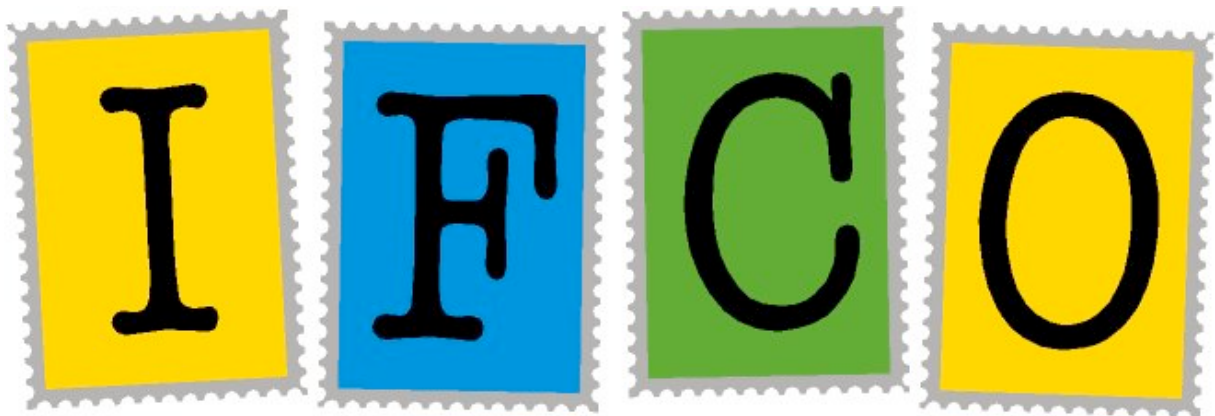


# Guidelines for Foster Care

International Foster Care Organisation



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## **Preamble:**

1. These guidelines are based on the UN declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children with special reference to Foster Placement and Adoption Nationally and Internationally, which were adopted by the General Assembly in December 1986 and on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which was adopted by the General Assembly in November 1989.
2. These guidelines were formulated by the participants of a special Working Group Meeting held in Bangkok, Thailand from 1-4 May 1995 in cooperation with the Department of Public Welfare, Bangkok. This meeting is a continuation of the special workshop on “The Child’s Right to a Family – New Concepts for Foster Placement and National Adoption” held at the 26<sup>th</sup> World Conference of ICSW in Tampere, Finland from July 3 – 7.
3. The Fundamental principle behind these guidelines is every child’s right to grow up in a family.
4. The first priority for a child is to be cared for by his or her parents. All efforts shall be made to support the family or the extended family to keep the child. Only when such efforts prove insufficient and not appropriate, shall foster care be considered.
5. In accordance with the child’s age and level of development, he/she has the right to be consulted and to have his/her opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting him/her.
6. In all foster care procedures it is important that the highest possible standards of practice are followed, within accepted principles. Guidelines, which incorporate the best of practice and principles, can be helpful in achieving this.
7. In all foster care procedures, the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration.

These guidelines shall serve to:

- Reduce the risk in out-of-home placement by building the strengths of foster care agencies and foster families to protect the health, safety, ethnic heritage and dignity of children placed in their care;
- Offer the base from which to examine and measure practice.
- Lead the content of education regarding issues and practice of foster care of the appropriate authority is staff, Foster Care Agency staff, birth/legal families, foster carers, children in care, and the general public.

# Definition of Terms

**Foster Care** This implies temporary care or alternative family care. The period of care can vary in different countries to meet the specific needs of a child. It could be pre-adoption care; weekend care or vacation care; respite care for handicapped children; care of a group of children in one family; or long-term care for a child who cannot be adopted.

**Foster Carers/  
Family** Adults who provide temporary physical care, nurture and emotional support in their home to children placed with them for planned, goal-directed services which will support the ultimate permanent life plan of a child.

**Foster Care  
Agency** The public or private agency which recruits, approves, supervises and places children with foster families.

**Biological  
Parents** The family into which the child is born. In this context means both parents if they are together, or the mother, or the father.

## **A. Foster Care Authorities and Agencies**

### **A.1. Accreditation**

Foster Care arrangements should be made only through government foster care authorities or recognized/ accredited bodies.

