or physical health of a child or foster parent/s.

- Placing caseworker calls parents to ask if they are willing to participate in an initial call, if yes, facilitate a three-way call
- Foster family/facility staff is provided contact information and initiates an initial call to parents
- Foster care licensing workers can facilitate phone calls with foster families and parents.

## General information for discussion

The following provides guidance or information for discussion:

- Information from parents about their children that will help foster parents or facility staff to better understand and meet child's best interests, as outlined in [Minn. Stat. 260C.212, subd. 2\(b\)](#), which includes children's:
  - Current functioning and behaviors.
  - Medical needs.
  - Educational needs.
  - Developmental needs.
  - History and past experiences.
  - Religious and cultural needs.
  - Connections with a community, school and faith community.
  - Interests and talents.
  - Relationships with current caretakers, parents, siblings and relatives.
- Information from foster parents/facility staff that will help parents to better understand the environment and care provided to their children, including typical routines and activities.
- How children are doing.

## Tips for a successful initial call

Initial calls help parents connect and create mutually healthy relationships with foster parents/facility staff; gain an understanding of where their child/ren are placed; how they are doing; and also provide tips on their children's immediate needs (routine, likes, how they like to be soothed, allergies, etc.) If an initial call is not arranged at placement, ask assigned caseworker about the call process and its timing. Topics of discussion may include:

- Name/s child goes by
- Best strategies to comfort each child/youth
- Ways to help children stay connected to their culture
- Family members and other important individuals to children
- Favorite toys, games or foods
- What daily routines are, including school/daycare
- Medical information, including providers/primary clinic, prescriptions, food/medication and allergies
- Which health and hygiene products work best and/or what child prefers

- For babies, if they are:
  - Breast-fed, arrangements to get breastmilk
  - Bottle-fed, type of formula and bottle/nipple that works best.

## **What to do if an initial call becomes difficult or stressful**

If an initial call is not going well, end it in a calm manner and indicate hope for future communication. If the placing caseworker does not participate in a call, contact them and share what happened.

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# 651-431-4670

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