DSHS

Foster Parents Speak

2014

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Foster Parent Survey

March 2015 | Report 11.215

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Department of Social & Health Services

RDA Research & Data Analysis Division

DSHS

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Department of Social and Health Services

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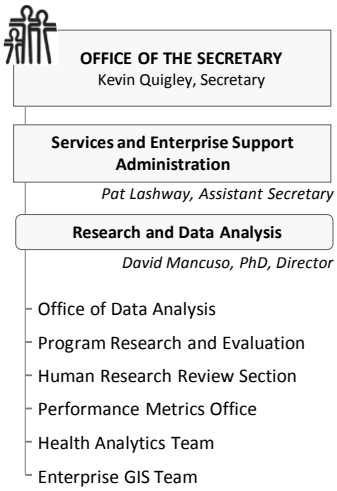

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INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Title: 2014 Foster Parent Survey: DSHS Foster Parents Speak

Abstract: Between September 2013 and August 2014, DSHS surveyed 1,351 foster parents who had a child in care on the 15th day of August 2013, November 2013, February 2014, or May 2014. These foster parents were asked about their satisfaction with support, training, and information provided by Children's Administration and private agencies contracted by the Administration to provide services to foster parents. They were also asked to offer recommendations for change.

The majority of foster parents continue to express satisfaction with the support and training they receive, and with the social workers assigned to their cases. Some indicated that they would like better access to resources, faster and more flexible processes, greater inclusion in matters concerning foster children, and more complete and timely information about their foster children's cases. Some foster parents also suggested a need for more convenient training locations and schedules, more interaction with experienced foster parents in training, more non-traditional training formats such as online training, and more choice about which trainings they take.

This report is the third in a series of annual Foster Parent Survey reports.

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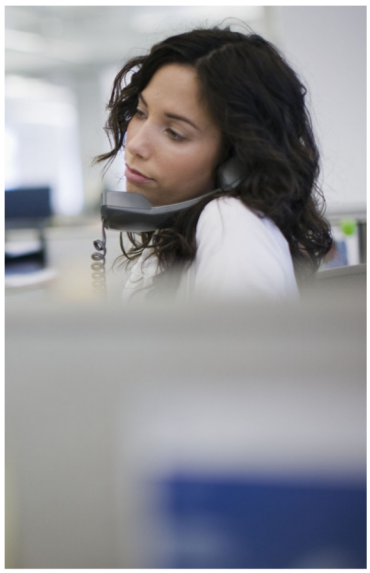
2014

DSHS Foster Parents Speak



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Highlights of the Survey

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The Highlights section is an executive summary of key findings from the 2014 Foster Parent Survey.

During the 2014 State Fiscal Year, the Research and Data Analysis Division (RDA) of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) conducted 1,351 telephone interviews with randomly selected foster parents in the state of Washington. The survey consisted of 7 standardized questions and 4 open-ended questions, the responses to which were comprehensively coded and analyzed for this report.

The survey responses described in this report paint a portrait of the complexities, successes, and struggles of Washington's foster care system and the thousands of individuals who interact with it on a daily basis, including:

- **Children requiring foster care, who often have experienced trauma.**
- **Biological parents who have had difficulty caring for their children.**
- **Foster parents trying to meet the needs of those children.**
- **Social workers and other professionals who must balance heavy caseloads, find safe placements for youth, and meet the needs of foster and biological parents while satisfying all legal requirements.**

The foster parents who contributed to the survey are at the center of this system. Their voices have much to tell us about its areas of strength, opportunities for improvement, and the importance of its impact on the lives of foster children.

Foster Parent Support

BRIGHT SPOTS

- ***Most foster parents said they are supported well by Children's Administration, specific programs and offices within the Administration, and private agencies contracted by the Administration to serve foster parents.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- 79% responded positively to the question "In the past year, did you get adequate support for your roles and responsibilities as a foster parent?" (1,053 of the 1,341 who answered).
- Of the 347 comments about overall foster parent support, 61% were positive (213 comments).

- ***Most foster parents find the social workers assigned to their cases supportive, courteous, respectful, willing to listen, and understanding of their situations and needs.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- 85% responded positively to the question "Do social workers listen to your input?" (1,115 of the 1,318 who answered).
- Of the 411 comments about social worker support, 55% were positive (228 comments).
- Of the 136 comments about social worker courtesy and respect, 60% were positive (82 comments).
- Of the 228 comments about social workers' ability to listen and understand, 65% were positive (148 comments).

- ***Most foster parents said they got help when they needed it, and more than half of the comments on access to social workers were positive.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- 81% responded positively to the question "Do you get help when you ask for it?" (1,079 of the 1,325 who answered).
- Of the 522 comments about phone and staff access, 56% were positive (290 comments).
- Of the 207 comments about having consistent contact with social workers, 62% were positive (129 comments).

CHALLENGES

- ***Some foster parents want more social workers hired. They feel that even excellent social workers are too overworked to pay proper attention to the children and families they serve, and that the overwork results in more staff turnover which negatively impacts foster families.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- 142 respondents said that more social workers are needed.
- Although a majority of comments about access were positive (56%), many of the 180 negative comments on phone and staff access indicated that social workers were difficult to reach or slow to respond.

- ***Some foster parents find aspects of the foster care processes cumbersome and unresponsive. They are critical of many processes.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- Of the 71 comments about general processes, 96% were negative or suggestions for improvement (68 comments).
- Of the 131 comments about specific processes, 95% were negative (125 comments).
- Of the 58 comments about coordination, 78% were negative (45 comments).

- ***Foster parents are clear about their need for timely access to resources, especially health resources, financial resources, and respite care.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- Of the 340 comments about resources, 52% were negative comments or suggestions for improvement (176 comments).
- Of the 84 comments about medical/dental/mental health resources, 61% were negative (51 comments).
- Of the 61 comments about respite resources, 67% were negative (41 comments). Slow payment for respite was a strong theme.
- Of the 57 comments about financial resources, 72% were negative (41 comments).
- Of the 37 comments made about childcare resources, 60% were negative (22 comments).

MIXED MESSAGES

- ***Foster parents' responses to standard questions about their inclusion in meetings and other matters concerning their foster children were mostly positive. However, the majority of comments about whether social workers include foster parents were negative.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- 76% responded positively to the question "Are you treated like part of the team?" (1,016 of the 1,331 who answered).
- 70% responded positively to the question "Are you included in meetings about the child in your care?" (904 of the 1,293 who answered). Although this figure still represents a large majority of respondents, there was a decline of 7 percentage points from the 2013 survey (the only statistically significant change from 2013).
- Of the 190 comments about social worker inclusiveness, 55% were negative or suggestions for improvement (104 comments).

- ***Foster parents' responses to the question concerning receiving adequate information about the needs of their children were generally positive. However, nearly half of the comments volunteered about the adequacy of information received were negative.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- 73% responded positively to the question "Do you get adequate information about the needs of the children placed with you, such as medical, behavioral, developmental and educational needs?" (943 of the 1,293 who answered).
- However, of the 690 comments concerning information, 47% were negative (323 comments).

Foster Parent Training

BRIGHT SPOTS

- ***The majority of foster parents are pleased with the training they receive from Children's Administration, private agencies, or specific programs.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- 87% responded positively to the question "Overall, thinking about all the training you have had in the last three years, how adequately has it prepared you to care for the basic needs of the foster children placed in your home?" (1,146 of the 1,321 who answered).
- Of the 354 comments about the overall helpfulness of their training, 82% were positive (292 comments).
- Of the 113 comments about trainers, 69% were positive (78 comments).

- ***Foster parents are grateful for the many ways training helps them care for their foster children, and find resources that benefit those children.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- Of the 201 comments about ways in which foster parents' training helps them care for their foster children, 85% were positive (171 comments).
- Of the 106 comments about ways in which training helps foster parents find resources for their foster children, 52% were positive (55 comments).

- ***Foster parents value the information and sense of community they get from interaction with their peers in training, especially when they can meet and learn from experienced foster parents.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- Of the 213 comments about having a voice and sense of community in training, 78% were positive (166 comments).
- Most positive comments related to voice and sense of community consisted of statements of appreciation for the presence of experienced foster parents in training activities, and for opportunities to connect with other foster parents in and out of training. Most negative comments were statements of concern that opportunities for interaction were lacking.

CHALLENGES

- ***Foster parents need more convenient training locations and times, to reduce travel costs and accommodate their work schedules. They also need childcare available during training, or assistance with childcare costs when training requires them to be away from home.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- Of the 419 comments about access-to-training issues, 92% were negative or suggestions for improvement (384 comments).
- Of the 118 comments about training locations, 92% were negative or suggestions for improvement (109 comments).
- Of the 238 comments about training schedules, 93% were negative or suggestions for improvement (221 comments).
- Of the 163 comments about childcare during training, 95% were negative or suggestions for improvement (154 comments).
- Of the 73 comments about the quality and timeliness of information about training, 73% were negative (53 comments).

MIXED MESSAGES

- ***Foster parents like non-traditional training formats, particularly on-line resources that offer comprehensive and convenient training options, and support groups that allow them to interact with other foster parents. But there is room for improvement in both cases.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- Of the 148 comments about on-line training, 61% were negative or suggestions for improvement (91 comments). The majority of these comments were requests for **more** on-line trainings, but there were also many complaints about outdated materials.
- Of the 20 comments about training received in support group settings, 85% were positive, but only a small number reported having had this experience (17 comments).

- ***Foster parents gave high marks to many specific trainings, or types of training, they have received. However, many foster parents want trainings on a wider variety of topics. Foster parents expressed interest in additional training opportunities for navigating the foster care system, child behavior training, and other topics.***

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- Of the 812 comments about specific trainings overall; 53% were positive, 26% were mixed/neutral, and 20% were negative or suggestions for improvement (434, 164, and 214 comments, respectively). Many of the mixed/neutral and negative comments were requests for training or for more training on certain topics, rather than criticisms of existing trainings. Some were requests to shorten some required trainings, or to combine them.
- Of the 155 comments about child behavior trainings, 55% were positive (86 comments).
- Of the 67 comments about health and safety training, 84% were positive (56 comments).
- Of the 195 comments concerning navigation of the foster care system, 52% were positive (102 comments). Many of the 78 negative comments were in reference to a perceived need for more training on navigating the system.
- Of the 219 comments concerning PRIDE training, 78% were positive (170 comments).
- Of the 30 comments on Parenting Plus, 47% were positive (14 comments).
- Of the 15 comments about Love and Logic training, 93% were positive (14 comments).

Survey Facts

- The 2014 Foster Parent Survey report is the third annual report on foster parents' responses to questions about the support and training they receive.
- The report summarizes the results of a rolling survey for State Fiscal Year 2014, conducted between September 1, 2013 and August 31, 2014.
- 1,351 foster parents were interviewed by telephone.
- The individuals called were a random sample of all foster parents who had a child in care on the 15th day of August 2013, November 2013, February 2014, or May 2014.
- Interpreters were available for all languages, and alternative methods were available for deaf and hard-of-hearing respondents.
- The survey's **95% completion rate** is extraordinarily high. Of the 1,430 eligible foster parents in the sample, 1,351 completed the survey.
- The survey's **97% cooperation rate** is also high. Of the 1,397 eligible foster parents *contacted*, only 23 refused to take the survey. Another 23 were not available during the study period.
- Participation was voluntary and respondents could decline to answer any question. The number of answers per question varied between 1293 (96%) at lowest, and a maximum of 1,341 (99%).

Survey Results at a Glance

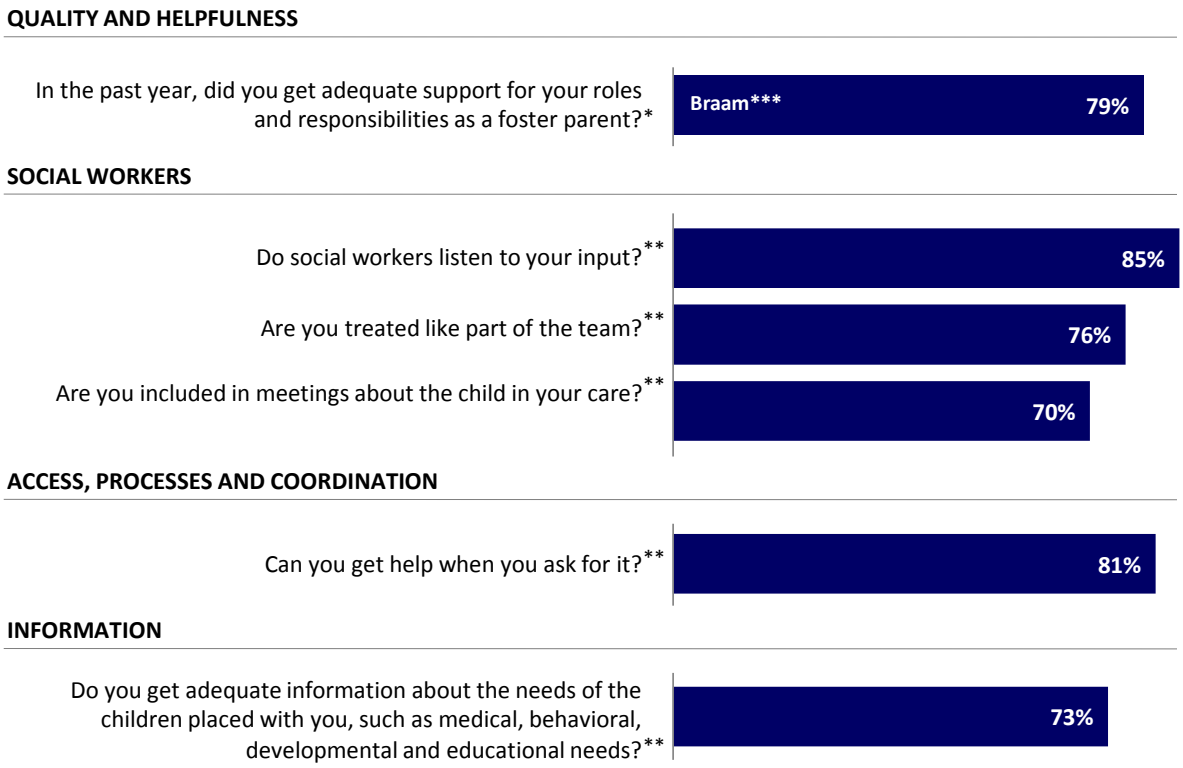
The survey analysis is based on two types of questions – standard (closed-ended) questions and open-ended questions.

There are seven standard questions – two compliance questions related to the Braam Settlement and Exit Agreement ("Quality and Helpfulness" and "Adequacy of Training"), and five questions designed to assist in strategic planning for foster parent support.

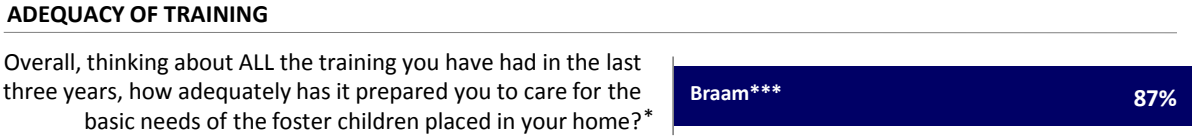
In addition, there are four open-ended questions – two relating to foster parent support, and two relating to foster parent training. Responses to the two foster parent support questions are summarized in the chart on the next page (page 7); responses to the two foster parent training questions are summarized on page 8.

2014 Foster Parent Survey satisfaction rates

Regarding Foster Parent Support . . .

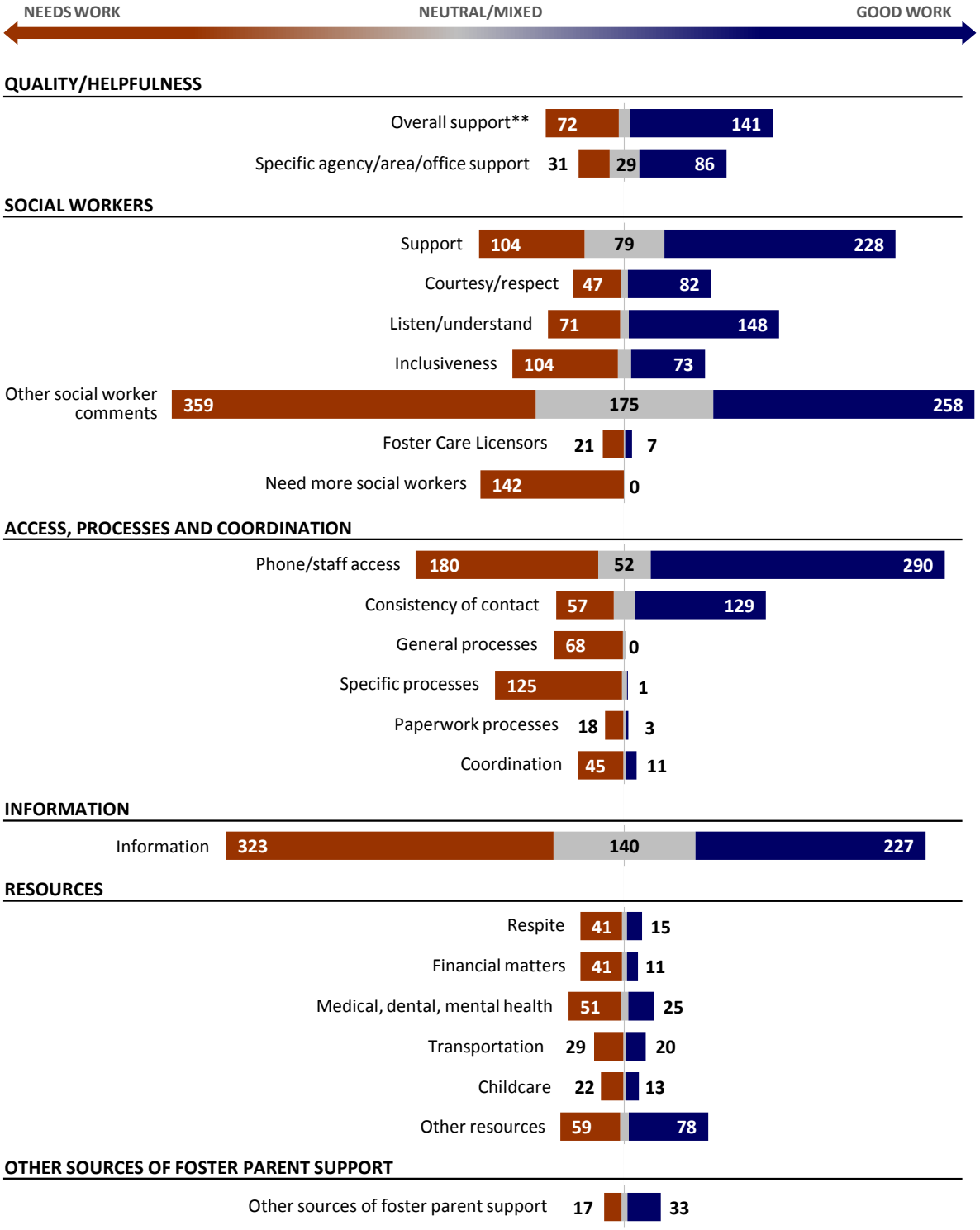


Regarding Foster Parent Training . . .