### **A2 Alternatives to keep child in biological family**

The appropriate authorities or agency shall satisfy itself that all alternatives to keep the child in his/her own family have been explored and that foster care is the optimal choice of care for the child.

### **A3 Recruit and Screen Foster Carers**

The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall recruit and screen foster carers. Assessment of the ability of the applicants for approval as foster carers shall comply with established procedures.

### **A4 Orientation and Training for foster carers**

The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency will provide orientation and pre-placement training to prospective foster carers and continuing periodic training to familiarize and support them in providing the optimal level of care for the foster child.

### **A5 Interdisciplinary Intervention Team**

The appropriate authority of Foster Care Agency shall use an interdisciplinary intervention team that has as its foundation a complementary partnership between the worker and the foster carers and that includes, as needed, other staff members and professionals from other fields such as psychology, health, education and law.

### **A6 Written Manual**

The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall develop, maintain, update and employ a written manual which delineates the roles, performance, policies and procedures which govern and guide their administration and personnel in their practice and which defines sanctions for abrogation of any stated policy.

### **A7 Foster Care Agreement**

The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall devise and have countersigned by the foster carers a foster care agreement as a requirement for receiving placements. This agreement shall include the rights and responsibilities of the foster family, the placing agency and the Foster Care Agency or appropriate authority.

### **A8 Placement limitations**

The Foster Care Agency shall establish a limit upon the number of children placed in one foster care home at one time.

### **A9 Placement agreement**

The appropriate authority of Foster Care Agency will devise and have countersigned by the foster carers a placement agreement prior to the actual placement of each child in that foster home.

- A10 **Preservation of Family Ties**  
To preserve family ties, the appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency will attempt to place a child in geographic proximity to his/her parents and his/her siblings, and to arrange frequent visitation. The appropriate authority or the Foster Care Agency will support contact with the child's extended family.
- A11 **Placement of Twins and Siblings**  
The Foster Care Agency or appropriate authority will place twins and siblings together in a single foster home, or, if this is not possible, will be placed in closest geographic proximity with frequent visitation arranged.
- A12 **Contact with Extended Family**  
The Foster Care Agency shall support the child's contact with the child's extended family.
- A13 **Preparation for Placement of Child**  
Wherever possible, the Foster Care Agency shall arrange pre-placement meetings between the child and foster carer, in either the agency office or the foster carer's home. The Foster Care Agency shall prepare the child for these visits and provide the child a description of the foster carer family.
- A14 **Emergency Placement**  
In the case of emergency placements, the appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency must endorse a written authorization/agreement from the foster carer to accept the child under emergency circumstances. The placement agency shall also provide, in writing, an agreement to provide all necessary and regular documentation within a specified time after placement.
- A15 **Permanency Planning**  
The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall begin permanency planning for the child as soon as placement has begun.
- A16 **Case Plan**  
The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall devise a written case plan to increase the likelihood of the child's reunification with his family. This case plan shall be reviewed at regular intervals in case conferences involving the child, the foster carer, the biological family and whoever else are involved in the child's development. The case plan should specify performance expectations of all the parties, frequency and duration of actions and the person or parties responsible for each action.
- A17 **Monitoring of Placement**  
Continued monitoring and assessment of the child's placement shall take place at regular intervals to determine whether necessary and appropriate services are being provided to eliminate or reduce those obstacles that prevent the child's return home. The results of this monitoring shall be in writing in each child's case file.
- The appropriate authority of Foster Care Agency shall monitor the child's progress according to the written case plan and according to the method of casework which is best suited to the child and caseworker.

