

# UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATIONS: *What Alaskan Foster Parents Need to Know*

## *Safety in the Foster Home*

*7 AAC 67.323 Premises*

*7 AAC 67.337 Firearms and Ammunition*

*7 AAC 67.340 Smoking*

*7AAC 67.341 Alcohol, marijuana, and other regulated substances*

*7 AAC 67.345 Animals*

*7AAC 67.360 Safe Sleep*

*This series is a guide to the regulations, but is not a substitute. In all discrepancies between the information in this series and the regulations, the regulations and the statutes are the final authority. Contact your licensing worker for a complete copy of the regulations.*

The health and safety of children in foster care is of utmost importance. Foster care regulations require specific safety standards for foster homes. This self-study looks at several areas of safety including: ***Firearms and Ammunition, Premises, Toxic Substance, Poisonous Plants, Smoking, Animals, and Car Safety.***

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### ***WHAT DO THE REGULATIONS SAY...***

#### ***About Firearms and Ammunition?***



If you have guns in your home and you are a foster parent, you need to use and store your firearms in a responsible way in order to prevent injury to children. The regulations specify that if you have guns in your home, you need to notify your caseworker so they are aware. Firearms in your home need to be stored *unloaded* and stored in a locked gun safe or other locked place that is not visible or accessible to children in care. Ammunition is to be stored separately from the guns and in a place that children cannot access.

Before an older foster child is allowed to handle a firearm, foster parents must submit a firearm safety plan to the licensing worker that addresses the safety instruction approach the home will use with the child. This **Firearm Safety Plan** is part of the **PLAN FOR CARE** that you complete as part of your application to become a licensed foster home. The resource family must request the child's placement worker to obtain advance permission from the child's parents or OCS if parental rights have been terminated. If you plan to allow a child in care to handle a firearm, you need to explain the firearm safety instruction approach you plan to use and review this information with your licensing worker. (A copy of the **PLAN FOR CARE** form is included the back of this self

*study.*) For the foster parent, this means that before a child can be allowed to use a firearm, birth parents or OCS must give permission and the child must have training in gun safety.

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## **WHAT DO THE REGULATIONS SAY...**

### ***About Smoking and Secondhand Smoke?***



Research shows second-hand smoke contributes to respiratory illnesses in children. Foster care regulations address smoking in the foster home. Smoke includes, but is not limited to cigarettes, marijuana, tobacco, vaporizers, e-cigarettes, and cigars. If anyone smokes in the foster home, smoking must be limited to outside the home **and** the home should not smell of cigarette smoke or other smoking products. Additionally, foster homes also must ensure that cigarettes or other smoking projects, ashtrays, lighters, or other smoking accessories are not visible or accessible to children. The foster home must submit a plan acceptable to licensing that addresses how children in care will be protected from smoking in the home. Foster parent may not smoke in their cars. Any vehicle used to transport children must also be smoke free.

The **Second Hand Smoke Reduction Plan** is part of the **PLAN FOR CARE** that you complete as part of your application for licensing. If any one in your family smokes, you will need complete this section to outline how you will protect children from second hand smoke.

### ***About Alcohol, Marijuana, and Other Regulated Substances?***

The use of alcohol, marijuana and other regulated substances are permitted in foster homes; however, the use of these products cannot interfere with the supervision of children. A responsible party should remain sober to provide supervision and care for any children. OCS may require a detailed Supervision Plan for marijuana and alcohol in a foster home. For marijuana use, the plan needs to address the frequency of use as well as how the marijuana will be ingested (inhaled, edible, or other forms). It also requires documentation of how marijuana will be stored to prevent access by children. Since marijuana can be legally grown by adults over the age of 21, OCS requires a resource parent who is growing marijuana, to create a safety plan to ensure plants are kept secure. The supervision plan also asks for an identified backup caregiver for youth while the resource parent is using marijuana. It is still illegal to use marijuana and operate a vehicle.

Youth are not allowed to smoke or use tobacco products, including e-cigarette/vape devices until their 19th birthday and youth are not allowed to use any marijuana products until their 21st birthday. If a foster youth over the age of 19 choses to use tobacco products while still in custody, they must abide by regulations for a smoke-free home and vehicle. Since youth cannot remain in OCS custody past their 21st birthday, if a resource family remains a support for a youth past the age of 21, the young adult must also follow the same rules and regulations regarding marijuana use in a licensed foster home that is expected of the resource parents and all other adults in the home.