* Percentage shown is the percent who answered "More than adequate" or "Somewhat adequate."
** Percentage shown is the percent who answered "Always or Almost Always" or "Usually."
*** Questions for "Quality and Helpfulness" and "Adequacy of Training" are related to the Braam Settlement and Exit Agreement.

Respondents who made positive, negative, or neutral/mixed comments about Foster Parent Support*



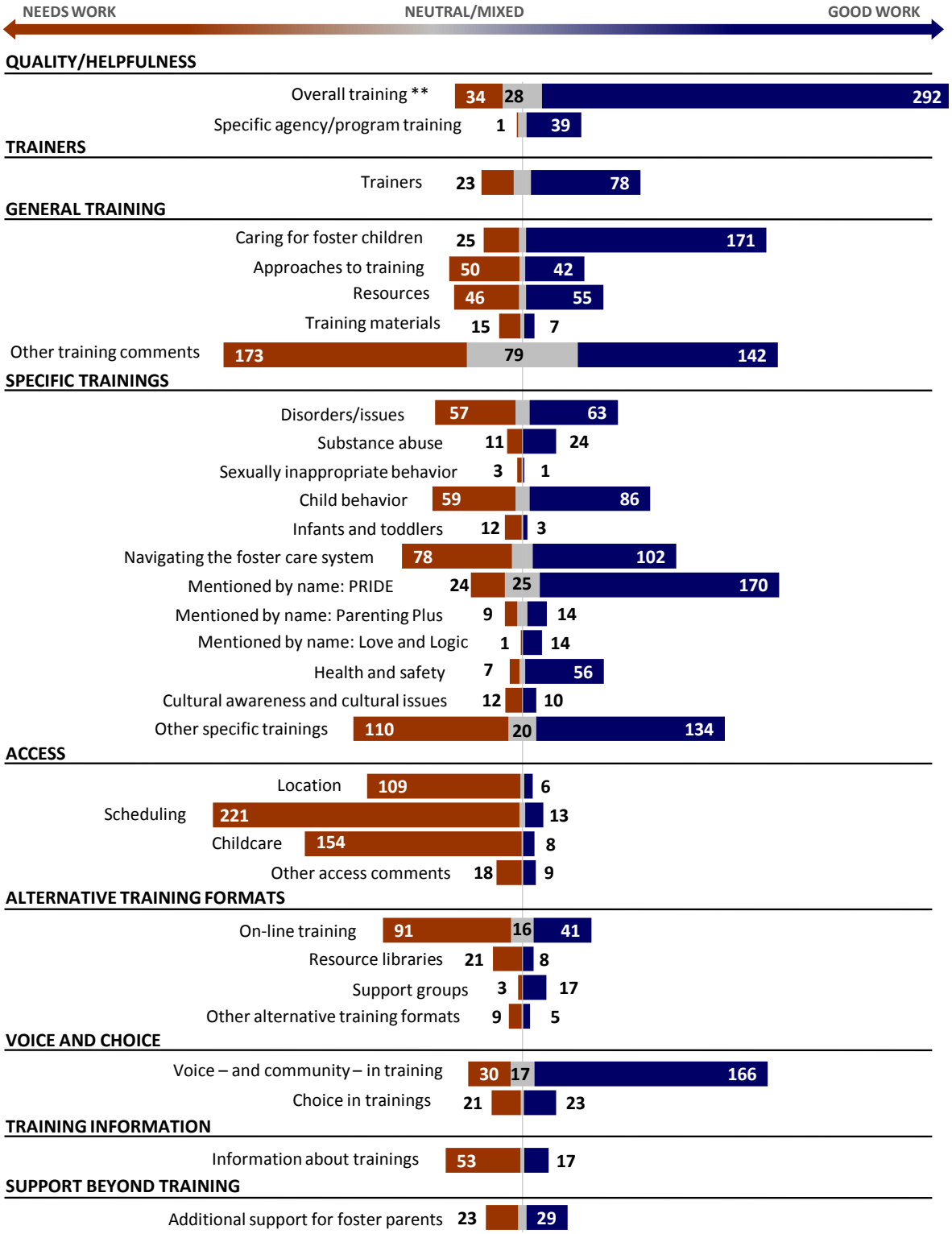
* Narrative comments were made in response to two questions:

- *What do Children's Administration and your social workers do well to support you?*
- *What could Children's Administration do better to support you?*

A more detailed table showing narrative response themes and a response glossary can be found in the Appendix.

**Overall support includes unduplicated general comments about Children's Administration support and "Nothing" answers. See p.13 for more explanation.

Respondents who made positive, negative, or neutral/mixed comments about Foster Parent Training*



*Narrative comments were made in response to two questions:

- *What about foster parent training has been helpful?*
- *How could foster parent training be improved?*

A more detailed table showing narrative response themes and a response glossary can be found in the Appendix.

**Overall training includes unduplicated general comments about training and "Nothing" answers. See p.55 for more explanation.

PART 1

Foster Parent Support

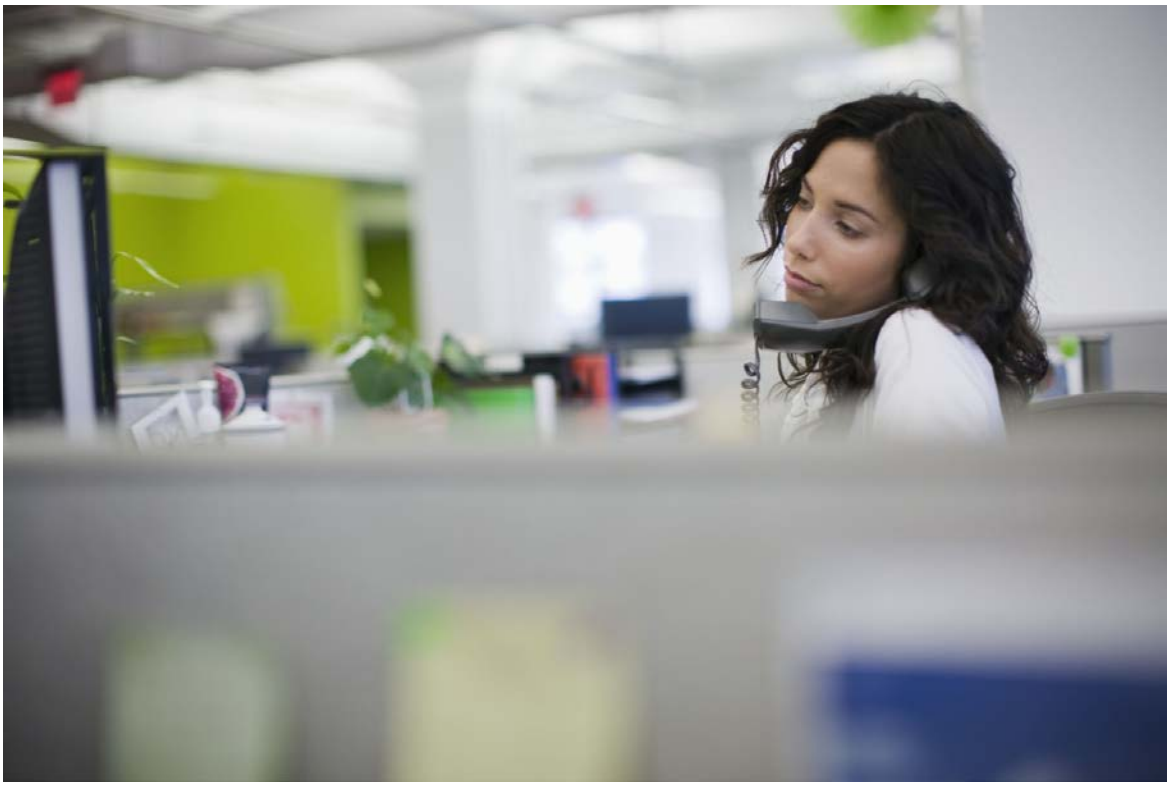


PHOTO: Photodisc/Getty Images

The Foster Parent Support section provides a detailed analysis of foster parents' responses to questions about the support they receive when caring for foster children.

The majority of foster parents reported that the level of support they receive is adequate or more than adequate. Many commended the support provided by Children's Administration and private agencies, the skills and efforts of social workers, the commitment of social workers to the needs of the children, and the range of resources that are provided.

Many foster parents also indicated areas in which they would like to receive better support. They would like more productive relationships with their assigned social workers, more timely responses to their requests, more information about their foster child's case and available resources, and consistent access to those resources. Most of all, foster parents want to be valued members of a team that prioritizes the needs and interests of foster children.

This part of the report contains the following sections:

- Section 1: Quality and Helpfulness
- Section 2: Social Workers
- Section 3: Access, Processes and Coordination
- Section 4: Information
- Section 5: Resources
- Section 6: Other Sources of Foster Parent Support

Quality and Helpfulness

PHOTO: iStock /Getty Images

Foster parents expect and appreciate support from the Children's Administration and the private agencies who also work with them.

This section describes the overall quality and helpfulness of the support received by foster parents from Children's Administration and from private agencies contracted by Children's Administration to provide services to foster parents. Subsequent sections present and summarize foster parents' experiences with specific aspects of foster parent support – social workers, access, processes, coordination, information, resources, and additional supports.

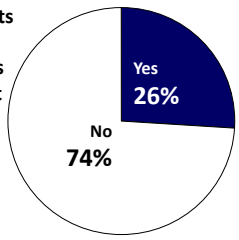
The majority of foster parents indicated satisfaction with the support they receive, and many survey respondents expressed gratitude to those who help them do the best for the children in their care. A substantial minority described challenges or suggestions for improvement.

In this section:

- The following page highlights foster parents' responses to the question: ***In the past year, did you get adequate support for your roles and responsibilities as a foster parent?***
- The next two pages describe foster parents' comments about the quality and helpfulness of support from Children's Administration as a whole, and from specific offices or agencies.

About one quarter of the survey respondents (347) commented on the overall quality and helpfulness of foster parent support. Of those 347 comments:

Made comments about quality and helpfulness of foster parent support?



- More than half (61%) were positive comments.
- About one in four (26%) were negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.
- Just over one of ten (12%) were mixed or neutral comments.

1.1 Quality and Helpfulness

PHOTO: Digital Vision/Getty Images

The majority of foster parents reported that support is good or adequate.

"Overall my experience has been very positive."

"I have good rapport with Children's Administration. If I need respite, no problem. Special needs have been addressed adequately."

"They are good at everything. They are very supportive when I need them and I have no complaints."

"I think they're doing a really good job. I wish the private agency could be more supportive, but DSHS has been wonderful."

"They are doing adequate."

"Social workers at both private agency and DSHS both respond quickly to our questions and concerns."

Some foster parents have mixed or neutral experiences with support.

"They do OK. Nothing stands out."

"We are going through a private agency in addition to working with the state. We feel fortunate to have this additional support and we feel like they supplement the lack of support from the state."

Others are not satisfied with the support provided.

"Private Agency is very supportive and helpful - not only on a level of what is needed for the foster children but overall as a family. DSHS makes us feel that we are to do it on our own and figure out stuff for ourselves."

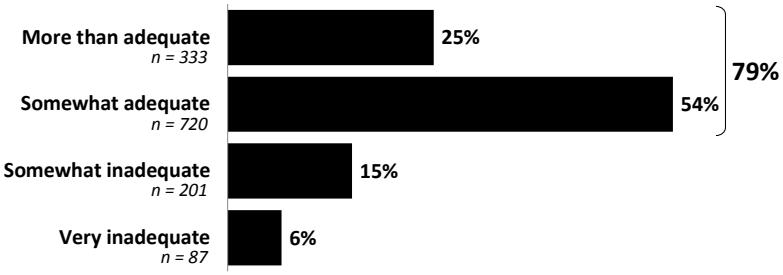
"I got a brand new social worker at DSHS and a brand new counselor at the Private Agency…I feel like the blind being led by the blind."

"I don't see where I am getting support."

"They give us children to care for. We only do this for the benefit of the child. The system is very poor and not helpful to us or the children."

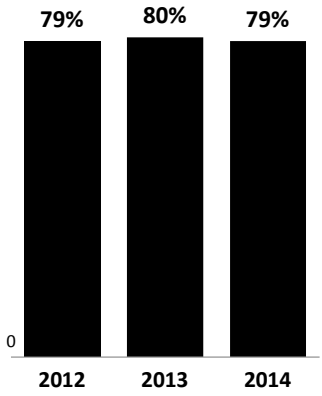
QUESTION | In the past year, did you get adequate support for your roles and responsibilities as a foster parent?

Of the 1,341 foster parents who answered this question, nearly eight out of ten (79%) reported that they received somewhat or more than adequate support in the past year. About two out of ten (21%) found support somewhat or very inadequate.



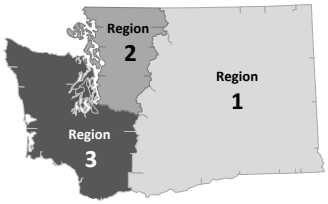
STATE TREND

The percent of foster parents reporting somewhat or more than adequate support did not change significantly from last year.



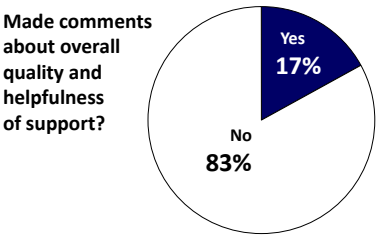
REGIONAL DETAIL

Foster parents in Region 1 provided slightly lower ratings, but there was no statistically significant variation by region.



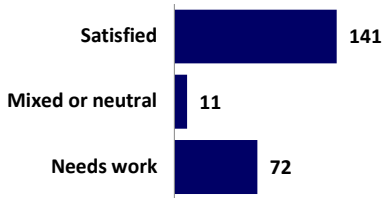
THEME | Overall Quality and Helpfulness of Support Received from Children's Administration

Comments about the quality and helpfulness of foster parent support received from Children's Administration (CA) were included in this category.[1]



224 of the foster parents surveyed (17%) mentioned general support.

Of the 224 survey respondents who addressed the overall quality and helpfulness of foster parent support, more than six out of ten (63%) made positive comments. About three in ten (32%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Less than one in ten (5%) made mixed or neutral comments.



These general comments include those that were made when respondents were unable to give any specific areas where support could improve – or areas where support is good.

- **102 respondents replied "Nothing" to the question "What could Children's Administration and your social workers do better to support you?" (a positive response).**
- **49 respondents replied "Nothing" to the question "What do Children's Administration and your social workers do well to support you?" (a negative response).**

These comments also include 107 foster parents who provided more specific descriptions in praising or criticizing the general quality of support.

- **69 made a specific positive comment about overall support (64% of specific comments).**
- **27 criticized overall support in specific terms (25% of specific comments).**
- **11 offered specific neutral or mixed comments (10% of specific comments).**

PHOTO: Fuse/Getty Images

Many foster parents are pleased with the quality of foster parent support.

"They were always there when I needed them, both private and the state."

"We often see private agency and DSHS social workers together which is really nice for our schedule."

"I feel like CA has been adequate and when I have had questions, they respond appropriately."

"The concern of the child's wellbeing is pretty high, so I think they do well."

"DSHS staff are great. I heard from them usually once a week. They kept me informed and answered all my questions quickly. I also love my private agency. They are very helpful and walked me through everything I need."

Some find support to be lacking.

"A lot of times I feel like I am on my own with my private agency and DSHS staff."

"I have to fight for everything. Other foster parents are most supportive."

"My social workers are great. Children's Administration, however, has not been supporting my home for ten months."

"The structure is not there for us. We had behavioral problems we could not control, and there was no recourse for us. The rules make it hard for us to discipline the children when they act out so the kids have to be removed from the home. We have given up our license because of this."

"They could always improve on support for the foster parents themselves. They seem to have their hands tied about certain things…this is both private agency and DSHS staff."

"We went with a private agency because we were incredibly unhappy with DSHS staff."

[1] As described on the lower part of this page, positive and negative comments were combined with "Nothing" responses according to question context.

1.1 Quality and Helpfulness

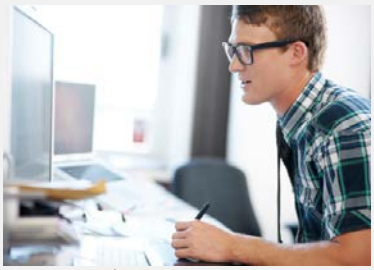


PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Some foster parents commented on support received (or not) from Children's Administration offices.

"When I do respite care for Spokane they go by the rules, they are helpful, and they are nice."

"The Tumwater social worker let me know about visits, courts and has asked about sibling visits."

"On our previous case from Snohomish County – they have a lot of work to do. They need an excessive amount of education provided to the social workers on how to treat foster parents and be respectful to them."

"Port Angeles office is outstanding as they answer questions promptly and keep me informed on the case."

"The Mt. Vernon office is very dysfunctional. They listen but do not deal with issues. It took 5 weeks to offer in-home counseling when there was an aggressive acting out child."

Respondents also discussed support from the private agencies or tribes.

"Our private agency staff are great: answering questions, returning calls, hooking us up with support groups."

"We use Tribal Workers - lots of info given out. Our case worker is through the Tribe and our experience was good."

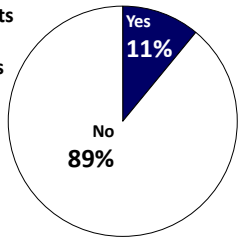
"Private agency has been outstanding in getting us resources and having them available and educating us about what's out there for these kids. DSHS social workers do that also but not quite as well."

"The private agency has been horrible – no help, no info and never part of the team, or listened to in meetings etc. Did not even tell me who the victims were and about restraining orders, and that my youth is a registered sexual offender. Changing my license to DSHS."

THEME | Quality and Helpfulness of Support from Specific Agencies, Areas, or Offices

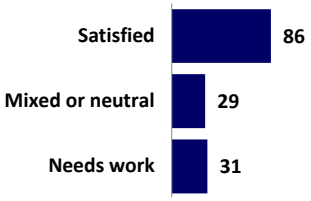
Comments about the quality and helpfulness of support received from particular private agencies, or from a specific Children's Administration area or office, were included in this category. 11% of respondents commented about support from a specific entity.

Made comments about quality and helpfulness of specific agencies, areas, offices?



146 of the foster parents surveyed (11%) mentioned support from specific agencies, areas or offices.

Nearly six out of ten (59%) of the 146 foster parents who mentioned specific agencies, offices, or tribes made positive comments. Just over one in five (21%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Twenty percent had mixed or neutral experiences.



In some cases, comments about specific agencies, areas, or offices may be based mainly on experiences with individual staff members. Comments included foster parents' observations about:

- Support received from their Children's Administration regions or offices.
- Support received from their private foster care agencies.
- Support provided by American Indian tribal organizations.

While the majority of the comments were positive in nature, some foster parents pointed out deficiencies in the support they received.

Social Workers

PHOTO: Huntstock/Getty Images

Foster parents want positive, timely, friendly, respectful, and productive interactions with social workers.

Some of these social workers who support foster parents are employed by Children's Administration, and others are employed by agencies contracting with Children's Administration to provide services to foster parents.

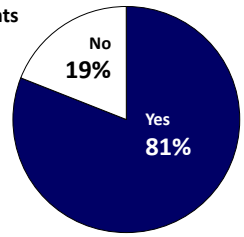
Many foster parents reported they are pleased with the support they receive from social workers. However, important challenges were also reported, such as the failure of some social workers to make foster parents a real part of the team; to communicate effectively; to respond effectively when problems arise; or to successfully manage their heavy caseloads.