- A18 **Promote Operation of Foster Care Agencies**  
The appropriate authority shall offer support to the Foster Care Agency.
- A19 **In-service Training for Foster Carers**  
The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall provide support to the foster carers through in-service training and other methods.
- A20 **Neglect and Abuse of Foster Child**  
Reports of neglect and abuse of foster child by the foster carers shall be immediately investigated in compliance with existing governmental statues and agency policies.
- A21 **Annual Mutual Review**  
The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall develop a procedure for participation with the foster carers in an annual mutual review. This review will evaluate the strengths and needs of the foster carers and of the relationships between the Foster Care Agency and the foster carers.
- A22 **Runaway**  
In the case of runaway, injury or death of a child in care, the agency should immediately be informed by the foster carer. The agency will report the circumstances to the appropriate authority. A review of the circumstances shall be immediately carried out to determine appropriate action. The interdisciplinary Intervention Team (IIT) will respond to the foster family's emotional needs.
- A23 **Recognition of Contribution of Foster Carers**  
The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall develop a policy to recognize the positive contributions made by foster carers to the field of child welfare.
- A24 **Policies and Procedures for Handling Grievances**  
The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall have written policies and procedures for handling complaints or grievances.
- A25 **Closure of Foster Homes**  
The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall develop written policies and procedures for the closure of foster homes under variety of circumstances (i.e. foster carer retirement, death, relocation, serious regulation violation, child abuse or neglect) and establish a procedure for revoking a foster carer's license. This procedure should include an appeals procedure and a review by an independent party.
- A26 **Individual Case Record**  
The appropriate authority and the Foster Care Agency shall develop an individual case record, which includes all pertinent family's involvement with foster care. This record should also contain periodic narrative reports that describe the provision and outcomes of foster care services.
- A27 **Confidentiality**  
The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall treat all case records as confidential. Access to these records should be restricted by agency policy and practice to authorized persons.

**A28 Retention and Disposition of Files**

The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall maintain written procedures for the retention and disposition of closed files being advised to comply with all applicable local and country laws in this regard.

**A29 Foster Care Worker**

Foster care workers and family services workers shall be qualified, trained and competent individuals.

**A30 Service Training for Foster Care Agency Staff**

The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall provide pre-service training and regular, on-going training for the foster care staff to carry out their responsibilities with children and their families.

**A31 Supervision**

The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency shall provide workers with regularly scheduled supervision by competent supervisors to provide support, to promote growth on the job, to ensure that administrative and legal responsibilities and performance standards are met, and to provide individualized training.

**A32 Case Load Size for Workers**

The caseload size for workers should be determined depending upon the level of service required to meet the assessed needs of each child.

**A33 Advocacy to Promote Foster Care**

The appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency should engage in advocacy efforts to promote foster care, ensure adequate protection and care for the children in its care and the foster families.

**B. CHILD IN FOSTER CARE**

**B1 Rights of the child**

Children and youth have the rights specified by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**B2 Responsibilities of Child in Care**

- a. To respects the rights of others
- b. To participate as a member of the interdisciplinary intervention team in developing the plan of care when the child is of an appropriate age and level of understanding.
- c. To follow through on any commitments, agreements or contracts made with the Foster Care Agency, foster carers or others involved in their plan of care.
- d. To work towards resolving the family conflicts with the goal of reunification with the family; unless inappropriate or otherwise mandated by the courts.
- e. To maintain contact with biological family members unless otherwise mandated by the courts.
- f. To complete with support, educational or school requirements.
- g. To abide by agreed upon rules and responsibilities within the foster care home.
- h. To perform household tasks, which are within their abilities, are reasonable for their age and are similar to those expected of their household members of comparable age and ability.

- i. To maintain personal hygiene habits, which include bathing regularly, tooth and hair brushing and hygienic toileting practices.

**B3 Physical Health Care**

Consent for the child's routine preventative and emergency medical and dental care should be provided, in writing, by the child's biological parents or legal guardian.

**B4 Food and Nutrition**

Each child in care should be provided with nutritionally balanced meals. If necessary, special dietary provisions required by the child's licensed physician or the child's placement plan should be met.

**B5 Clothing and Personal Belongings**

Each child in care should be provided with adequate, well-fitting, clean clothing appropriate to the season and to the child's age, sex, activities and individual needs.

Clothing should be in good repair.

The child in care should be allowed to possess and bring to the foster carers home, personal belongings subject only reasonable household rules and the child's placement plan. Personal belongings and gifts received by the child should be sent with the child when the child leaves the foster carers home.

**B6 Emotional Health Care**

The emotional health of the child in care will be protected by the Foster Care Agency, the foster carer and other members of the interdisciplinary intervention team.