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## ***WHAT DO THE REGULATIONS SAY...***

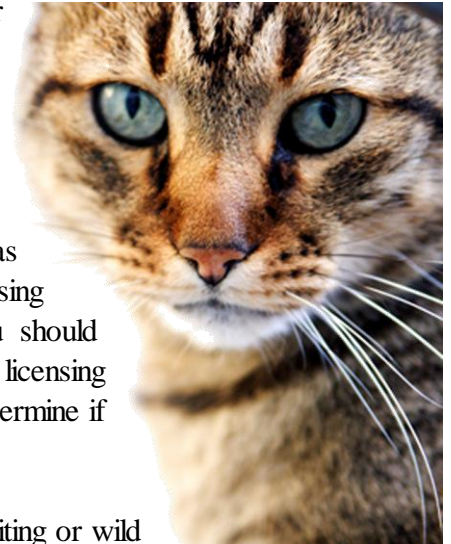
### ***About Pets and Animals?***

Pets can be a positive experience for children. Good sense should guide the foster parent in keeping pets and providing a safe experience for children as well. Foster families need to ensure that any animal kept in the home has no communicable diseases and is free of parasites. Pets should also have all the required immunizations and foster families should have proof that pets have received the required shots. Foster parents are also required to notify a child's caseworker prior to placement of any animals in the home.

Foster parents should take care to provide the appropriate cages or aquariums for animals and to keep cages and pets clean and free of disease. Keep your pet living areas easy to clean. Change bowls and water daily. Remove waste regularly to prevent odor. Make it a habit, and teach your children, to wash hands thoroughly after handling pets.

If you have an animal that has a history of aggressive behavior such as biting, or has been reported to animal control because of aggression, you must let your licensing worker know. If an animal becomes aggressive or bites someone, you should immediately remove the animal from the children in your care and contact your licensing worker within 24 hours of any occurrence of aggression. OCS will need to determine if the animal continues to be a threat to the safety of the children in your care.

Foster homes should avoid dangerous animals such as dogs with a history of biting or wild animals such as skunks, monkeys, and wild rodents.



### ***About the Safety and Condition of Your Living Space?***

When your licensing worker visits your home for a home inspection, he or she is looking at your premises, or the environment that children will be living in. Generally, the worker is looking at the overall safety of the home. The regulations outline some specific areas of safety that he or she will be looking at.

- Your residence must be generally clean, safe, sanitary and in good repair.
- Your home should be free of hazards such as splintered surfaces, broken or hazardous toys, protruding corners, unsafe play areas, ice on walkways, lead paint and flaking paint.
- Insects, rodents and other pests need to be under control and the foster home is kept free of conditions that would harbor pets.
- Your home should have adequate lighting appropriate for the activities performed in each area of the house.
- Cleaners, medicines, toxic materials, and other harmful substances are stored inaccessible to children and adults with impaired judgment.
- Your furniture should be durable, in good repair and kept clean.
- Your hot water temperature should be no less than 100 degrees and no more than 120 degrees.

- You should provide an artificial light source in each part of the house that is adequate for the task performed there (such as playing, cooking, hygiene practices)
- You should make your licensing worker aware of any poisonous household plants such as poinsettias, English Ivy, and philodendrons. If you have these plants, you should have a plan to keep them from young children and be aware of what to do in case of an accidental poisoning.

## About Safe Sleep?

For infants under 12 months, foster parents must follow safe sleep practices. A good rule of thumb is to use the ABCs. The child should be **A**lone, placed on their **B**ack to sleep, and in their own **C**rib.

Safe Sleep Practices also include:

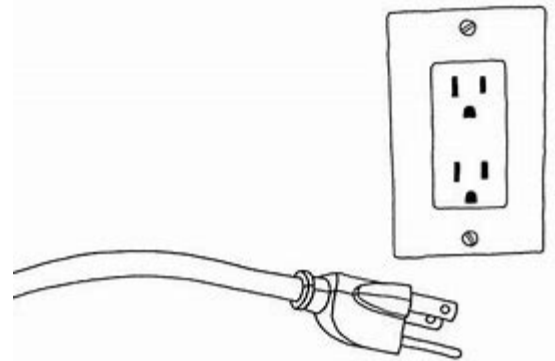
- Not using bedding materials like comforters, pillows, fully blankets, stuffed animals, and crib bumpers because of their risk of causing suffocation.
- Not using sleeping equipment that may allow a child to fall or have clothing tangled.
- The infant must have their own sleeping area, such as a pack n play, bassinet, or crib.
- Co-sleeping is not allowed in a foster home. Co-sleeping is the practice of allowing an infant to share a bed or sleeping space with an adult.



## About Childproofing?

An important part of keeping your home safe for children is to look at those things in the environment that can hurt them. Making sure the environment is safe is called “childproofing.” This means going through your home and fixing those things that can hurt children. For foster homes with infants and children, this includes:

1. Installing and using safety gates to prevent access to stairs
2. Installing outlet covers in all electrical outlets accessible to children
3. Using safe and sanitary equipment for diapering, and making sure that caregivers can easily wash hands after diapering or helping a child with toileting



Remember to have a regular plan for cleaning toys and have a plan for washing reusable bottles in a dishwasher or in boiling water.