In this section:

- Topics are addressed in this order: social worker support; social worker courtesy and respect; social workers listen/understand; social worker inclusiveness; other comments about social workers; specific social workers; foster care licensors; and the need for more social workers.
- Three pages (18, 20, and 21) provide foster parents' responses to specific questions.
- Seven pages (16, 17, 19, 22, 23, 24, and 25) address foster parents' comments on various themes related to social workers.

Over four out of five of the foster parents surveyed (1099 out of 1351, or 81%) made comments about social workers. Of those who commented on this subject:

Made comments about social workers?



- About three out of ten (30%) made positive comments (334).
- About three out of ten (30%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement (333).
- Nearly four out of ten (39%) made mixed or neutral comments (431).

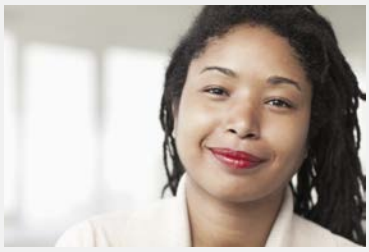


PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Most foster parents appreciate the social worker support they receive.

"They are good at everything. They are very supportive when I need them and I have no complaints."

"They communicate well, and are helpful and affirming. The social workers just seem like wonderful people."

"They are always very gracious, helpful, and communicative. We have taken emergency placements and they are very supportive."

"I have had a very good relationship with the social workers. They have always helped me to the best of their abilities, and I have been doing this for 20 years."

"Right now, we have a fabulous social worker. She is like part of our family. She is very supportive."

Some are dissatisfied with their social worker support.

"After we accepted the child it felt like we were on our own."

"I don't feel like they are very helpful. I leave a lot of messages. I don't EVER get timely answers to my questions. I was told things would happen and they never did."

"Be supportive to us as foster parents. We are just a number to the social worker. We will be giving up our foster license after the most recent experience. We love being foster parents, but our most recent experience has been a nightmare."

Others reported that support depends on the individual social worker.

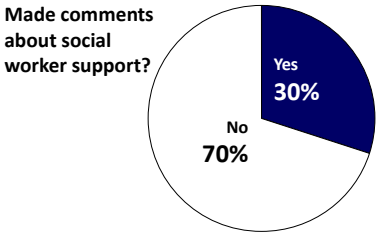
"The last child I had four different case workers and it's difficult to answer this question. Some were great and some were terrible!"

"That's a tough one. A lot depends on the worker you have. With one kid, I had a good worker that did anything I needed. With other workers, I get no help."

"It all depends on the social worker."

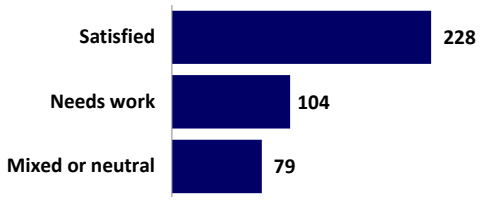
THEME | Social Worker Support

Three out of ten foster parents commented at least once on the overall quality of social worker support (rather than on specific social worker attributes, such as respect or understanding).



Of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed, 411 (30%) mentioned general social worker support in their comments.

Over half (56%) of comments on general social worker support were positive (228 positive out of 411 comments). One quarter (104 or 25%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. 79 (19%) made mixed or neutral comments.



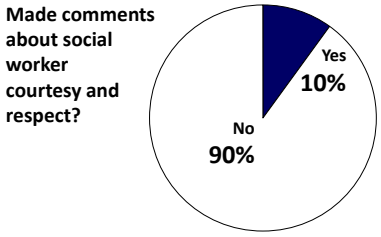
Comments about the quality of social worker support included foster parents' thoughts about:

- Social workers in general.
- Individual social workers.
- Children's Administration social workers.
- Private agency social workers.

Although most comments praised the support provided by social workers, some indicated the level of support should be higher or that it varied greatly between social workers.

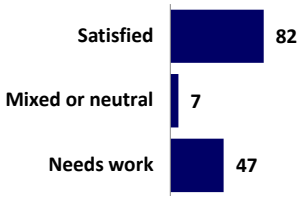
THEME | Social Worker Courtesy and Respect

Comments about courtesy and respect shown to foster parents by social workers were included in this category. Ten percent of survey respondents made a comment about social worker courtesy and respect.



One in ten (136 or 10%) of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed mentioned social worker courtesy and respect.

Of the 136 survey respondents who addressed social worker courtesy and respect, six in ten (82 or 60%) made positive comments. Over three in ten (47 or 35%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. The remaining seven (5%) made mixed or neutral comments.



Foster parents **like** social workers who:

- Treat them with kindness and courtesy.
- Are actively engaged with them.
- Regard them as equals.
- Truly care about foster children and foster families.
- Are respectful of the many contributions foster parents make to the children in their care.

Foster parents **dislike** social workers who:

- Are rude, inconsiderate, or unprofessional.
- Are judgmental.
- Treat them as inferiors.
- Don't have a "heart" for foster children and families.
- Fail to recognize the time and effort that foster parents spend caring for their foster children.

PHOTO: Pixland/Getty Images

Foster parents want social workers to be courteous and friendly.

"Both DSHS and the private agency are incredibly friendly and understanding."

"They are always kind and considerate."

"The social workers need to respect the foster parents, not treat me rudely."

"They are really good about getting back to me. They are very nice and courteous."

"Within the past five years there has been a change in the attitudes of the social workers. They are not as friendly, nor as helpful."

"They are very kind and sympathetic."

They value social workers who care about them and the children in their homes.

"Our current social worker is wonderful. She is very good about showing care to our entire family – both the foster children and our biological children."

"The social workers really care about the child and the foster parents. They try to do everything they can to support me."

"The social workers need to consider the children and not treat them as just a number."

"They have the foster child's best interests at heart."

"The social worker didn't inform us a scheduled visit from our foster child's father was cancelled three days before it was supposed to happen. That poor kid sat on the steps of our house for three days waiting for her dad while we waited for a call back from anyone."

They value social workers who respect their work as foster parents.

"Almost any time I talk to a social worker they thank me for being a foster parent. It's a lot of work. I appreciate the thanks."

"They appreciate my role as foster parent. I appreciate all that CA does. They have the child at heart."

"They don't give us credit for what we are doing. Sometimes they blow me off when I call for support."

1.2 Social Workers

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents like social workers who are good listeners.

"She listens, she is collaborative, and is empathetic...and helps solve problems when they arise. She is fantastic."

"State agency social worker is fantastic and honors our opinion."

"I feel like they definitely listen and they were open to the things that I had to say about the case."

"The private agency staff is very receptive to my ideas and suggestions. They listen and respond well."

"They listen. It is so nice to be heard."

"I appreciated the social worker's follow through – taking care of what she said she would do. She quickly got the child into daycare and therapy. All social workers respected our insights and our needs seriously."

"They listen, help problem solve, and connect us with resources."

Some feel that their social workers should improve their listening and communication skills.

"They could value me as a person and communicate that. Actually listen to my opinions in a way that is not dismissive. The way they answer I can tell they aren't taking it in. I am with the child 24 hours per day and they are with the child one or two hours per month."

"Listen without judgment – sometimes as a foster parent you feel like a second class citizen."

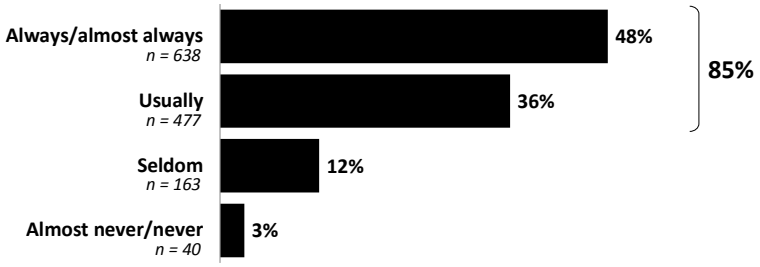
"A lot of the time it seems like they hear us but are not listening. They don't take suggestions or acknowledge our point of view is valid."

"Their communication is pretty bad. The foster parent is in a unique position to discern and share information about the child, but foster parents' opinions are rarely listened to or consulted."

"Listen. Consider the children's needs and likes. Return my calls."

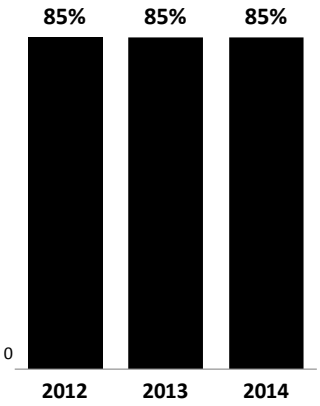
QUESTION | Do social workers listen to your input?

The majority of the 1,318 foster parents who answered this question (85%) said that social workers almost always, always, or usually listened to their input. The remaining 15 percent said seldom, almost never, or never.



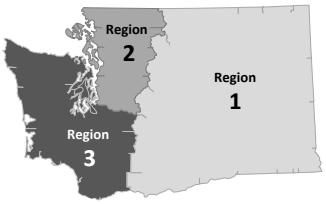
STATE TREND

This percent is unchanged from last year.



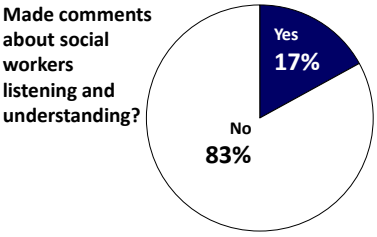
REGIONAL DETAIL

Region 3 was a little higher (86%) on this question than the other two Regions (83% and 84%), but the difference was not statistically significant.



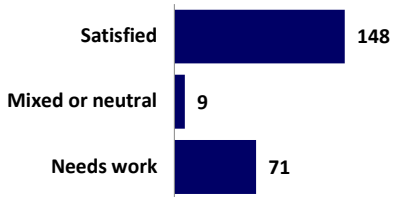
THEME | Social Workers Listen/Understand

Comments about social workers' ability to listen to and understand foster parents were included in this category. Seventeen percent of foster parents surveyed made a comment about social workers listening and understanding.



228 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (17%) mentioned social workers listening and understanding.

Of the 228 survey respondents who addressed social workers' ability to listen and understand, almost two thirds (148 or 65%) made positive comments. Nearly one third (71 or 31%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Four percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Many foster parents said that their social workers:

- Are good listeners.
- Take foster parents' ideas and concerns into account when making decisions about foster children.
- Listen to – and support them – when they discuss the children's needs.
- Understand the needs of foster parents and foster children.

Some suggested that social workers:

- Work on their listening skills.
- Solicit *and use* foster parents' input about children in their care.
- Try harder to understand foster parents' and foster children's circumstances.

PHOTO: Stockbyte/Getty Images

Foster parents want social workers to *listen* to what they have to say.

"I feel that they are listening. I feel they advocate for the children and for the foster parents – if a situation needs to be changed or if we need information. They have been supportive in making sure we have what we need."

"The social worker listens well and provides me with what is needed to care for the children in my home."

"Really listen to what we have to say about the child and take our comments into consideration when planning for the child."

"They listen and problem solve and go above and beyond to make sure things are working out for me and the foster child."

"They could listen a little more thoroughly. Although they listen, it appears they do not digest the information."

They also want social workers to understand their circumstances.

"They listen and understood the complications of the behavioral needs of the kids. They allowed us to seek intervention regarding this and supported us."

"Be more proactive when needs are mentioned to the social worker so the child gets needed services now, not wait until an emergency occurs."

Most of all, foster parents want a strong voice in matters regarding the children in their care.

"They listen to my input and consider what I think is best for the child when making their decisions."

"DSHS doesn't really listen to our advice or what we feel is important for the foster children. We are with the foster children every day and we know what is happening!"

"This worker has been attentive to any concerns or needs we voice regarding what the foster child needs to be healthy and developmentally on task."

1.2 Social Workers

PHOTO: Digital Vision/Getty Images

Most foster parents feel valued as a team member.

"The caseworker and social worker are awesome and a fabulous team. I really feel like a part of the team. I am listened to and I get responses. I am grateful to be a part of this team."

"The private agency workers are great. They are supportive above and beyond. We are a really good team."

"I feel like a valuable member of the team and feel encouraged by staff."

"They are very receptive to our input, and treat us with respect. I feel like a part of the team."

"They are very positive, very encouraging, etc. They acknowledge us, are very prompt, and make us feel like we are good parents. I feel like a full-fledged partner."

"We work together as a team, they return calls and e-mails, and make business in a timely manner."

Some feel excluded from the caregiving team.

"They could include me as part of the team. My whole thing is the best interest of the child. I find that they don't value my input."

"The social workers need to make the foster parents feel like they are part of the team and consider what the foster parents say as they have the children 24/7."

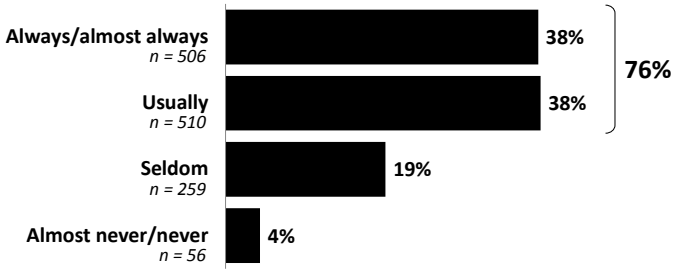
"Make us feel like we are part of a team. Give more explanation so we are not always in the dark about the status of the child."

"For 'teams,' include foster parents in the decision-making. Give foster parents value rather than thinking that a foster parent doesn't actually 'know' the child or their needs."

"One thing is to make the foster parents part of the team! Too often I think the foster parent is ignored. They need to treat the foster parents as more of an equal since we are trying to do a similar job."

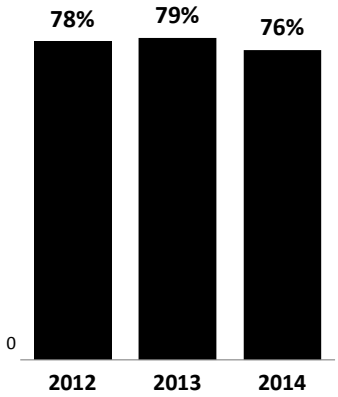
QUESTION | Are you treated like part of the team?

Over three quarters of 1,331 foster parents who answered this question (76%) reported they are usually or always treated like part of the team. Nearly one quarter (23%) said seldom or never.



STATE TREND

There was a slight decrease in this percentage compared to last year, but the change was not statistically significant.

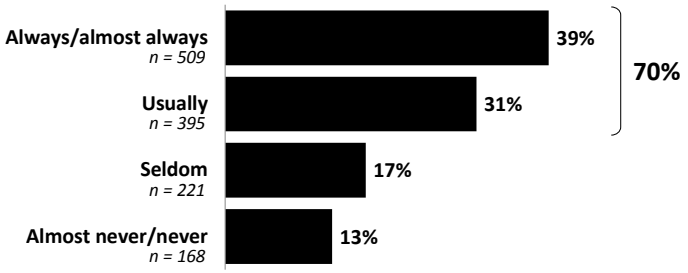


REGIONAL DETAIL

Region 2 was slightly more positive than Regions 1 (75%) and 3 (76%), but the difference was not statistically significant.

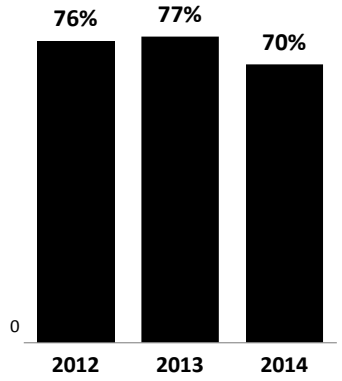
QUESTION | Are you included in meetings about the child in your care?

Seven out of ten of the 1,293 foster parents who answered this question (70%) reported they are usually or always included in meetings about the child in their care. Three out of ten (30%) indicated they are seldom or never included.



STATE TREND

The decrease in this percentage from 2013 to 2014 was statistically significant.



REGIONAL DETAIL

Region 3 responses were slightly more positive than Regions 1 (70%) and 2 (68%), but the difference was not statistically significant.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Most foster parents feel included in meetings about their foster children.

"I am informed in advance about meetings and given the opportunity to participate."

"They include me in the meetings, they ask us for our opinion, and they are helpful."

"They are very good at including me in meetings and what is happening with our foster son."

"They have provided the special services we need for our special kids. They have a monthly meeting with all of these providers: the biological parents, the specialists – all concerned."

"Many meetings available; conferencing available; social workers available."

"We are invited to the meetings and to the court."

"We were included in a transition meeting before the children left my home."

"They show up at meetings and support us when they can."

Others report they are left out.

"Invite me to the meetings and keep me up to date as to what is happening in the case."

"Include us in the meetings for the child or provide some direct means of communication with somebody who is responsible for making decisions."

"I don't know if there have been any meetings for my foster child – I would like to be invited to attend!"

"Try to include me in meetings and decision making about how long children are staying. I need to know so I can plan for the needs of my family."

"Include us as part of team. Return phone calls in a timely manner. Everybody else knows what's going on but me! I learn what is going on from other children that hear what is going on at school – that's pretty sad!"

"Include the foster parent input into the team meetings. I am there but I don't get to provide input."

PHOTO: Top Photo Corporation/Getty Images

Foster parents appreciate social workers asking for – and considering – their input.

"They allow me input which makes me feel valued as a foster parent."

"They value my thoughts and opinions concerning my children's issues, and also my input regarding their future needs."

"Important decisions about the kids should not be made without input from all parties involved – including the foster parents."

"We are treated like we are not part of the solution to help the foster children."

They want to be included in planning for the children in their care.

"They let us be involved in trying to form a plan that is best for the kids based on our experiences with the child."

"Allow us say-so in the child's future."

"The social workers really care for the children and they include the foster parents in the planning of what is happening in the case."

"Keep the foster parents in the loop. Listen to the foster parent when they give you information on the child. Do not set up a child up for failure by not providing information about the child to the foster parents."

"They have been good at including me in decision making or suggesting what the child may need."

"Realize that foster parents are part of the team and need to be included."

They want social workers to supply regular updates on children's cases.

"I wish I got more information or felt more in the loop. I feel like I am stuck in the dark most of the time."

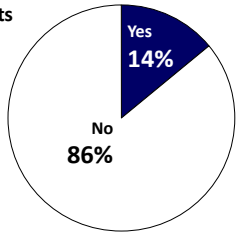
"They need to keep us better informed – better information about court dates."

"Our current social worker has been wonderful with communication and keeping us in the loop and involved 100% of the way."

THEME | Social Worker Inclusiveness

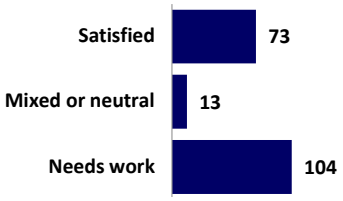
Comments about social workers' inclusion – or exclusion – of foster parents in matters concerning their foster children were included in this category. Fourteen percent of survey respondents commented on social worker inclusiveness.

Made comments about social worker inclusiveness?



190 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (14%) mentioned social worker inclusiveness.

Of the 190 survey respondents who addressed social worker inclusiveness, almost four out of ten (38%) made positive comments. Over half (55%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Seven percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Many foster parents feel social workers should:

- Ask for – and act on – their ideas and opinions.
- Provide more complete and timely updates on their foster children's cases.
- Include them more in decision-making, meetings, and court hearings.