**B7 Recreation and Social Activities**

Play is a way in which social, emotional and intellectual skills are developed and should be encouraged as a significant aspect of a child's development. Play should be age appropriate.

**B8 Special Events**

Special efforts should be made by the foster carers to celebrate transitional events in the child's life and to include the child's legal family in such events.

**B9 Sex Education, Sexual Identity, and Sexual Development**

The development of healthy sexual attitudes and behaviours in the child should be encouraged and supported by the interdisciplinary intervention team.

**B10 Spiritual Development**

The spiritual development of the child should be supported by the inter-disciplinary intervention team in accordance with the wishes of the child and the child's biological parents.

**B11 Case Plan**

To increase the likelihood of the child's reunification with his family, a written case plan should be devised by the appropriate authority or Foster Care Agency. This case plan should be reviewed at regular intervals and in case conferences involving the



child, the foster carer, the biological parents and whoever else is involved in the child's development.

**B12 Preparation for Independent Living**

The child shall be supported and encouraged to acquire appropriate skills for productive living and eventual independence.

Even the young child should have these skills included in his/her placement plan and this portion of the placement should be updated as the child meets successively more challenging goals.

Plans for the youth who is nearing emancipation should concentrate upon development of a network for services to be utilized once the youth has left care. Foster carers may be included in this network. Formal plans may be made for the youth to experience the skills necessary for productive adult living prior to exit from foster care.

**B13 Aftercare**

The child in care should cooperate and the Foster Care Agency should provide for a network of services to support and assist him/her during a transition period of one to six years.

**C FOSTER CARERS**

**C1 Qualifications**

Foster carers should have the knowledge and skills to:

1. Protect and nurture children in a safe, healthy environment with unconditional positive support, using methods of positive discipline, stressing praise and encouragement for good behaviour and refraining from physical/corporal punishment or verbal abuse of the child, including threats of removal from the foster care home;
2. Support relationship among children and their parents, twins, siblings and kin;
3. Meet the developmental needs of the child. (See addenda)

**C2 Attachment**

Recognizing the child's needs to bond and the importance of bonding to human development, the foster carer should model and facilitate attachment for the child in care.

**C3 Foster Carer Financial Stability**

The foster carer should demonstrate that the household has sufficient income to meet their needs and ensure the security and stability of the household independent of foster care maintenance payments.

**C4 Qualities of The Foster Carer Home**

The foster carer must demonstrate the ability to maintain a home, which is in safe condition and good repair, in compliance with local standards, ordinances and regulations for residential use, kept free of hazards to the health and physical well-being of the family, and is continuously supplied by drinking water approved by local health authorities.

**C5 Characteristics of Foster Carers**

Due consideration should be given to foster carer applicants with regard to their age, income, marital status, race, religious preference, sexual orientation, physical or disabling condition, or location of the foster home.

Among the characteristics of foster carers are that the foster carer must demonstrate and document when requested are:

- a. Ability to use methods of positive discipline, stressing praise and encouragement for good behaviour and refraining from physical/corporal punishment and verbal abuse of the child, including threats or removal from the foster care home.
- b. Physical health and freedom from communicable diseases, as certified by a licensed physician, or disabilities which would either endanger the health of a child or interfere with the capability of the household to provide care for the child;
- c. Responsible adult lifestyle, free of excessive use of alcohol or use of illegal drugs;
- d. Ability to set realistic expectations for behaviour and performance based upon the age, abilities and special needs of a child;
- e. Ability to provide nurturing care, supervision, reasonable discipline and a home-like environment for a child;
- f. Without criminal conviction, indictment or ethical conduct;
- g. Productive participation as a member of the interdisciplinary intervention team responsible for planning, providing and discussing the total care and services provided to each child, fully disclosing all information related to a child's problems or progress.
- h. Treat any personal information about a child or the child's family in a confidential manner.

**C6 Safety Requirements**

Specific safety issues must be addressed by the foster carer and monitored by the Foster Care Agency to ensure the highest safety of a child. (See Addenda.)

**C7 Foster Carer's Rights**

The foster family has the right to be treated with personal dignity and respect, to be considered first as a family and second as a service provider, and to be informed of their rights and how to exercise them. (See Addenda.)