**Playground Equipment:** Make sure your play areas are free of hazards as well. Securely anchor outside play equipment, such as swing sets, if not self supporting and make sure that there aren’t any dangerous features on play equipment such as sharp points or edges or pinch and crush points. If there is a fall height from equipment of three or more feet, use shock absorbing materials such as pea gravel, sand or sawdust, and avoid concrete or asphalt.

**Toxic Substances:** Securing and locking up toxic substances is also an important part of making the environment safe. All toxic substances such as cleaning material, detergent, pesticide, poison and aerosol cans need to be stored in the original labeled container. Exceptions would be commercial sanitizing or bleach water solution in a spray bottle that is properly labeled. These products need to be stored inaccessible to children and stored separately from medication and food. Foster families should take care to use only nontoxic arts and crafts materials with children.

**Handwashing:** Washing hands with soap and warm running water can decrease the spread of germs and encourage good hygiene. Caregivers should wash hands before food preparation, after toileting or diapering a child, before assisting a child with tooth brushing or giving medication, and after handling pets or when hands are contaminated with bodily fluid, including nose wiping.

## ***About Car Safety?***

While the licensing regulations don't directly address car safety, foster parents are expected to follow all state and federal laws.

Alaska law says that a driver may not transport children under 16 in a motor vehicle unless the child is properly secured according to state child passenger safety law. Children under age 4 must be properly secured in a federally approved car seat or booster car seat. For children over age 4 but under age 16, Alaska state law requires that the child be properly secured in a vehicle seat belt or federally approved car seat or booster seat, whichever is appropriate for the particular child based on their height and weight. Never place a child in a rear-facing car safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle that has a passenger air bag. The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat. All infants should ride rear-facing until they have reached at least 1 year of age and weigh at least 20 pounds. Once your child is at least 1 year of age and at least 20 pounds, they can ride forward-facing.



When children have reached 4 years of age and have outgrown their car seat, they should ride in a booster seat. The seat should raise your child so the lap and shoulder seat belts fit properly. A child should use a booster seat until they fit properly in a regular seatbelt harness. Foster parents should set a good example and always wear your seat belt. Wearing a seatbelt or providing appropriate safety restraint for children is the law for all passengers in Alaska.

Never leave a child in a car alone even if it is for a short time. Children have been known to slip cars into gear accidentally and be seriously hurt or hurt others. It only takes a minute for a tragedy to happen. Of course, foster parents should never transport a child in a vehicle if the parent is under the influence of alcohol, marijuana or regulated substances.

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For more information about the **UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATIONS: What Alaskan Foster Parents Need to Know** series, contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families at 1-800-478-7307.



## OTHER IDEAS FOR A SAFE HOME

1. Take CPR or First Aid, especially if you have a medically needy child, an accident-prone child, or young children. Have basic First Aid supplies on hand, such as Band-Aids, alcohol, gauze and tape.
2. Look at toys in your house. Be careful of toys with small pieces or sharp objects. Do not let young children play with plastic bags or balloons.
3. Cut up food into small enough pieces so that children do not choke on hot dogs, meat, vegetables, etc. Don't let children have hard candies. Cereals with holes, such as Cheerios, are also safer for young children.
4. Take special care with children around strange dogs or animals.
5. Wash your hands frequently. Teach children to do the same (such as before food preparation, after touching animals, after sneezing, before eating). Hand washing is proven to cut down on disease and colds. Set up a hand washing system that is easy to use.
6. Be careful with long curtain cords that can strangle a child and tablecloths that can be pulled atop a child.
7. Get breakable things up and out of the reach of children. Secure kitchen cabinets with plastic child locks to prevent children from getting into cupboards.
8. Teach children biking and boating safety. Teach them to use hand signals, bike horns, helmets and to look before going into the street. Teach them to always wear a personal flotation device. If children are often around water, teaching them to swim may be a good idea. Never leave young children around water unsupervised, even if it is in the sink or washtub.
9. Always use infant and car seats when transporting children under 4 years of age in the car. Use a booster seat for older children until they can fit into adult seat belts. Always wear your seat belt and teach older children to do the same.
10. Inspect your outdoor play area often. Is there sharp, rusted or bent metal exposed? Is equipment working properly? Are swings and bars at a good height? Is the area free of broken glass, garbage and other dangerous material? Are children safe in the area? Are they in view or in close access to adult supervision? Fix safety concerns *immediately*.

## TEST