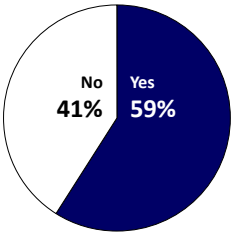
Others appreciate that social workers:

- Value their opinions and observations about the children in their care.
- Keep them "in the loop" about developments in children's cases.
- Collaborate with them and make them a legitimate part of the team.

THEME | Other Comments about Social Workers

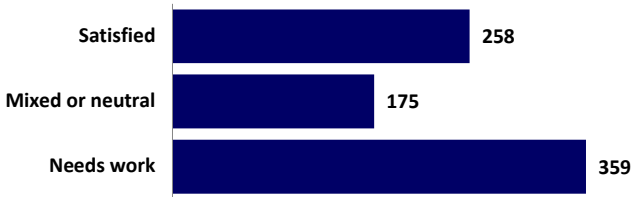
All comments about social workers which did not refer to general support, courtesy, respect, listening, understanding, or inclusiveness were categorized as "other" social worker comments.

Made other comments about social workers?



792 of the foster parents surveyed (59%) made other comments about social workers.

Of the 792 survey respondents who made other comments about social workers, one third (33%) made positive comments. Nearly half (45%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. 22% (175) made mixed or neutral comments.



Some foster parents commended social workers for:

- Providing good service, including quick responses and follow-through.
- Solving problems efficiently and effectively.
- Being well-trained and knowledgeable.
- Communicating clearly and honestly.

Others suggested that social workers should:

- Be more responsive to foster parents' concerns.
- Try harder to create good solutions for foster children and foster families.
- Be better trained, and more "on top of" their jobs.
- Improve their communication skills.
- Be understanding of foster parents' feelings when a foster child leaves.

PHOTO: Design Pics/Getty Images

Foster parents like social workers who are effective problem solvers and responsive to their needs.

"They help find daycare, providers, respite – everything. Whatever I need I call them and they get it to me."

"I feel alone until they need something. They could be more responsive to foster parents' needs."

"The social workers need to act more promptly when something is needed by the foster parents."

"Sometimes DSHS staff gets inside a square box and the foster child needs something outside the box and DSHS staff are unwilling to go outside the box."

They also value social workers who provide good service.

"Show up at my house for scheduled appointments."

"She shares information that she thinks is relevant to my child's case. She is very professional."

"Follow through. Consistently do the monthly health and safety checks."

When a foster child leaves, foster parents would like feelings recognized and a sincere thank you.

"Seems like the end of the process could have a little more sincere thanks given. My heart was hurting and I got nothing back from the case worker. Even a scripted thank you would be nice."

Foster parents want social workers to have good communication skills.

"Communicate better – information is limited, phone calls are very few and far between."

"The social workers we have right now are good communicators: they return phone calls and let me know when things are coming up (court dates, family planning meetings)."

1.2 Social Workers

PHOTO: Hemera/Getty Images

Eighteen foster parents complimented their social workers by name.

"Karen Smith has gone above and beyond the call of duty to help us and work with us."

"The Nicole Berry Team is the best team ever."

"Catherine McEnderfer has been a wonderful help and a stellar case manager."

"I have an adoption worker who is very excellent – Kassica Volkman."

"Jobe Jacobs has been remarkable!"

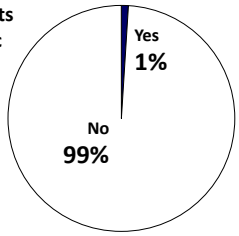
"Catherine Gregory and Gina Miles are both amazing social workers."

"Denise Huynh – she is exceptional."

THEME | Specific Social Workers

Comments about specific social workers were included in this category. Just over one percent of survey respondents made a comment about one or more specific social workers.

Made comments about a specific social worker?



Nineteen of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (1.4%) mentioned a specific social worker in their comments.

Of the 19 survey respondents who commented on a specific social worker, only two made critical comments. One of the two, while critical of a former social worker, had high praise for the current social worker.

1.2 Social Workers

PHOTO: Ron Chapple Stock/Getty Images

Comments on licensor support were mostly negative.

"The licensor accused me of trying to hide some criminal activity since I didn't get my husband's driver's license to her quickly enough."

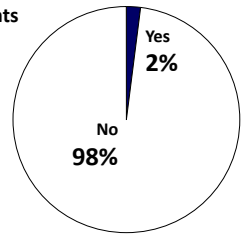
"Licensor – one was so bad we withdrew our application."

"Licensor is very helpful and gone out of his way to try to make this a positive experience."

THEME | Foster Care Licensors

Comments about the quality of support foster care licensors provide to foster parents were included in this category. Two percent of survey respondents made a comment about foster care licensor support.

Made comments about licensor support?



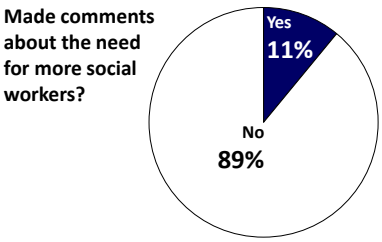
29 of the foster parents surveyed (2%) mentioned foster care licensor support.

Of the 29 survey respondents who addressed foster care licensing support, seven made positive comments. One made a mixed or neutral comment.

21 made negative comments or suggestions for improvement.

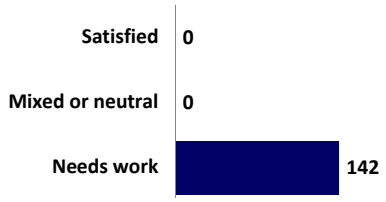
THEME | Need More Social Workers

Comments about the need for more social workers were included in this category. 11 percent of survey respondents commented on this topic.



142 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (11%) mentioned the need for more social workers.

Of the 142 survey respondents who addressed the need for more social workers, all made negative comments or suggestions for improvement.



In the comments about the need for more social workers, foster parents made three key points:

- Social workers' caseloads are too large.
- Heavy workloads hinder social workers' ability to support foster families.
- High social worker turnover makes it hard to develop positive relationships between social workers and foster families and difficult to provide continuity of care for the foster child.

As noted above, all comments in this category underscored the need for more social workers.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents believe social workers should have smaller caseloads.

"The social workers I've dealt with try their hardest, but seem to be operating in a realm of perpetual hurriedness. You need more social workers – their caseloads seem too large."

"Social workers are overworked and cannot keep up with the demands of the cases. They appear to act on crisis."

"There need to be more social workers as their caseloads are too high and that prevents them from giving the case the attention that is needed."

"Large caseloads are cause of turnover and burn out."

"Hire more staff and reduce caseloads. Social worker seems overwhelmed."

They feel social workers' ability to support foster families is limited by their heavy workloads.

"Their caseloads are too high to give support to the foster parent and the children."

"I think that sometimes they are overworked, and sometimes the ball gets dropped regarding things that are really needed such as referrals for the foster children."

"Reduce the caseload size so we can get quality support. Our social worker tries hard but seems overwhelmed and was not up to date on the case."

They also believe social workers' high turnover rate has a negative effect on foster parent support.

"Turnover of social workers causes disruption in communication and the continuity of care for the child."

"In my last placement I had six social workers in five months on one case, so there was a lack of continuity of care. I could not get medical information on a medically fragile child because of the turnover of social workers. This made it impossible for me to follow up on any of the child's medical needs."

Access, Processes, and Coordination

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

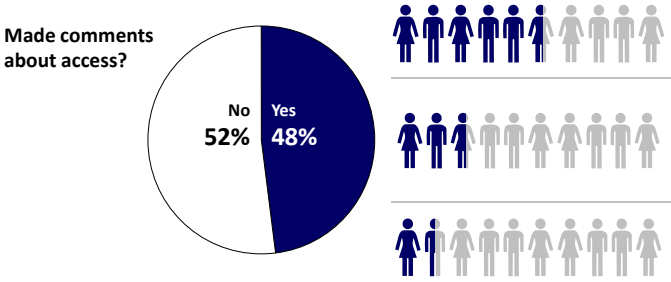
Foster parents need effective access to support and services.

The majority of foster parents are satisfied with their access to social workers. However, many reported that both agency processes and coordination of services for foster parents are in need of improvement.

In this section:

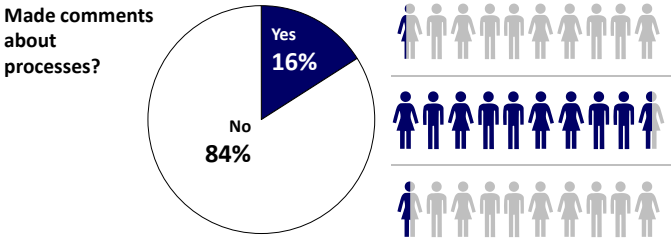
- Topics are addressed in the following order: Phone/staff access; consistent contact; general processes; specific processes; paperwork; and coordination.
- The first page highlights foster parents' responses to the question: ***Can you get help when you ask for it?***
- The next six pages describe foster parents' comments on access to support, agency processes, and coordination of services.

Nearly half of survey respondents (643 out of 1,351, or 48%) made comments about access. Of those who commented on this subject:



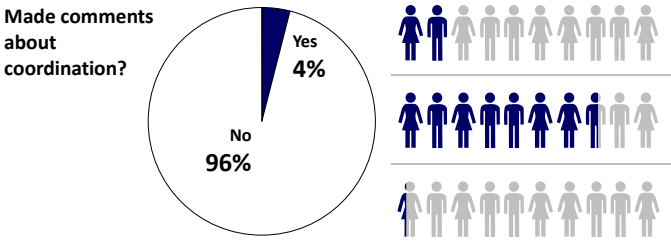
- More than half (57%) made positive comments.
- Almost three out of ten (29%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement.
- 15 percent made mixed or neutral comments.

One in six survey respondents (220 out of 1,351, or 16%) commented on processes. Of those who commented on this subject:



- Three individuals (1%) made positive comments.
- Most (94%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement.
- Five percent made mixed or neutral comments.

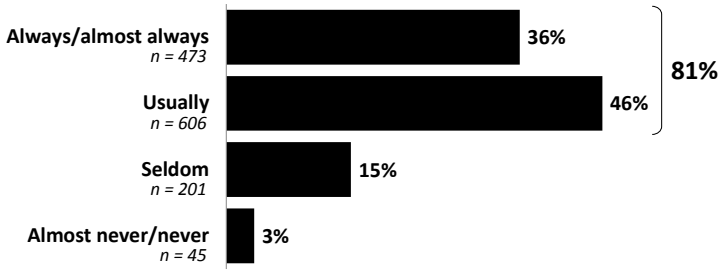
A small number of survey respondents (58 out of 1,351, or 4%) made comments about coordination. Of those comments:



- About one in five (19%) were positive.
- Nearly four out of five (78%) were negative or suggestions for improvement.
- About three percent were mixed or neutral.

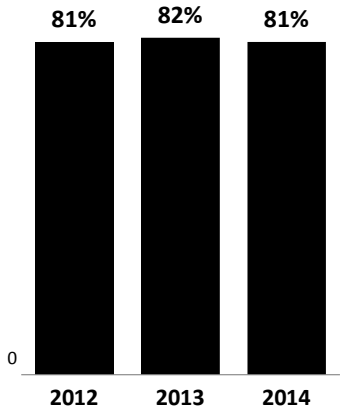
QUESTION | Can you get help when you ask for it?

More than eight out of ten of the 1,325 foster parents who answered this question (81%) reported that they can usually or always get help when they ask for it. Less than one out of five (18%) indicated it is difficult to get the help they need.



STATE TREND

This percentage has not changed significantly.



REGIONAL DETAIL

Region 3 gave the most positive response on this question and Region 1 the least (83% to 79%), but the differences are not statistically significant.

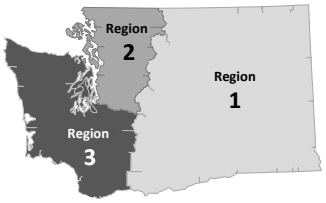


PHOTO: Digital Vision/Getty Images

Foster parents like quick responses to their phone calls and e-mails.

"They always take the call and try to marshal the resources needed."

"My social worker is awesome. She usually gets right back to me and answers my questions."

"They are good about getting back to me within 24-48 hours."

"The social worker is available by phone or e-mail with quick turnaround, which speaks volumes about them."

"They are always there when you need them, no matter what."

"They are almost always available to speak to me if I have questions. That is really valuable to me."

"It's all about communication, and they have both have been very good at answering my e-mails."

They find slow responses – or *no* responses – very frustrating.

"They need to respond to me. I send e-mails and get no response. I make phone calls and get no response. I repeat these phone calls and I never get any responses. The only time I hear from my social worker is when she wants something from me."

"I don't call unless I really need something. It took over a week to get a call back when we were having behavioral issues in our home."

"They could return my phone calls. Sometimes the social worker doesn't return my phone calls or e-mails at all. Sometimes I will get a response a month later for an issue I needed a response to within a day or two. Critical questions, not frivolous questions."

"Answer the phone. It makes it really tough in an emergency situation when they don't answer the phones."

"The social worker needs to respond. I should not have to e-mail four or five times and make calls in order to get a response."

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Some foster parents indicated that access contributes to their sense of belonging to a team.

"They answer phone calls and e-mails in a reasonable period of time. I feel listened to and respected."

"I've only been able to reach them on the phone three times after multiple messages and calls. I feel ignored."

Others describe mixed responsiveness and variability across social workers.

"One social worker is excellent and the other is not. The second does not respond to me unless I contact her supervisor. The excellent social worker is quick to respond or at least acknowledge my communication. That to me is very important."

"It depends on the social worker. The good ones answer phone calls and e-mails quickly."

"One social worker was good at responding to my e-mails. The other social worker was not good at that."

"E-mails and phone call responses depend upon the social worker. It varies greatly. At least an acknowledgement of receipt of the question or concern would be helpful."

Some foster parents described improvements in access over time.

"They are timely with their callbacks – at least this round anyway. They usually inform me on important issues. I have had some in the past that didn't but things are better now."

"Communication via e-mail or phone has been a lot better than I have experienced in the last year compared to previous years."

Returning phone calls is important.

"Call me back. Don't be rude."

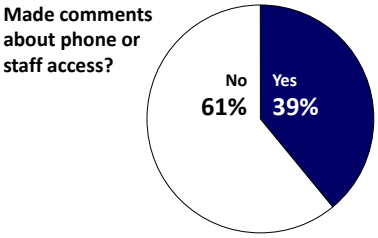
"They usually phone or e-mail me back in a timely way."

"They usually repond to e-mails and phone calls within 24 hours."

"They don't return calls. There's no communication!"

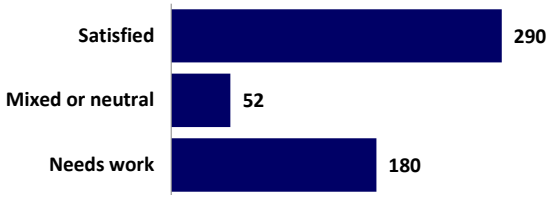
THEME | Phone/Staff Access

Comments about foster parents' ability to access social workers and other staff – by phone or other methods – were included in this category. Almost four out of ten foster parents surveyed commented about phone or staff access.



522 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (39%) mentioned phone or staff access.

Of the 522 survey respondents who addressed phone or staff access, more than half (56%) made positive comments. About one third (35%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Ten percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Some foster parents commended social workers for:

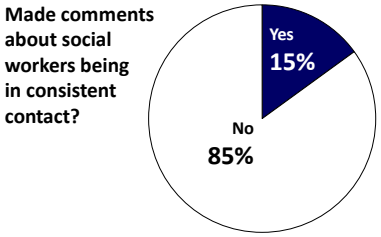
- Being easy to reach when they are needed.
- Returning phone calls and e-mails quickly.
- Listening to their concerns and taking action.

Others suggested social workers should:

- Be more available to answer questions and act on requests.
- Return phone calls and e-mails within a reasonable time frame.
- Designate alternative contacts when they will be unavailable for an extended period of time, and after hours.

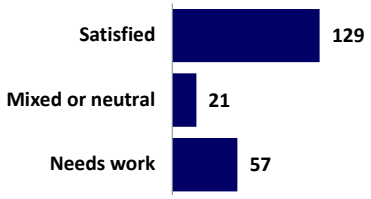
THEME | Consistency of Contact

Comments about the consistency of social workers' contact with foster parents were included in this category. 15 percent of survey respondents made a comment about the consistency of contact.



207 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (15%) mentioned consistency of contact.

Of the 207 survey respondents who addressed consistency of contact, more than six out of ten (62%) commented positively. Nearly three out of ten (28%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. One in ten (10%) made mixed or neutral comments.



Foster parents appreciate consistency of contact across different social workers. They also appreciate social workers who:

- Visit their home frequently.
- Check in often by phone or e-mail.
- Ask how things are and what is needed, and listen to what the foster parent has to say.

Foster parents dislike it when social workers:

- Visit rarely, or not at all.
- Only react to emergencies or major events.
- Fail to respond when contacted.

PHOTO: moodboard/Getty Images

Most comments provided by foster parents described consistent contact with social workers.

"She is prompt and always comes to the visits. We can always count on her."

"They are johnny-on-the-spot. They call me back and they are out to visits every month."

"They are always checking on the foster child -- they are always contacting us to see if there are any concerns. They are doing their job."

"They do the monthly visits well, are on time, and spend an hour or so. We have had great caseworkers and supervisors."

"My social worker follows up and e-mails me. She always responds quickly. She comes for monthly home visits and is very pleasant with me. She does not blow me off."

"The visits have been on time and every month since placement."

"They are really good about checking to see if we need anything and doing the home visits with the children."

Some want social workers to check-in more frequently.

"Maintain more constant contact with me. I do not get replies to e-mails and phone calls. I don't find out what happens at court unless I bug the social worker to find out."

"I have had 3 children in my care in the last year, never have I had anyone come out and do a home visit. I have asked for them, and not gotten them."

"I would like to be able to talk with social worker after my work time. The home visits are during the day when I cannot attend."

"Better communication between the foster parents and the social workers. Six months have gone by and we have not heard from the social worker."

"Check-in with how the kids and I are doing, not just a five minute monthly visit. The current visits seem more like a check-off of a to-do list than a status check-in."

PHOTO: Digital Vision/Getty Images

Some foster parents feel the system is biased toward biological parents at the expense of the children.

"Sometimes they work so hard to unify the family that they seem to overlook what might be best overall for the foster child."

"It always seems like it is about the biological parent and not about the children's best interests. That really bothers me. The children's needs should be as valuable as the biological parents."

"The rights of the parents to self destruct trump the rights of the children to have healthy, thriving minds."

Some feel social workers are hindered by bureaucracy.

"The social workers are stuck with state laws and procedures and there is nothing more they can do without changes being made."

"The social workers should have more case control and be able to provide case by case decisions to care for the children. They should not have to go through three or four people to authorize services."

"Case workers don't have time to support foster parents and are tied up on the computer doing reports.Therefore, they don't have time to visit the foster children and foster parents."

Foster parents want to be treated as valued team members

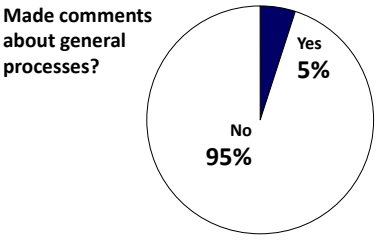
"I never once felt like I was part of the team. I always felt like we were treated like some third party who was always on the verge of 'being in trouble.'"