**C8 Foster Carer's Expenses**

The foster carer should be compensated for expenses related to caring for the child in foster care.

**C9 Foster Carer Associations**

The foster carer's right to become affiliated with or form a foster family association is affirmed.

**C10 Orientation and Pre-Service Training**

The foster carer shall receive an orientation and pre-service training. (See Addenda.)

**C11 Training**

The Foster Care Agency should provide foster carers with a thorough on-going in-service training program that helps them to maintain and expand the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfill their responsibilities. Training should be regularly scheduled and should be integrated with supervision and monitoring so that in-service training, supervision and monitoring are mutually reinforcing. (See Addenda.)

**C12 Placement**

a. The foster carer will participate in the preparation of the home study, which will consider, but is not limited to, assessment of:

1. A safe and caring home environment for the child;
2. The linguistic, social, ethno-cultural, religious identity and heritage of the foster family;
3. The number, ages and gender of children/youth or adults already living in the foster family home;
4. The geographic location and community norms of the foster family;
5. The proximity to schools and other community services for children/youth;
6. The willingness and ability of the foster family to work with the child/youth in care and become part of the interdisciplinary intervention team;
7. The willingness and ability of the foster family to maintain contact with the child/youth's family, in accordance with the plan of care;
8. The strengths, abilities, special talents and level of preparation enabling the foster family to provide quality care for the child;
9. The willingness and ability to increase knowledge and further training to meet a child/youth's specific and changing needs;
10. The willingness and ability to meet the health and dietary needs of the child;
11. The ability of the foster family to accept twins, a sibling group, or multiple placements;

12. The willingness of the foster family to access and use available resources.
- b. The foster carer will countersign a fostering agreement devised by the Foster Care Agency prior to the time a child is placed with the foster family. This agreement should include the rights and responsibilities of the foster family, the placing agency and the Foster Care Agency.
  - c. The foster carer will countersign a placement agreement prior to the placement of each child in that foster home.
  - d. The foster carer will attempt to accept the placement of twins and siblings together in a single foster home. If the placement of siblings (not twins) together is not possible, the foster carer will accept placement of siblings in the closest possible geographic proximity and arrange frequent visitation to preserve the siblings' family ties with each other.
  - e. Whenever possible, the foster carer will accept a pre-placement visit in their home with a child who is being considered for placement in that home.
    1. Prior to the pre-placement visit, the child should be made aware of his/her rights and access to his/her Foster Care Agency case worker.
    2. The child should also be provided with a description of the foster carer family, their home, photographs and a video, if possible, so the child is able to prepare for meeting the foster carers.
    3. The foster family should receive from the Foster Care Agency information that pertains to the psychological, emotional, or physical history of the child and his/her family, including:
      - a) name, date of birth (legal name and name known by);
      - b) health and health card number; allergies, medical and dental records; genetic, eating or sleeping disorders;
      - c) psychiatric or psychological disturbances of the child or other family members;
      - d) behavioral issues of the child or other family members;
      - e) school and academic records;
      - f) significant events and prior placement information;
      - g) child's interests, hobbies, or extra-curricular activities;
      - h) clothing and belongings list;
      - i) any other significant information.
  - f. Emergency placements accepted by the Foster Care Agency must be accompanied by written authorization to accept the child under emergency circumstances and the placement agency's agreement in writing to provide all necessary and regular documentation within a specified time after placement.

### **C13 Case Planning**

The foster carer should participate in the devising of a written case plan for each child in care. These plans should be reviewed at regular intervals and should involve the child, according to age and stage of development, the foster carers, the public agency worker, the child's parents, and the child's advocate. Other persons who are involved with the child's care, such as psychologist or school guidance counselor may be included in the plan. All these parties should receive a written copy of the plan. The plan should specify performance expectations of all the parties, frequency and duration of actions, and the person or parties responsible for each action. Monitoring and continued assessment should take place at regular intervals to determine whether necessary and appropriate services are being provided to eliminate or reduce those obstacles that prevent the child's return to the family (CWLA).