"Treat us as part of the team. Respect the fact that we have to care for the kids every day. Our observations should be important."

"The foster parents are the pooper-scoopers for the elephants in the parade."

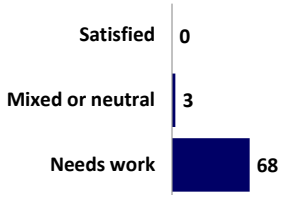
THEME | General Processes

Comments about the general processes followed by the agencies serving foster parents were included in this category. Five percent of survey respondents made a comment about general processes.



71 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (5%) mentioned general processes.

Of the 71 survey respondents who addressed general processes, no comments were positive. The majority (96%) made suggestions for improvement or negative comments. Four percent made mixed or neutral comments.

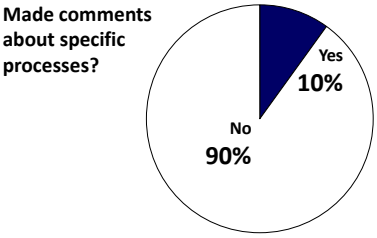


These foster parents are concerned that:

- The foster care system favors biological parents over the needs of the children, and social workers are not able to intervene.
- The bureaucracy focuses too much on blindly following rules, and too little on the needs of the foster children.
- Office procedures and staff performance are not standardized.
- The system does not recognize the value of their contributions.

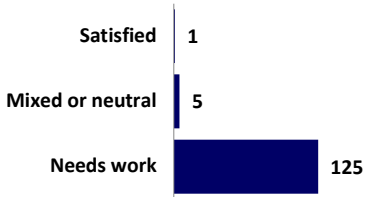
THEME | Specific Processes

Comments about specific processes followed by the agencies serving foster parents were included in this category. Ten percent of survey respondents made a comment about specific processes.



131 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (10%) mentioned specific processes.

Of the 131 survey respondents who addressed specific processes, one individual (1%) made a positive comment. More than nine out of ten (95%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. About one out of twenty (4%) made mixed or neutral comments.



Many foster parents had complaints about the following processes:

- Initial placement into foster homes – poor documentation and information about children's problems.
- Multiple changes in social workers.
- Slow reimbursements for services, mileage, and respite services.
- Learning about court processes, being involved in them, and being sure the older foster children were informed of them.
- Moving from foster care to adoption.
- Delays in licensing.
- Handling of allegations made against foster parents.
- Perceptions of inadequate DSHS staff supervision.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Many different processes presented challenges for foster parents.

"They could do more communication when they place a kid in the home. We showed up to the office and they did not know the kid's name that we were going to take, nor did they know anything about the kid's needs, nor did they provide with anything to meet the needs of an infant and a three year old who were drug impacted."

"They should keep the same social worker with a foster child. We have had eight social workers in the past two years! Because we had eight social workers, it should have taken twelve months to terminate the biological parent's rights so we could adopt – but with the constant change of social workers it has taken 26 months so far."

"The first month we had a foster child, I reported something that the child said. Later it was turned around and an accusation was made against our foster home. It was shattering and earth shaking! If DSHS wants to lose foster parents, this is an excellent way to do it."

"I am having a hard time now with the time it takes in dealing with termination of the parental rights. I also have a problem with switching workers, as then the process has to start all over again."

"The two girls were sent to a different foster home because our finger prints were delayed. This would have saved the girls two years of horrific treatment in the other foster home."

"Streamline the DSHS system! Each member of my family had to be checked out four separate times because DSHS slowly did the other paperwork and the background check expired numerous times."

"It took me over two years to get a license. I had to send in the same paperwork repeatedly — they kept losing it. It was so disorganized."

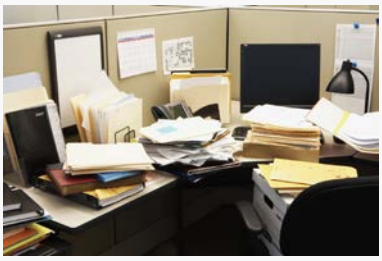


PHOTO: Digital Vision/Getty Images

Most, but not all foster parents were critical of paperwork processes.

"When you submit a mileage form it shouldn't takes weeks to get a payment. If it was on-line it could be much quicker."

"DSHS staff does not complete their paperwork in a timely manner."

"Once we didn't have sufficient documentation for our foster child to take a trip. The social worker took many days to respond, but did eventually get us the paperwork. The trip was cancelled because it was too late."

"I would like more consistency. Different social workers give different forms and packets for different kids."

"I believe that paperwork is the only thing lacking, so if they could complete the paperwork in a timelier manner it would be greatly appreciated."

"The only thing I can think of is when we got licensed it took a fairly long time. One of the reasons we heard was we changed supervisors and our 'papers got lost.'"

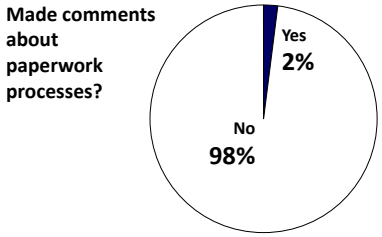
"Too much turnover system-wide. Paperwork gets lost."

"They have been very good at doing the foster children's medical paperwork and getting us through that process."

"They signed paperwork for outpatient surgery promptly and quickly for my foster kids. They file the paperwork for respite correctly so my providers get paid."

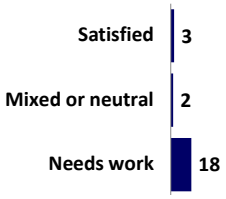
THEME | Paperwork Processes

Comments about paperwork processes followed by the agencies serving foster parents were included in this category. Two percent of survey respondents made a comment about paperwork processes.



23 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (2%) mentioned paperwork processes.

Of the 23 survey respondents who commented about paperwork processes, three individuals (13%) made positive comments. Nearly eight out of ten (78%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement, and there were two mixed or neutral comments (9%).

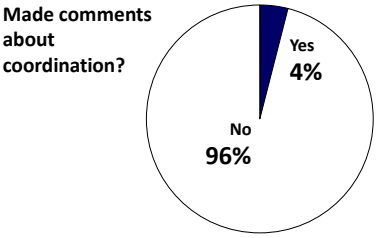


Foster parents are unhappy when:

- Paperwork processes take too long.
- Late paperwork delays payments or reimbursements.
- Recordkeeping is incomplete or inaccurate.
- Paperwork is lost.
- Foster children are placed with them without medical cards or needed documentation, and therefore services are delayed.

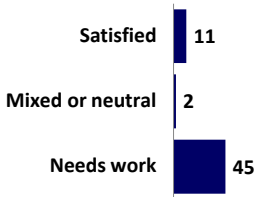
THEME | Coordination

Comments about how well those who support foster parents coordinate their efforts were included in this category. Four percent of survey respondents made a comment about coordination.



58 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (4%) mentioned coordination.

Of the 58 foster parents who addressed coordination, about one in five (19%) made positive comments. Nearly eight out of ten (78%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Three percent made mixed or neutral comments.



When coordination is successful:

- Employees of Children's Administration, or of a private agency serving them, work well as a team.
- Social workers collaborate with others in the community to get foster children the resources they need.

Foster parents are frustrated when:

- Social workers change without transfer of information.
- Social workers don't reach out to others who can provide resources for foster children.
- Employees within an agency aren't "on the same page."
- DSHS and private agencies do not communicate effectively.

PHOTO: Thinkstock Images/Getty Images

Some comments focused on coordination within Children's Administration.

"I don't feel like they communicate with each other. I was asked to take a child for one night, and no one ever came to get the child as the placement worker did not tell the case worker."

"Can the process between CPS and Child Welfare be streamlined – meaning the timeliness and transfer of information?"

"We had a social worker with the same child for a long time, then the child changed social workers multiple times and none of them knew anything about the child or their situation."

"Social workers don't communicate with other members of the team such as the guardian ad litem, foster parents, co-workers at his/her office."

Others focused on coordination between Children's Administration and other agencies or DSHS programs.

"We deal with DSHS, private agency foster care, probation officers, the biological parents. The communication is not good between all these players."

"We would really appreciate them having a more coordinated approach. We have a Native American child and must work with three social workers to get our funding for medical, daycare, and personal expenses. The experience is a nightmare."

"With both DSHS and our private agency there is a lot of overlap and it seems that I have someone at my home from either DSHS or a private agency way too often. There doesn't appear to be communication between the two agencies. I have to repeat things to both of them. "

"The social workers and the private agency are all on the same page and work well together."

Information

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents want clear and current information.

Although most foster parents indicated they are satisfied with the information that they receive, a majority of those who made comments suggested that the process of sharing information could be improved.

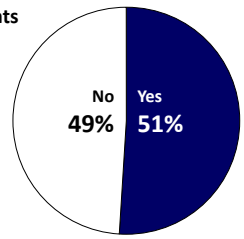
Many noted that the quality and timeliness of information varies across individual social workers, indicating that this is an area in which improvements are possible.

In this section:

- The following page provides an overview of general comments about information.
- The next two pages contain additional comments about information.
- The last page addresses information about the needs of children placed with foster parents.

About half of the foster parents surveyed (690 out of 1,351, or 51%) commented about information. Of those who commented on this subject:

Made comments about information?



- One third (33%) made positive comments.
- Nearly half (47%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.
- Two out of ten (20%) made mixed or neutral comments.

PHOTO: Hemera/Getty Images

Some foster parents are very satisfied with the information they receive.

"I get health history and it is helpful. I got information about health and dental resources and school transportation. Very useful."

"They got health and education reports to me in a timely manner."

"The social workers are good at communicating needs and expectations for the foster child, and they have been really good at answering questions in a timely manner."

"The social workers stay in communication with us and when we have a need they provide us with the necessary information and resources."

Some consider the information they receive to be inadequate.

"Stay in contact and let me know what's going on, what's available, and how to get the boys the help they need. I am out there swimming on my own."

"Talk to foster parents directly. Work with us. There is so much they never tell you."

"There is a lack of information – it seems like no one really knows what is going on or whom I should speak to."

"We often felt like we were left in the dark and had to chase for updates."

"We got paperwork with conflicting, inaccurate, and missing information at the beginning. Doctors' offices did the extra leg work, otherwise it would have been overwhelming for us."

Others have mixed experiences with being given information.

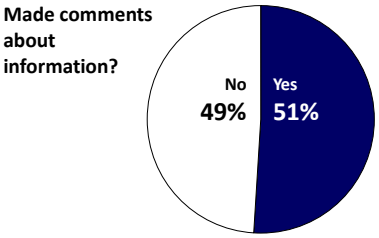
"Our social worker is awesome! She gets back to us very quickly but she doesn't always have all the info."

"They try and get as much information as possible and it can be helpful, but I don't always get the information."

"The first social worker would not share information due to privacy. The current social worker is more forthcoming."

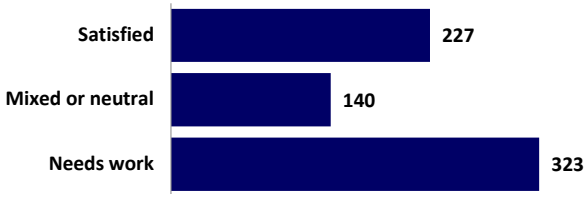
THEME | Information

Comments about information were included in this category. 51% of survey respondents made a comment about information.



690 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (51%) mentioned information.

Of the 690 survey respondents who addressed information, one third (33%) made positive comments. Nearly half (47%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. 20 percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Some foster parents noted they are given:

- Quick and complete answers to their questions.
- Regular updates on their foster children's cases.
- Timely notice of court hearings and meetings.
- Information on foster children's backgrounds.
- Information about services for foster children and foster families.

Some foster parents reported that the frequency and quality of information received varies between social workers, agencies, and offices.

A greater number of foster parents reported that they:

- Don't get "straight answers" to their questions.
- Lack current information about their foster children's cases.
- Are not notified of court hearings and meetings in advance.
- Are told little about their foster children's history.
- Don't get enough information about community services needed by their foster children.
- Don't get enough information about their role in the foster care system.

Many comments contained very specific compliments, complaints, or suggestions for improvement. Some of these comments can be found in the column to the left and on the next two pages.

THEME | Information, *continued*

Foster parents want timely, accurate, and useful answers to their questions concerning the children in their care. They want adequate notice about court hearings and meetings; comprehensive background information about their foster children; resource availability, and their role in the foster care system.

Voices . . . .

Foster parents value clear and complete answers to their questions.

"The placement coordinator has been keeping in touch with us and helping us out. She clears up our questions and follows through."

"Just be well versed in community resources, and more forthcoming with information, instead of us trying to pull it from them."

"This is our first placement and I don't have much experience. They assume we have a lot of knowledge that we don't have."

They also want important information to be shared in a timely fashion.

"When we ask questions, they get back to us immediately. They are very good at explaining."

"They could provide information about the kid in a timely manner. I feel like we as are the last to know any pertinent information."

"They respond very quickly to my phone calls or e-mails and answer my questions to the best of their ability."

"We just got a booklet congratulating us on becoming new foster parents with all sort of advice in it and classes we can take. It would have been very nice to have gotten that booklet about four months ago when we really needed it."

"We are the last people to know anything. We hear about court dates from the guardian ad litem, never from the case worker."

Foster parents are particularly interested in receiving regular updates on their foster children's cases.

"They do a good job keeping me informed with which direction things are going with a particular case and what the next steps are."

"I really don't know what's going on regarding the court system. I never get any information about the courts unless I specifically ask for it. After there has been court action, I am not notified of what happened."

"Keep the foster parents updated as to what is happening in counseling session so that they can reinforce what is being learned."

"The foster parents need to be informed of what is happening in the case and what to expect from the biological parent."

They want to be informed about meetings and court hearings *before* they occur.

"They let me know if there is a change in the plan, or if a meeting is scheduled or changed and they keep me in the loop."

"Communicate about meetings regarding the foster child. We have missed a lot of court hearings although we asked to be advised."

"Notify me when a meeting is rescheduled or cancelled. I have to take time off from work to attend the meeting."

"On 9/17, I received a notice of a hearing that was happening that day at 9:00 a.m. and it was now afternoon."

They want detailed information about their foster children's background.

"They screen well and provide information up front about the foster child."

"More information about the kids would be very helpful.You have to go through trial and error to find out where the kids need help."

"I often don't get medical records or access to information about when the kids last had a physical or a doctor's visit."

"They could give more and better foster child background information such as behavioral issues or if there are sexual or abusive behaviors involved. This is especially important if children already reside in the foster home."

They want to know of resources and services available to the children in their care.

"The social workers give me contact information for resources to provide me with the needs of the children."

"I feel like I could have had more information on some of the resources available to me. There really isn't a comprehensive list of resources available provided to foster parents. In each case, I feel like I have to independently research each thing. It's a real burden on me."

"They have been helpful in pointing us in the right direction to get services for the foster children."

"Nobody tells me about vouchers, help with Treehouse, help with school and IEP's -- nobody tells me anything about resources."

They also want support and information for their own roles as foster parents.

"We always know what's going on and what the next step is."

"I would like better communication from the case worker. More communication about the entire process and my role in it."

"They explain to me what it is that I am supposed to do and how/when to take child to the doctor."

"The primary person we are trying to help is the child, but the relationship between us and social services seems adversarial because we don't know what we are supposed to provide versus what social services is supposed to provide."

1.4 Information

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Some foster parents expressed appreciation for the information they received about the needs of children placed with them.

"Good information when they first are placed."

"Our social worker has been very informative about what to expect, unique issues, family visits and where things are in the process."

"When they give me as much background information about the kids as possible, it is very helpful."

"They keep me up to date on what is happening in the case, court, the child's issue that I need to attend to."

"They are usually up front about the information they have on hand."

"They tell me what they can about the child, and they respond to my questions as best they can."

Foster parents may be frustrated when information about the needs of children is perceived to be inadequate.

"DSHS staff should tell the truth about foster children they are placing with us. They didn't tell us the truth about behaviors, medical needs, etc."

"Usually when I initially get a child, DSHS/private agency does not come with a lot of information and some of it is inaccurate. So, the child ends up being completely different than what I was initially told."

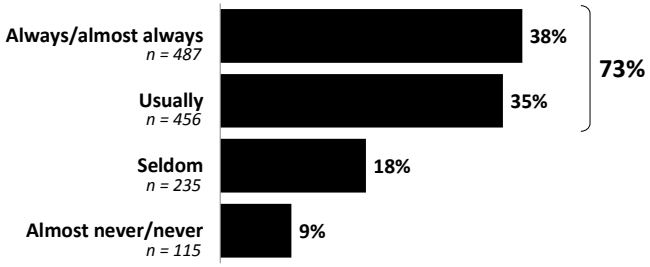
"The social worker said the kids were fine, but there are major behavioral, social, and medical issues. It turns out I'm the tenth foster parent this child has had. I got my rib broken by being kicked and almost lost my job due to the special needs of the foster child."

"Tell us the whole truth when placing a child with us. Sometimes information is withheld so we will take the children, especially regarding their legal status."

"They sugar coat information at the beginning. Be honest about the issue with the child at placement. For example: a child had a medical condition and they did not disclose it."

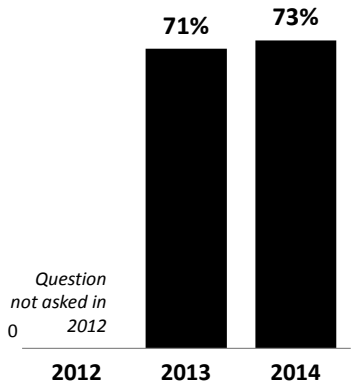
QUESTION | Did you get adequate information about the needs of the children placed with you, such as medical, behavioral, developmental, and educational needs?

More than seven out of ten of the 1,293 foster parents who answered this question (943 or 73%) reported that they can get information about the needs of the children placed with them when they need it. Almost three out of ten (28%) said they seldom or never get that information.



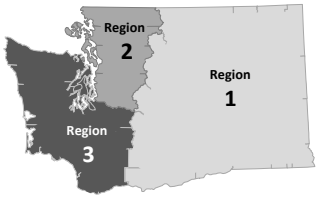
STATEWIDE TREND

The small increase from 2013 was not statistically significant.



REGIONAL DETAIL

Ratings of information adequacy did not vary significantly across regions.



Resources

PHOTO: Digital Vision/Getty Images

Foster parents want needed resources to be quickly and easily available.

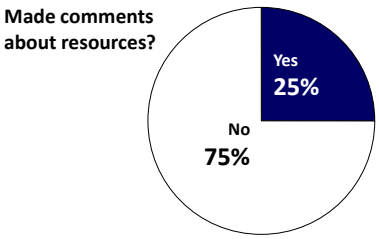
This section focuses on the wide variety of resources provided to foster parents and the children in their care.

Just over half of foster parents who commented about resources had problems. However, many also commented that they are pleased with the resources they currently receive.

In this section:

- The first five pages are arranged by topic, in the following order: respite; financial matters; medical, dental, mental health; transportation; and childcare. The sixth page contains an overview of comments about various other resources.

One quarter of survey respondents (340 out of 1,351 or 25%) made comments about resources. Of those who commented on this subject:



- About one third (119 or 35%) made positive comments.

- Over half (176 or 52%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.