### **C14 Discharge Planning**

The foster carer should support the Foster Care Agency in beginning planning for the child's discharge from foster care as soon as placement in foster care has begun, so that the child can achieve a permanent home at the earliest possible time after placement. That home may be the home from which he came into care or a kinship home, an adoptive home or in the home of a foster carer as a long-term placement option. Discharge plans should include the public child-placing agency, the family Foster Care Agency social worker; the child, according to age and stage of development; the child's parents; other family members, if desired by the child's family or the child, and the foster carers.

### **C15 Confidentiality**

Foster carers should work cooperatively with Foster Care Agency representatives, planning for the services provided to each child and should disclose fully all information related to a child's problems or progress to Agency representatives. Foster carers should treat any personal information about a child or the child's family in a confidential manner.

### **C16 Foster Carer Support**

The foster carer should receive support from the Foster Care Agency.

- a. The Foster Care Agency should arrange for new foster carers to have access to experienced foster carers who can serve as mentors and provide the new foster carers with informal support and guidance.
- b. The Foster Care Agency should provide accessible, quality, competency-based in-service training for foster carers which provides foster carers with the opportunity to:
  1. Build on the basic competencies established through life experiences and in pre-service training;

2. Identify and develop advanced competencies, such as working with medically fragile infants; and,
  3. Continue relationships with other foster carers, including sharing expertise and problem-solving.
- c. The Foster Care Agency should provide policies and procedures that detail casework and support services. These plans should include:
1. The availability of the caseworker or an on-call agency caseworker to respond to emergencies 24 hours a day;
  2. The increased presence and availability of the agency caseworker at the time of and shortly after placement or crisis;
  3. What respite services and supports are available to the foster carers;
  4. Discharge preparation with and by the foster carers;
  5. Post-discharge support for foster carers who are grieving the separation and loss of a child in care.

**C17 Relationship to Family of Child in Care**

Foster carers should maintain a working relationship with the child's family in accordance with the service plan and in cooperation with the Foster Care Agency staff. The child's family should be allowed to communicate with the child by mail, by telephone and in person in accordance with the child's service plan.

**C18 Runaway, Injury, or Death of a Child in Care**

In the case of runaway, injury of a child in care, the foster carer shall report the event to the appropriate authorities, then review the placement plan with the IIT to determine appropriate action.

**D. BIOLOGICAL PARENTS**

**D1 Biological Parents' Rights**

Biological parents of children and youth in care have the right to personal dignity and respect and to be informed of their rights and how to exercise them. (See Addenda.)

**D2 Respect**

The biological parents should concomitantly respect the rights of others.

**D3 Biological Parents' Responsibilities**

The responsibility of biological parents will be to support efforts to actively resolve family conflicts and aim toward the reunification of the family by being involved in the interdisciplinary intervention team and to maintain contact and schedule visits with them unless such contact places the child in danger of harm or is mandated against by the courts.

**D4 Biological Parents' Background**

The biological parents should provide information about their own and the child's background, medical history and development history.

**D5 Biological Parents' Commitment**

Biological parents have the responsibility to follow through on any commitments, agreements or contracts made with the child and family services, foster families and others involved in their child's plan of care.

**D6 Plan for Care**

The biological parents have the responsibility to be involved in the planning for their child's placement and care provided such involvement does not interfere with the child's and foster family's safety.

**D7 Grievances**

The biological family has the right to voice opinions, thoughts, feelings and beliefs without retribution by making use of the established grievance process.

**D9 Significant Events**

The biological parents have the right to be informed of any significant events or developments in the child's life.

**D10 Identity**

The biological parents have the right to their own identity and ethno-cultural heritage, language, traditions, activities and religious/spiritual beliefs.

**D11 Record Access**

The biological parents shall have access to recorded information related to all family members including the child in care provided such access is within the legal limits of the country.

**D12 Confidentiality**

The biological parents have the right to confidentiality.

**D13 Interdisciplinary Intervention Team (IIT) Member**

The biological parents have the responsibility to participate as a member of the interdisciplinary intervention team.

**D14 Religious and Ethno-cultural**

The biological parents have the right to state a preference for the religious and ethno-cultural upbringing of the child.

**D15 Termination of Parental Rights**

Termination of parental rights may only be initiated after assessment of the biological parents ability to continue productive involvement in their child's life.