- More than one of ten (13%) made mixed or neutral comments.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Many foster parents want improved access to respite care, and more timely payments.

"I need respite. I've been asking and asking. They keep telling me they are working on it. I can't get the help I need."

"Our foster daughter came to us six weeks before I had a baby. I asked for daycare, temporarily, and they denied me."

"Big problems with respite care. I don't bother since they lost the paperwork three times. I pay for it myself as it is not working. This is true for other foster parents as well."

"I didn't follow up on respite because I was told I would probably be told no."

"The system needs to be changed so that we are automatically notified that the respite care was approved and it will be covered on the day we requested."

"We get paid for the first day but not the last day even when the child is picked up very late in the day."

"We are still waiting for payment from June and it is now early November."

"We have a child who has cerebral palsy. We fought and fought to get respite, and we finally got it and it makes a world of difference."

Others did not have difficulty getting respite services.

"The respite service in the last year has been better – changes have been made."

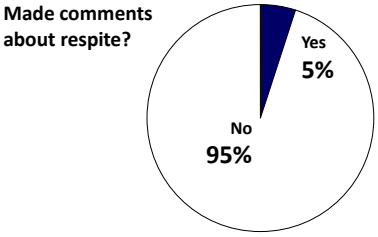
"Respite is easy with the private agency because it comes directly to the agency who then in turn pays us."

"The social worker usually gives me respite when I ask for it."

"I work for a private agency. I feel like they try to find replacement respite when I am not available to provide it."

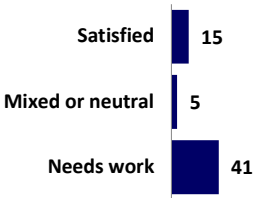
THEME | Respite

Comments about respite care were included in this category. Five percent of survey respondents made a comment about respite.



61 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (5%) mentioned respite.

Of the 61 survey respondents addressing respite, one in four (25%) made positive comments. Two thirds (67%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Eight percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Respondents suggested they need:

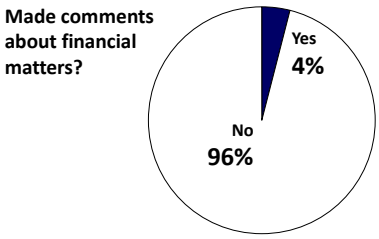
- Easier access to respite care.
- Faster response to requests for respite care.
- Timely payment for respite care.

Some foster parents are satisfied with:

- Improvement in respite care service.
- Social workers' support for respite care requests.
- Ready access to respite care.

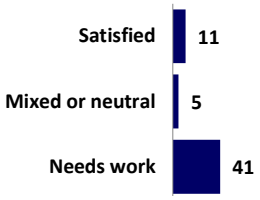
THEME | Financial Matters

Comments about financial matters were included in this category. Four percent of survey respondents made a comment about financial matters.



57 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (4%) mentioned financial matters.

Of the 57 survey respondents addressing financial matters, 19 percent made positive comments. Nearly three in four (72%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Nine percent made mixed or neutral comments.



The majority of foster parents commenting on financial issues indicated a need for:

- Quicker and more efficient reimbursement for out of pocket expenses.
- Increased reimbursement rates.
- Accurate rate assessments.
- Higher foster care payments.

Some commended the:

- Timeliness of reimbursements.
- Reliability of foster care payments.
- Efficiency of the automated payment system.

PHOTO: Ingram Publishing/Getty Images

Foster parents want fair, timely reimbursement for their expenses and work.

"DSHS doesn't make timely payment of monthly invoices and mileage reimbursement requests."

"We don't get reimbursed! We send in the request for reimbursement and don't get paid."

"Provide us with food stamps. The cost of kids is more than we are paid."

"I have had a foster child for three years and we have received no medical funding or financial support for the child."

"They screw up my invoices every month. I have to contact the financial department and get foster children not listed on invoice added."

They also want timely rate assessments that accurately reflect foster children's circumstances.

"DSHS misclassifies the foster children and we don't get paid appropriately for the foster children as a result of this misclassification."

"If they are BRS kids, pay us that rate. Don't tell us they are normal, regular kids at that rate when these foster children are not normal, regular kids. Pay higher rates for such children!"

"When I asked why our payments were cut, I was told from my local office that they don't care because it was not their money."

Some foster parents are satisfied with their financial support.

"The social workers have provided me with funding that allows me to care for the children and connect me with other resources necessary."

"They do a good job providing financial support. Reimbursement for gas is appreciated and adequate."

"They pay on time."

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents want accessible, high-quality medical and dental care for their foster children.

"A child in our home needed critical surgery; it took three months to get that surgery approved."

"One of my foster children needed a medication which still has not been approved (seven weeks). We had to take him to the ER."

"They support us with medical and all the experts necessary for psychological and medical support."

They also want access to mental health services.

"It took me four months begging to get a therapist, which they told me she needed before she arrived."

"When I first got my special needs children, they needed counseling and hadn't gotten any. DSHS apparently did not know about the children's sexual aggression. When I told the case worker about the child trying to play sex games, it was never addressed. Two of my children were molested by these two new children."

"Provide substance abuse treatment when indicated."

"They have made counselling available for us, and they definitely follow through. They answer all my questions."

Foster parents want information about the medical needs of children, and about available resources.

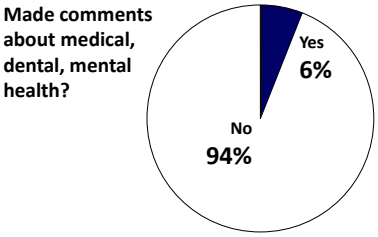
"I would like DSHS to tell me if the foster children have mental disorders. No one told us about the issues these foster children have."

"Give better medical information. One of our kids had several medical issues that we were not aware of."

"A doctors or dentist referrals list would be helpful. Maybe a collection from other foster parents."

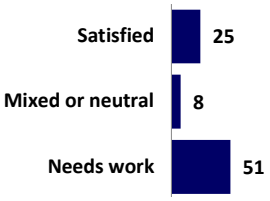
THEME | Medical, Dental, Mental Health

Comments about medical, dental, and mental health resources were included in this category. Six percent of foster parents surveyed made a comment about one or more health-related resources.



84 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (6%) mentioned medical, dental or mental health resources.

Of the 84 survey respondents addressing medical, dental or mental health resources, more than a quarter (30%) made positive comments. Almost two thirds (61%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Ten percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Foster parents appreciate:

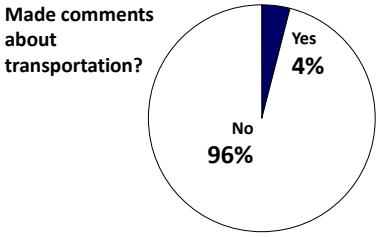
- Access to needed medical, dental, and mental health care for their foster children.
- Information about children's medical needs.
- Assistance in finding the best care.

They are discouraged by:

- Bureaucratic roadblocks to getting services.
- Lack of care providers near their home.
- Denial of needed care for foster children.
- Harm resulting from unmet care needs.

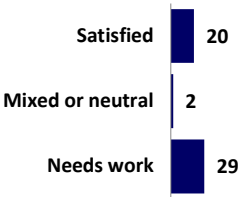
THEME | Transportation

Comments about transportation were included in this category. Four percent of survey respondents made a comment about transportation.



51 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (4%) mentioned transportation.

Of the 51 survey respondents addressing transportation, more than a third (39%) made positive comments. More than half (57%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Four percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Foster parents like:

- Access to needed transportation.
- Social workers who assist with transportation.
- Timely transportation services.
- Fair compensation for mileage.

They are frustrated by:

- Confusing processes for transportation reimbursements.
- Long waits for transportation reimbursements.
- Burdensome transportation needs.

PHOTO: Blend Images/Getty Images

Foster parents want compensation for transportation costs and they would like it to be timelier.

"There needs to be an easier way of turning in the monthly mileage like on the computer. There also needs to be a way to remind the foster parents that their mileage forms are due."

"We have mileage from March 2014 that is not paid for (today is July seventh)."

"My reimbursement is delayed for months because I live in a rural area and have a lot of mileage. It needs additional levels of approval."

Some foster parents want better information and assistance with transportation.

"I had to drive about 700 miles in two weeks to serve the foster children's needs. I found out how to address my foster children's school transportation needs from another foster parent."

"The transporter does not have a child seat for my child."

"I drive my foster child about 1,000 miles per month. DSHS needs to have more drivers available to help."

"We had no idea financial help was available to us for gas, etc. We never got reimbursed for that."

Some foster parents are pleased with transportation services.

"The social workers help us with transportation."

"We get help with transportation."

"I think reimbursement is sufficient and mileage is OK."

"They work with me regarding my schedule since I do have an outside job. If I cannot transport a child, they will do it – that helps."

PHOTO: Stockbyte/Getty Images

Some foster parents are displeased with the limited availability of childcare, and with the adequacy and timeliness of payments.

"Day care is inadequate for kids with mental health problems. Some kids are paid for and others are not. I can never get an answer from the social worker as to why the child is not eligible for payment."

"There have to be more funds provided for day care. You cannot get day care with what is provided."

"I need child care if they expect me to go to court."

"Getting childcare started was very challenging, and childcare resources are limited. It would be helpful to inform new parents about this."

"We waited months for day care."

"Reimbursement for day care is very slow. Please expedite this important expense."

"CA needs to provide after school supervision for teens. Cover the span between when a foster child arrives home from school and when the foster parent arrives home from work."

Some foster parents were pleased with the childcare assistance they have received.

"We had trouble finding childcare for our child and our social worker helped us research places for childcare. She did a good job helping with that."

"They are good at locating resources for us like childcare and accommodating our schedule."

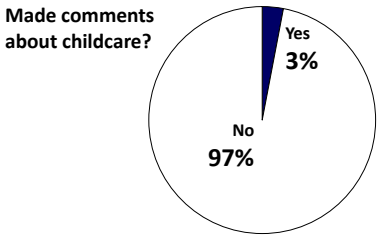
"They were quick about getting childcare approved."

"They help us with school, day care and other needs of the children. I am very pleased with the social workers."

"CA is really good about getting the kids day care paid for – that has improved vastly over the years."

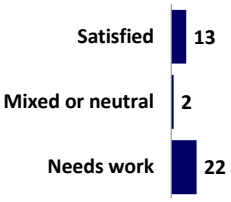
THEME | Childcare

Comments about childcare were included in this category. Three percent of survey respondents made a comment about childcare.



37 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (3%) mentioned childcare.

Of the 37 survey respondents addressing childcare, over one third (35%) made positive comments. Almost two thirds (60%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Five percent of comments were mixed or neutral.



Some foster parents are pleased with:

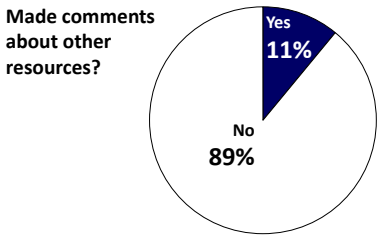
- Assistance of social workers in obtaining and paying for childcare.
- Improvements in the payment process.

Others suggested that childcare should be:

- Easier to access.
- Provided in a timelier manner.
- Expanded to encompass more types of care.
- Fully reimbursed.

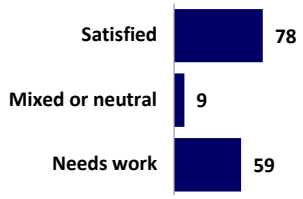
THEME | Other Resources

Comments about other resources were included in this category. Eleven percent of survey respondents made a comment about other resources.



146 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (11%) mentioned other resources.

Of the 146 survey respondents addressing other resources, more than half (53%) made positive comments. Over a third (40%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Six percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Comments placed in the"Other Resources" category include those that mention:

- Resources (with no further clarification of the term).
- Training for foster parents.*
- Training for foster children.
- Clothing.
- Other supplies.

Some foster parents are pleased to have the resources named above. Others are frustrated by limited availability of those resources, particularly with respect to clothing vouchers and children with special needs.

*The comments about training discussed on this page were made in response to questions about foster care support. Comments in response to specific questions about training are found in Part 2 of this report.

PHOTO: MIXA next/Getty Images

Some foster parents made a variety of general comments about resources.

"They are concerned about the foster children and want to support me and the children, but they just don't have the resources to do it."

"Other foster parents are a great resource."

"The resources should be equally available to all foster children, not just the ones that the social workers decide should receive the benefits."

"They don't give a lot of resources for our kids that were meth kids. A doctor or dentist referrals list would help."

"The social workers are good about providing me with the necessary resources needed to care for the children in my home."

Others commented on training for foster parents.

"I definitely think there have to be more resources for the pre-K age group. Possibly more training at day care or helping school system."

"More feedback about how we are doing instead of doing it wrong and then finding out."

"They gave me a specialist from Institute of Family Development for coaching when I asked for it."

Some foster parents addressed the need for clothing and other supplies.

"Kids often come without any supplies. It can be weeks before clothing or other items arrive for them."

"The foster parents need to have a community bank in which they can exchange or purchase articles necessary to care for the children."

"Put a two month window on the clothing vouchers. I have received the vouchers the day they expired."

"They could come through with a clothing voucher now and then."

"When I go to get the clothes for the three children – one voucher is fine but the next two are declined."

Other Sources of Foster Parent Support

PHOTO: Pixland/Getty Images

Foster parents receive support from a variety of sources.

This section focuses on support provided to foster parents and foster children by two groups:

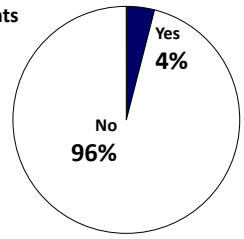
- Staff *other than social workers* employed by Children's Administration or its contracted providers.
- Individuals and organizations *other than Children's Administration and its contracted providers.*

Many foster parents expressed satisfaction with support they have received from various sources in their community. However, some do not feel well supported and others believe the supports that do exist are not well coordinated. Many foster parents desire more contact with their peers.

- The following page provides an overview of foster parents' comments about the support they receive from staff other than social workers, and from sources outside Children's Administration and its contracted providers.

Less than one in twenty respondents (56 out of 1,351, or 4%) made comments about other sources of support. Of those who commented on this subject:

Made comments about other sources of foster parent support?



- Over half (59%) made positive comments.
- Less than one third (30%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.
- Eleven percent made mixed or neutral comments.

1.6 Other Sources of Support

PHOTO: Big Cheese Photo/Getty Images

Foster parents want contact with other foster parents through referrals, support groups, and mentorship.

"I would say that we need a good foster parent network group."

"It would be helpful if the new foster parents could get together with the previous foster parents so they know what to do and what is needed for the care of the children."

"Could have a tribal foster parent support group so we could learn from others and know what to expect."

"I would like a mentor. I would like the phone number of a seasoned foster parent. That would be a great help and would lessen the load on the DSHS case workers."

"I am part of a foster parent support group. Our group provides more information than a case worker is allowed to say. The foster parent's experience is very important to all other foster parents."

The roles of Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) and Guardians ad Litems (GALs) are important for foster parents.

"I get more help from CASA."

"CASA workers have been very helpful in obtaining documents and his personal belongings."

"The foster child's GAL is very supportive of both foster child and foster parent."

"The only person I feel supports us is our CASA."

"Everyone including the GAL and agency people seems good about communication."

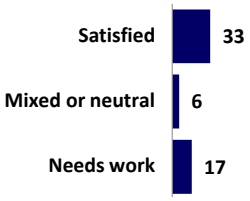
"GAL also meets with the foster child regularly and she converses with me too and keeps me informed. She keeps me more informed than the social worker."

"I have a situation where I really need my GAL and have a brand new one who hasn't read the file. I need her help now and she has not called me back."

THEME | Other Sources of Foster Parent Support

Comments about other sources of foster parent support were included in this category. "Other sources" was defined as Children's Administration or private foster care agency staff (other than social workers), and other individuals or organizations in the community. Four percent of survey respondents made a comment about other sources of foster parent support.

Of the 56 survey respondents who addressed other sources of foster parent support, over half (59%) made positive comments. Less than one third (30%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. 11 percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Foster parents' comments covered the following topics:

- Many foster parents value contact with other foster parents and would like more of it.
- Support from CASAs (Court-Appointed Special Advocates) or GALs (Guardians ad Litem) is appreciated when present, and missed when it is lacking.
- Foster parents expect effective coordination between social workers, other representatives of the foster care system, and community supports. For example, foster parents may appreciate information received through a GAL while wondering why they did not get it through their social worker.

PHOTO: Hemera/Getty Images

PART 2

Foster Parent Training

PHOTO: Photodisc/Getty Images

The Foster Parent Training section provides a detailed analysis of foster parents' responses to questions about the foster parent training provided by Children's Administration and affiliated agencies.

The majority of foster parents reported they are satisfied with the training they receive. They praised the training provided by Children's Administration and private agencies, the skill of the trainers, and many of the trainings currently offered. However, a substantial number of foster parents reported difficulties with training access – with training schedules, locations, travel costs, and childcare. Foster parents also indicated they would like more non-traditional training options such as on-line training or training integrated with support groups. They would also like more contact with experienced foster parents, and more timely information on the availability of training opportunities.

This part of the report contains the following sections:

- Section 1: Quality and Helpfulness
- Section 2: Trainers
- Section 3: General Training
- Section 4: Specific Trainings
- Section 5: Access
- Section 6: Alternative Training Formats
- Section 7: Voice and Choice
- Section 8: Training Information
- Section 9: Support Beyond Training

Quality and Helpfulness

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Most foster parents give high marks to the training they receive.

This section is about the overall quality and helpfulness of the training foster parents are given by Children's Administration, and by private agencies contracted by Children's Administration. Subsequent sections address more specific aspects of foster parent training – trainers, general training, specific trainings, access, alternative training formats, voice and choice, training information, and support beyond training.

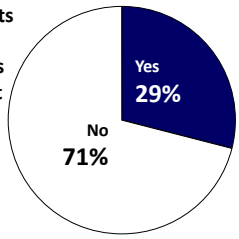
The majority of foster parents indicate that the training they receive is adequate or better. Even those who feel that current training needs work often acknowledge the benefits of trainings they have taken.

In this section:

- The following page highlights foster parents' responses to the question: ***Overall, thinking about ALL the training you have had in the last three years, how adequately has it prepared you to care for the basic needs of foster children placed in your home?***
- The next two pages address foster parents' comments about the quality and helpfulness of training as a whole, and from specific agencies or programs.

- **Almost three in ten survey respondents (393 of 1,351 or 29%) made comments about the quality and helpfulness of foster parent training across all sources. Of these:**

Made comments about quality and helpfulness of foster parent training?



- Over four out of five (83%) made positive comments.

- Less than one in ten (8%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.

- Nine percent made mixed or neutral comments.

PHOTO: Hemera/Getty Images

The majority of foster parents feel positively about the training they receive.

"The training leading up to the placement of our first child was very helpful and gave realistic expectations about how challenging foster parenting can be. Our experience could have been disheartening without this information, and we walked out with great tools and our eyes wide open. Training was also helpful for learning about the roles of the birth parents, culture, and family."

"A lot of the information is relevant, applicable, and useful concerning foster children."

"The basic training was good. I gained extra training in trauma and that was most helpful."

"They did a good job preparing you for the realities of foster parenting. The trainers gave personal examples of situations in training to give some practical reasoning behind the lesson. They also made it very clear each situation is different and there might be exceptions to some rules. They also informed me of ways to get additional help which I really appreciated."

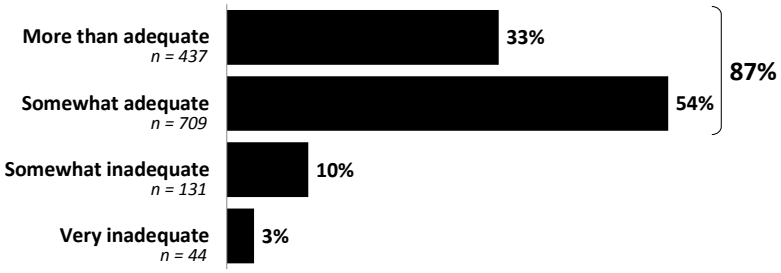
Some don't feel the state training has prepared them sufficiently.

"I think training can be improved by actually listening to what the foster parents want and need. A couple of times we went to training and asked about specific situations, but we were told the situations were too unique and that they couldn't address them."

"Here's a scenario: you have a heart attack and are going into surgery. The doctor you're given is fully licensed and knows virtually everything there is to know about the heart; however, that doctor has never experienced open heart surgery, put in a stent, or even been in a real hospital emergency scenario. That's kind of how I feel about the training and trainers."

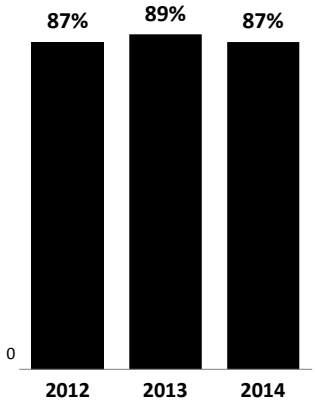
QUESTION | Overall, thinking about ALL the training you have had in the last three years, how adequately has it prepared you to care for the basic needs of foster children placed in your home?

Nearly nine out of ten of the 1,321 foster parents who answered this question (87%) reported that training was more than or somewhat adequate. 13 percent found the training somewhat or very inadequate.



STATE TREND

The slight decrease from 2013 was not statistically significant.

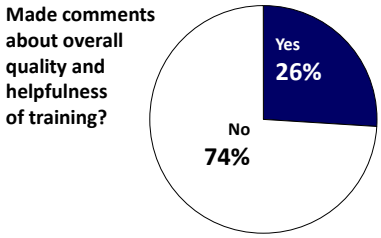


REGIONAL DETAIL

Responses to this question showed no variation by region.

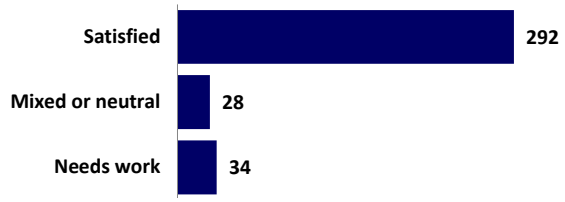
THEME | Overall Quality and Helpfulness of Training

Comments about the overall quality and helpfulness of foster parent training (rather than the quality and helpfulness of specific trainings) were included in this category. 26 percent of survey respondents made a general comment about training.[1]



354 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (26%) mentioned the overall quality and helpfulness of training.

Of the 354 survey respondents who addressed the overall quality and helpfulness of training, more than three quarters (82%) made positive comments. Ten percent made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Eight percent made mixed or neutral comments.



These general comments include those that were made when respondents were unable to give any specific areas where training could improve – or areas where training is good.

- **121 survey respondents replied "Nothing" to the question, "How could foster parent training be improved?" (a positive response).**
- **21 respondents replied "Nothing" to the question, "What about foster parent training has been helpful?" (a negative response).**

These comments also include 107 foster parents who provided more specific descriptions in praising or criticizing the general quality of training.

- **220 made a specific positive comment about overall training (85% of specific comments).**
- **15 criticized overall support in specific terms (6%).**
- **25 offered specific neutral or mixed comments (10%).**

PHOTO: Pixland/Getty Images

Most foster parents find the training they receive to be very helpful.

"The training was great. I don't know what I would do without it."

"I am so satisfied that I don't know what to tell you! They have so many classes and they cover everything one could possibly want to know about foster care."

"Training was overwhelming emotionally, but it was very good."

"It's all been helpful. They give you a lot of information that we can use with the kids."

"It would be pretty hard to improve on what is taking place."

"I was really pleased! I would not have done it if it wasn't required. I am glad it is required!"

"Have a little more variety on the childcare stuff, dealing with parents in general, and what can you expect from particular age groups. I have been a foster parent for 35 years and did not want to go with the state training – but it is very good."

"The training I have had so far has prepared me for foster parenting."

"All the trainings have been somewhat helpful."

Few have mixed or negative feelings.

"The training is not good. I have been licensed since 1972 and training needs to reflect today's kids. Also, it needs to be clear to foster parents what to expect and how to hang in there with these children and not just move them at the slightest issue."

"Most of it is helpful and informational, but it becomes repetitious when we have to take the same classes over and over."

"I only take infants so much of the information was not relevant."

"Being able to network with the other foster parents at the training was more helpful than the training itself."

[1] As described on the lower part of this page, positive and negative comments were combined with "Nothing" responses according to question context.

PHOTO: moodboard/Getty Images

Many foster parents commented on the quality of training from specific agencies or programs.

"The trainings offered by the Fostering Together groups are very helpful and they provide childcare."

"The Kitsap Foster Association has monthly meetings on a different subject each month. That has been very helpful."

"I am a part of the Mockingbird Constellation, which has monthly meetings and topic presenters. They need more of these for foster parent support."

"Tree House, Independent Living, and the YMCA for example offer lots of training and it is great."

"The Spokane Orphan Summit was probably the most helpful because of the support of the people and organizations that were there."

"I really like the booklets we have been getting in the mail listing the classes available through the University of Washington. They are free and awesome."

Some spoke of the helpfulness of private agency training, without naming the agency.

"Our private agency has really supported us and no changes are needed."

"One of the best things offered through our private agency was LGBT training, which applies to us."

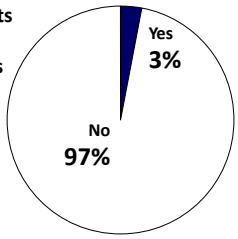
"It has been very helpful for us to receive training through our private agency."

"We learned what resources are out there – like getting financial assistance, respite care, how to deal with different behavior issues, etc. There is a lot of very valuable information given to us by both DSHS and private agency staff."

THEME | Quality and Helpfulness of Training in Specific Agencies or Programs

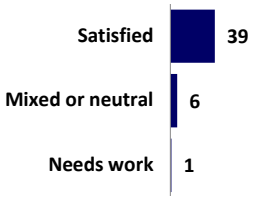
Comments about the quality and helpfulness of training provided by specific agencies or programs were included in this category. Three percent of survey respondents made a comment about training in a specific agency or program.

Made comments about quality and helpfulness of training in specific agencies or programs?



46 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (3%) mentioned the quality and helpfulness of training in a specific agency or program.

Of the 46 survey respondents who addressed the quality and helpfulness of training in specific agencies or programs, more than eight out of ten (85%) made positive comments. One respondent made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Another 13 percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Foster parents' comments fell into the following groups:

- Comments on the quality/helpfulness of training from specific *named* agencies or programs.
- Comments on the quality/helpfulness of *unnamed* private agencies.
- Comments on other sources of training support, including hospitals, foster care networks, and professional training.

Trainers

PHOTO: Purestock/Getty Images

Foster parents feel that good trainers enhance the training experience.

Foster parents' experiences with trainers involve multiple agencies. Some of these trainers are employees of Children's Administration, some are employees of agencies contracting with Children's Administration, and still others are hired by Children's Administration or private agencies to present specific trainings.

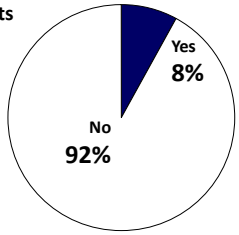
Most foster parents who commented reported satisfaction with the trainers they have worked with. A smaller number suggested that trainers would be most effective if they have direct experience with foster care, focus on practical suggestions, offer more interaction during the classes, and present more up-to-date materials.

In this section:

- The following page provides an overview of general comments about the performance of trainers.
- The next page addresses comments about specific trainers who foster parents liked or disliked.

Fewer than one in ten survey respondents (113 out of 1,351, or 8%) made comments about trainers. Of those who commented on this subject:

Made comments about trainers?



- Over two thirds (69%) made positive comments.
- One of five (20%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.
- Just over one out of ten (11%) made mixed or neutral comments.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Most foster parents commended their trainers.

"They were very thorough in covering the material. She made the rules clear as to what we could do and not do with the foster children."

"We are blessed with a good trainer in my area."

"The instructors are really good. I don't see how they could improve."

"Trainers were honest and candid and that was helpful."

"I think the presenters have been very good and gave us real life situations."

"The trainers present well and are very knowledgeable."

"The most helpful was having trainers or people with foster care parenting experience doing the training."

"The instructor was very good about answering all my questions."

"The trainings we attended provided much knowledge and had good trainers. They always provide knowledgeable staff."

Some suggested ways trainers could become more effective.

"Have more involvement in the training from foster parents who actually do the day-to-day stuff with the foster children rather than the trainers who don't have much experience and read it out of a book."

"The person that taught the class was more of a jokester with too many personal stories, too many sexual comments that were inappropriate, and we didn't even go through the entire binder. We only covered about six chapters, he called it good and we got our signed certificate."

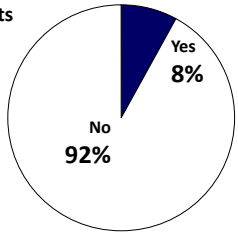
"Maybe they need to do some audits or have some folks sit in the training classes and then anonymously report back to DSHS management as how the classes are going and being taught."

"The instructor skipped over half the material and told us 'this needs to be updated' and was incredibly negative."

THEME | Trainers

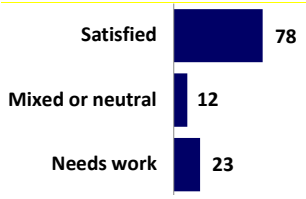
General comments about foster parent trainers were included in this category. Eight percent of survey respondents made a comment about the trainers.

Made comments about trainers?



113 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (8%) mentioned trainers.

Of the 113 survey respondents who addressed trainers, almost seven out of ten (69%) made positive comments. One in five (20%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Twelve people (11%) made mixed or neutral comments.



Foster parents like it when trainers:

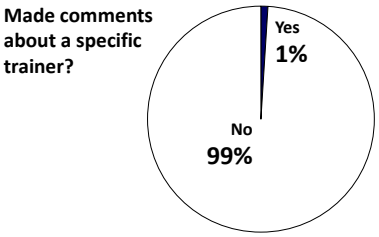
- Know their subject matter well.
- Have real-life experience with foster care.
- Are honest about the ups and downs of foster care.
- Take time to answer questions.
- Involve the class throughout training.
- Have passion for their work.
- Make the class interesting.

They are frustrated by trainers who:

- Lack practical experience with foster care.
- Don't invite others with expertise to co-train.
- Lack knowledge of their subject area.
- Share outdated information and materials.
- Don't answer questions or offer practical solutions to problems.
- Read from a book.

THEME | Specific Trainers

A dozen people made comments about specific foster parent trainers, mentioning them by name.



12 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (1%) mentioned a specific trainer.

All twelve comments referring to specific trainers or staff involved in training were positive.

Those who commented praised particular trainers for:

- Being able to keep the class engaged, while still being helpful.
- Offering additional support outside class.
- Sharing realistic, honest experiences.
- Having first-hand knowledge themselves of what it takes to be a foster parent.
- Making sure the class gets all the information they need.
- Knowledge of available resources.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

People tend to mention specific trainers by name when they consider them to be outstanding in some way.

"I love Yolanda Marcet. She gives the PRIDE training. She stayed after the training and I ran into her in the office and she offered support and remembered me from the year prior when I had taken that training."

"The training that Ryan Krueger puts on is great. He has been a foster parent and is realistic."

"I really liked the meetings with Alfred – they were the PRIDE classes. They were good."

"Jenny Forest has been outstanding!"

"Our trainer, Nancy, was a great PRIDE trainer. Entertaining, helpful, and very experienced. She gave us good resources."

"Kimberly McNaughton was an amazing trainer!"

"Colleen Wilcox and Catherine Gutz are excellent trainers. Their information is truthful and accurate."

"Our instructor Renee really tried hard to make sure we had what we needed to do a good job."

"Bill Todd is the best instructor ever!"

"I've taken many trainings, but the training Sean Mahoney leads about dealing with drug affected children was the most helpful."

"I would suggest that they keep Nancy Lee as long as possible. She is fantastic! She has so much knowledge about the entire process."

"Please respect Nancy Thomas and her trainings. She really knows what she is doing."

General Training

PHOTO: Digital Vision/Getty Images

Foster parents appreciate many aspects of foster parent training.

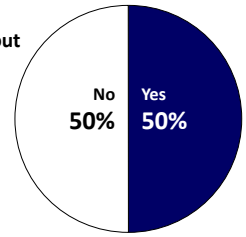
The majority of foster parents who commented about training reported positive experiences. They commented on the useful information and skills they gained during training, the way that training prepared them to care better for their foster children, and the new perspectives that training gave them. Some made suggestions for improvements in certain aspects of training, such as practicality, training requirements, techniques, materials, and resources.

In this section:

- The following page addresses comments about how well training prepares foster parents to deal with the children in their care.
- The third page is an overview of comments about approaches to training.
- The fourth page focuses on comments about training resources.
- The fifth page reviews comments on training materials.
- The sixth page looks at other general training comments.

Half of survey respondents (676 out of 1,351, or 50%) made general comments about training. Of those who commented on this subject:

Made general comments about training?



- Just under half (46%) made positive comments.

- Nearly one third (31%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.

- 23 percent made mixed or neutral comments.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents like training that helps them understand and deal with their foster children.

"It really made us realize what the children are going through. This makes us re-examine how we are dealing with them."

"The training has opened my eyes to the needs of the foster children who have had unstable starts to their lives."

"I liked the overview of common issues with foster kids, i.e. behavior and PTSD and things like that."

"The training helps one to appreciate the background the kids come from, so we can understand the kids better."

"The training has provided me with the tools necessary to care for the children in the home."

They appreciate knowing how to get help and resources for their foster children.

"The training gave me a background of what to expect and the resources that are available to help care for the children in my home."

"They gave good information about behaviors, resources, and what to expect."

"The training also provided valuable resources."

"They are good at giving you resources so we can reach out."

Some said they needed more training on how to care for foster children.

"We need more education on the emotional needs of kids that have been taken from their parents."

"More training on what happens when you become an instant family and what to do."

"Needs to be more focus on realistic situations the child is/has been in."

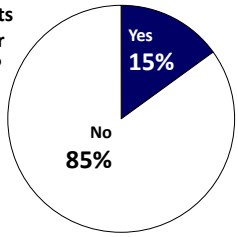
"We need the nitty gritty of helping a child who has lived a deprived life and integrating him/her into our family and culture, such as bathing and eating."

"I wish they would cover the core stuff foster parents are supposed to provide better."

THEME | Caring for Foster Children

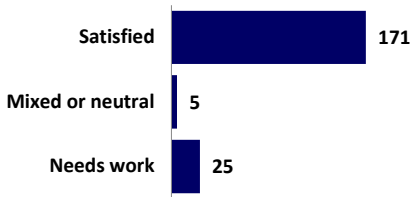
Comments about how well training prepared foster parents to care for the children in their home were included in this category. 15 percent of survey respondents commented on this aspect of training.

Made comments about caring for foster children?



Over one in ten of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (201) mentioned the impact of training on their ability to care for foster children.

Of the 201 survey respondents who addressed how adequately training prepared them to care for foster children, more than eight out of ten (85%) made positive comments. 12 percent made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Three percent made mixed or neutral comments.

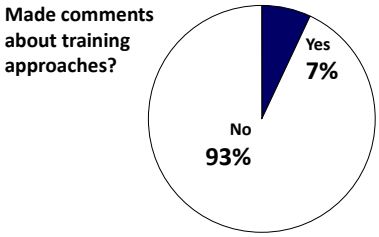


Foster parents want training that:

- Helps them understand, and deal with, the experiences and emotional needs of foster children.
- Teaches them how the entire family adjusts to a new child.
- Helps them advocate for their foster children, and get them access to outside resources and support.
- Realistically covers current issues facing foster children.
- Clearly tells them what they should be providing to each child.

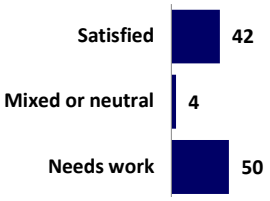
THEME | Approaches to Training

Comments about various approaches to foster parent training were included in this category. 7% of survey respondents made a comment about approaches to training.



96 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (7%) mentioned approaches to training.

Of the 96 survey respondents who addressed approaches to training, over four out of ten (44%) made positive comments. Slightly more than half (52%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Four percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Comments about approaches to training made it clear that foster parents favor:

- "Hands on" training.
- Roleplaying various situations.
- Practical, real life examples.
- Small group and one-on-one trainings.
- Question-and-answer sessions with experienced foster parents.
- Availability of "take home" materials.
- Use of media instead of trainer lectures.

PHOTO: Hemera/Getty Images

Foster Parents appreciate training that is interactive.

"The roleplay situations giving us ideas on how to respond."

"I felt like we learned a lot – very thorough. We got to participate."

"The text and the dry stuff really don't relate."

"I appreciated the in class training and we did several simulated activities."

"In the 'First Placement, Now What?' class, instead of going through the text we talked about the concerns the new foster parents had in an open forum. I appreciated this."

They like classes led by more than just the trainer.

"I like the discussion part when foster parents speak up during training or a social worker who has an experience."

"We heard success stories from parents who got their children back which was very enlightening."

"Have some adult foster children come talk to us about their experience."

"Hearing about former foster parents and what they have gone though is great to include in the training."

"I think when there are actual panels of foster parents or foster kids...having real life situations with answers available…that go hand-in-hand with what the foster children in the system are facing."

Many foster parents said training should be more engaging.

"There needs to be more roleplaying during the training."

"It is more set up as a classroom lecture, and it does not keep people's attention very well."

"Having more real life and hands-on training would be great."

"I would say that it could be more interactive and real life rather than us sitting there and being preached at all day."

"Include real situations in the training rather than what is in the book."

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Many foster parents are pleased with information given at trainings about available resources.

"The most helpful parts of training are the resources they give you."

"It lets us know what resources are available in our community."

"There are plenty of training offerings with good website information and resources."

"The resources provided were helpful."

"The foster training has provided other resources that we did not know were available."

"It was good to know who else is out there and who you can call if you need to."

"I think they did fairly good about giving us phone numbers for support and resources if we run into a problem or have a question."

"They also gave us good resources that we could call when we needed help."

"The training provided us with the resources necessary to care for the children."

Some feel like they need lists showing additional resources/support.

"We need more information about the resources that are available in our area."

"Have a listing of resources available. I had to do the research myself and the state should provide that to save valuable time."

"More information about available services would great."

"I think DSHS should establish resources available lists and widely distribute those lists."

"There needs to be a better list of people who can help - who we can call or who can answer our questions."

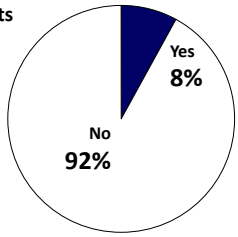
"They need to have training on the available resources that the foster parents can use."

"I'd like to know who to go to for different support."

THEME | Resources

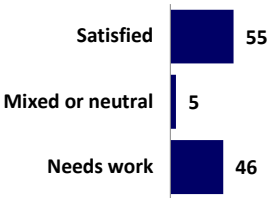
Comments about resource lists being available at trainings are included in this category. Eight percent of survey respondents commented on resource information available at trainings.

Made comments about training resources?



106 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (8%) mentioned resource information at trainings.

Of the 106 survey respondents who addressed training resources, more than half (52%) made positive comments. Over four in ten (43%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement, while five percent made mixed or neutral comments.

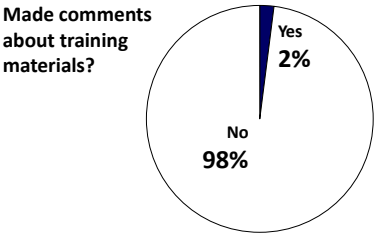


The majority of comments expressed satisfaction with the information about resources for foster children and foster families that they receive in training. Some would like more information about:

- Resources available in specific geographical areas.
- Resources for help for when foster child issues arise.
- Local resources for foster parents – babysitters, respite care, community connections, and so forth.
- On-line resources for foster care support.
- Resources for children with special needs.

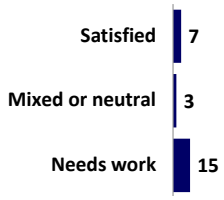
THEME | Training Materials

Comments about training materials were included in this category. Two percent of survey respondents commented on materials used in trainings.



25 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (2%) mentioned training materials.

Of the 25 survey respondents who addressed training materials, seven people (28%) made positive comments. Fifteen (60%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Three (12%) made mixed or neutral comments.



Comments about training materials fell into three groups:

- Quality of videos.
- Quality of written materials.
- Access to training materials.

Although some foster parents had positive things to say about training materials, most who commented said that the materials are outdated, poor quality, or not realistic.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Some foster parents complimented the materials used in trainings.

"Both the training and the reading materials were excellent."

"The books that we get – they cover a lot."

"The movies and the guest speakers were good."

"They try to give us a lot of physical material to refer to."

"I like the format of using videos in the training."

"I appreciate the ability to receive printed materials so that I can refer back to them easily and quickly later."

Others felt the materials – or the access to materials – could be improved.

"The videos are outdated and need to be updated."

"We got a packet on training materials, but no table of contents. It is really hard to reference stuff. It would be helpful if it were more organized."

"It would be nice if it was updated, and the videos weren't from the 1980s."

"The manual we used in class was a photocopy that had been used over and over."

"Old videos give the impression that this information is not necessarily up-to-date."

"The handouts and worksheets were faded. I could hardly read the information. The copies were unreadable. It was pathetic. They said they didn't have money in the budget to get better copies."

"We need a reference we can look at."

"Update some of the material. It seems like some of the videos we watched were from the 1970s or 1980s."

"Need more hand out materials for the foster parents."

"I've seen these videos so many times. Give us something fresh and not from the 1980s!"

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents appreciate when trainings are helpful.

"It gives you ideas on how to approach a problem because there is more than one way to handle things."

"I think the most helpful thing was the variety of topics that were covered."

"I like that they train you to prepare for the worst. They were not sugar coating it."

"All of the different classes, times, and locations offered are helpful."

"Training makes you aware of everything you are supposed to do and some of what the foster children have had to endure."

"They cover the right topics and answered questions and concerns."

"Trainings are beneficial and provide good information to consider and put in your tool belt."

Many have suggestions for general ways training could be improved.

"Do not require so many training hours within three years. I have to keep taking the same old outdated training that I took ten years ago to fulfill my hourly requirements. That's a waste of your time and my time."

"Break up the information into smaller courses."

"Maybe more classes offered and more time/day choices."

"The amount of ongoing training required and the hours when it is provided are difficult to participate in when you have several foster children placed in your home."

"Each training session is too long."

"My husband took the last training and said it was a big stack of photocopies and they simply went through it page by page. It was very dry!"

"The training needs to be updated."

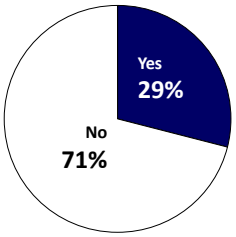
"Be more accurate about what actually happens in foster care situations."

"Some provision for not taking repetitive training would be good."

THEME | Other General Training Comments

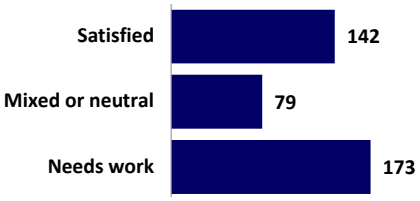
Other general comments about training were included in this category. 29% of survey respondents made comments about other general training issues not already covered in prior sections.

Made other general comments about training?



394 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (29%) made other general comments about training.

Of the 394 survey respondents who made other general comments about training, over one in three (36%) were positive comments. Just under half (44%) were negative comments or suggestions for improvement. 20 percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Foster parents expressed satisfaction with:

- Wide variety of classes offered.
- Training that helps them understand their roles and the foster care system.
- Training that provides useful information.
- Training that prepares them for what to expect.
- Training that helps them develop new skills.
- Refresher classes that keep them updated.

They dislike it when:

- Training requirements are redundant or burdensome.
- Reading materials and long lectures make training boring.
- Information is overwhelming in a single training session.
- Training is not realistic or current.
- Training requirements do not take into account professional backgrounds and long-time foster parent experience.

Specific Trainings

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents commented on a variety of training types.

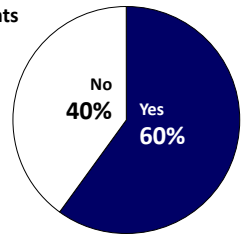
Of those who commented on specific trainings, most made positive comments and many of these were positive towards a favorite training or training type. Some voiced negative or mixed comments about particular trainings, suggested ways to improve a specific training, or asked for training in a specific area.

In this section:

- This chapter reviews foster parents' comments on ten specific training themes. The themes are arranged in the following order: Disorders/Issues; Substance Abuse; Sexually Inappropriate Behavior; Child Behavior; Infants and Toddlers; Navigating the Foster Care System; Trainings Mentioned by Name *(PRIDE, Parenting Plus, and Love and Logic)*; Health and Safety; Cultural Awareness and Cultural Issues; and Other Specific Trainings.

More than half of survey respondents (812 out of 1,351, or 60%) made comments about specific trainings. Of those who commented on this subject:

Made comments about specific trainings?



- Over half (53%) made positive comments.
- One in five (20%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.
- About one in four (26%) made mixed or neutral comments.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Many foster parents said that the trainings they receive on specific disorders or issues are helpful.

"The great trainings are the ones that pertain to the children I am caring for age wise and condition wise (medically fragile)."

"The training on attachment issues was the most helpful."

"The special education training, especially on behavioral management, is good."

"The grief counseling training concerning children who have experienced complete and utter loss was brilliant and useful."

"Trainings also do a good job of preparing for possible issues around the child – like social and emotional issues."

"Attachment training has been the most helpful."

"I think the training received has been helpful in what to expect for special needs children and how to address kids in crises in individual ways."

Several requested trainings on particular disorders and behaviors they are dealing with.

"There should be more follow-up training on many disorders."

"If you have a child in your care that has various specialized issues – it would be nice to have classes for those issues."

"There is not enough training available regarding special needs children."

"I think if they went more in-depth about some of the behaviors we are likely to see. Be clearer about this and do not make us figure out the situation on our own."

"There are neglect issues and the training does not address that."

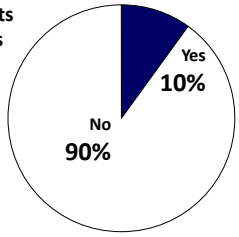
"Need to give more training on how to protect a child who is violent and how to restrain them."

"We need training on PTSD, and how to help kids deal with losses."

THEME | Disorders/Issues

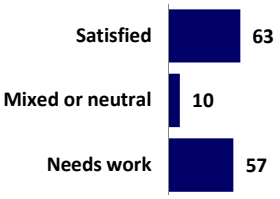
Comments about training on specific disorders or issues were included in this category. Ten percent of survey respondents commented on trainings directed at disorders or issues.

Made comments about disorders or issues?



130 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (10%) mentioned training on disorders or issues.

Of the 130 survey respondents who addressed trainings on specific disorders or issues, just under half (49%) made positive comments. A little less than half (44%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement, and eight percent made mixed or neutral comments.

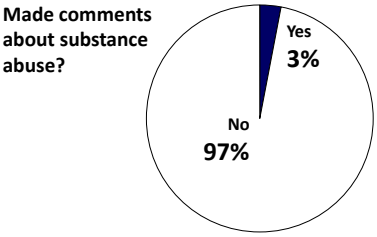


Many comments in this section are requests for additional trainings on specific disorders or issues. The following specific training topics were asked for by respondents (*most often requested at top/least requested at bottom*):

- Attachment disorders.
- Trauma, and post traumatic stress disorder.
- Children with special needs.
- Autism spectrum disorders.
- Medical fragility issues.
- Grief, loss, and separation issues.
- Eating disorders.
- Abuse and neglect issues.
- Sensory disorders.
- Problematic behaviors (including violence and running away).
- ADHD and ADD, bipolar, and sleep disorders.
- Other mental health disorders.

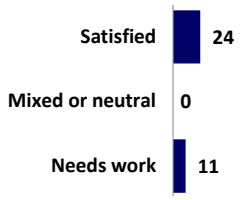
THEME | Substance Abuse

Comments about substance abuse training were included in this category. Most of these comments referred to trainings about children exposed to alcohol or drugs before birth. Three percent of survey respondents commented on substance abuse training.



35 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (3%) mentioned substance abuse training.

Of the 35 survey respondents who addressed substance abuse training, almost seven out of ten (69%) made positive comments. Less than half that (31%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement.



The majority of foster parents, who commented on substance abuse, indicated they find these specific classes important and useful:

- Fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effects.
- Drug-affected infants.

Some felt that they were not getting the training they need to be able to help the substance-affected children in their care. They want training that:

- Offers more depth on drug-affected infants and children.
- Teaches how to care for children going through substance withdrawal.
- Shares possible side effects of common behavior medications.
- Offers insight on how addicted parents think.
- Identifies addiction and informs how to get treatment.
- Shares information on current emerging street drugs.

PHOTO: Hemera/Getty Images

Most foster parents said the substance abuse training they got was useful.

"The training on drug babies was excellent."

"I think the foster parent trainings that have addressed the drugs and alcohol and fetal alcohol syndrome have been good."

"We've had classes on how to care for drug babies which were very good."

"There is a series of training for fetal alcohol syndrome kids that was very beneficial to me."

"The training on drug use and how it affects the children was useful."

"The training on fetal alcohol was helpful."

"Drug exposed infants training was very helpful."

"The training they do on drug impacted children and fetal alcohol syndrome is very helpful."

Some indicated they would like more – or more accessible – substance abuse training.

"Foster parents need more access to how to work with drug affected children. Training needs to focus more on this."

"Provide more training on alcohol/ substance abuse issues: how to identify early on, advocate for treatment, and find out resources available for foster child in this regard."

"Need training on children exposed to drug/alcohol prenatally, when they reach school age."

"The current drug/alcohol training on-line is so very basic. Wastes time, effort, and money."

"Include realistic information about drug impacted children."

"Give us some insight on how an addicted parent thinks and raises their child and how to approach this child and help them overcome these fears."

"More training with how to care for children going through withdrawals."

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Most of these comments were requests for more training on dealing with sexual inappropriate behaviors.

"Increase training on the really hard subjects and more in-depth like sexual abuse, trauma, sexualized behaviors etc."

"More specific training on specialized problems such as sex abuse."

"If we could have a panel of experienced foster parents that could share their experiences with different kinds of issues (i.e. physical/sexual acting out, cultural differences) that would be a great resource for training."

One person said this training was helpful to them.

"Trainings on sexualized behaviors and parenting classes have been helpful."

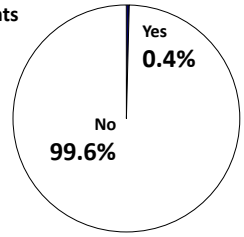
One person simply asked where they could find a class on Sexually Aggressive Youth.

"Where can I find a SAY class?"

THEME | Sexually Inappropriate Behavior

Comments about sexually inappropriate behavior training were included in this category. Less than one percent of survey respondents commented on specific training about sexually inappropriate behavior.

Made comments about sexually inappropriate behavior?



5 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (.4%) mentioned training about sexually inappropriate behavior.

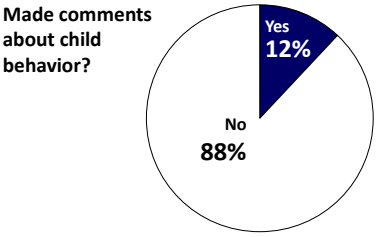
Of the five survey respondents who addressed a specific training about sexually inappropriate behavior, one (20%) made a positive comment. Three (60%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Another one (20%) made a mixed or neutral comment.

In this and previous surveys foster parents have said it is important to receive training on:

- Sexually aggressive youth.
- Signs of sexually inappropriate behavior.
- Sexualized behavior.
- Sexual and physical abuse of children.
- How to protect children from sexual abuse.

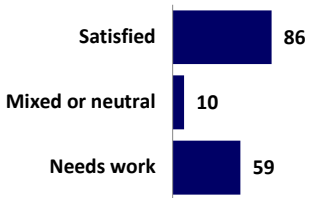
THEME | Child Behavior

Comments about training on child behavior were included in this category. 12 percent of survey respondents made comments about training dealing with child behavior.



155 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (12%) mentioned training on child behavior.

Of the 155 survey respondents who addressed training on child behavior, over half (56%) made positive comments. Just under four in ten (38%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement, while seven percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Foster parents appreciate training that covers:

- Child development.
- Behavior management.
- Dealing effectively with traumatized children.
- Discipline techniques.
- Realistic de-escalation techniques.
- Where to go for help or more information.

Some would like:

- Training separated by specific age groups.
- Classes offered with more depth of content.
- Examples given that are realistic and honest.
- More training on child development.
- Training on behavior management that helps them deal with really difficult behaviors.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents often called the child behavior training "great" and "excellent".

"I liked the training when they had the behavioral management specialist. He was good and did not sugarcoat the issue."

"The behavior training was great."

"The training gave me information on the behavior of children and what to expect of their behavior."

"I think there are lots of helpful trainings about how to deal with behaviors and the situations they are going through."

"They told us a lot about what to expect as far as behaviors and what to expect with different scenarios."

"The training also taught me skills on how to handle the behavior of the children."

"Learning about behaviors and triggers. I appreciate more tools for my tool bag so I can be creative."

"The training on behavior was excellent."

Some foster parents suggested ways to improve behavior training.

"There needs to be more training for the different age groups of children and how to handle behavior problems for each group."

"By offering concrete suggestions for managing your children. Some of the trainings on behaviors give suggestions and ideas, but I want to hear, 'Go home and try this...'"

"Offer more training for behaviorally challenging children."

"I think they need to provide more training regarding behavioral issues. Give us more options as how to handle those issues! Teach what can be done, what has been done, and what is effective."

"They don't prepare you for the emotional trauma we experience getting kids in our home that don't want to be there and let you know that they don't want to be there."

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Three foster parents commended the infant and toddler training they have received.

"Basic care for newborns is great."

"I attended Toddler Training on my own. It was good."

Most foster parents offered ideas to improve infant and toddler training.

"It would be nice if they had specialized training for infants and teenagers that are separate, that way they can be more specific."

"If one is going to get newborns – we need to go to newborn classes to learn about them…maybe a review of well baby exams and the like. What should we expect?"

"It would be nice to have some classes on infants and toddlers...five and under...and how we could work better with them."

"I wish there were more age specific trainings. We only take in children age three and younger, and a lot of the training is geared toward older children. For example, the last little guy I had at four months old had feeding issues. I didn't understand what was going on with him and I feel like I could have helped him a lot sooner if I had known what to look for."

"The training should be more age appropriate. We have a newborn. The material was designed for teenagers."

"We only take infants and most infants coming into care are drug babies. I think there should be training to know how to hold such a baby and how to handle that baby's special needs."

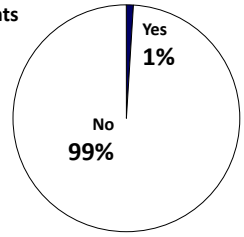
"Talk more about how to find childcare and shot records so you can reduce leg work for foster parents of infants. It could save time and energy."

"There is nothing in there for those of us that take infants."

THEME | Infants and Toddlers

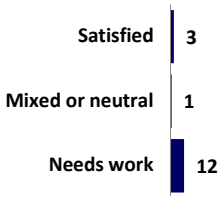
Comments about training on infants and toddlers were included in this category. One percent of survey respondents commented on infant and toddler training.

Made comments about infants and toddlers?



16 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (1%) mentioned infant and toddler training.

Of the 16 survey respondents who addressed infant and toddler training, three people (19%) made positive comments. Twelve parents (75%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. One person (6%) made a mixed or neutral comment.



Three foster parents are pleased that infant training covers:

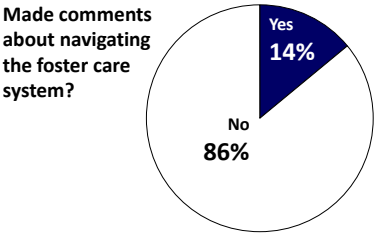
- Medically fragile infants.
- Caring for newborns.
- Age-specific behavior and development.

This list reflects what the twelve foster parents requested be included to improve training *(most often requested at top/least requested at bottom)*:

- Age-appropriate lessons and material.
- More training on caring specifically for newborns.
- Trainings on dealing with special needs/medically fragile children.
- Where to find childcare and support resources.

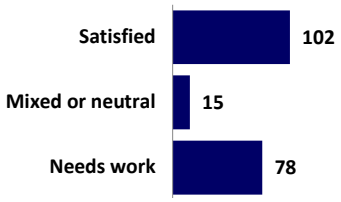
THEME | Navigating the Foster Care System

Comments about learning to navigate the foster care system were included in this category. 14 percent of survey respondents commented on training about navigating the foster care system.



195 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (14%) mentioned training on navigating the foster care system.

Of the 195 survey respondents who addressed training on navigating the foster care system, more than half (52%) made positive comments. Four in ten (40%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Eight percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Foster parents like training that helps them to:

- Comprehend the foster care system and how it works.
- Understand the legal process and court system.
- Keep track of updated policies and procedures.
- Get a clear, realistic idea of foster parent rights, rules, and responsibilities.
- Complete required paperwork and keep necessary records.
- Know what resources are available to them.
- Identify who they can contact to get more information.

Almost all of the foster parents that made negative comments described perceptions of a lack of comprehensive training in the topics described above.

PHOTO: Fuse/Getty Images

Foster parents want to learn how the foster care system works before having a child placed with them.

"There is no training on resources available, no training how to enroll a child in school, etc. When a foster parent gets a new placement, the child must have a medical exam within three days – but no one told me."

"It would be really helpful to know about all the things that we will not be provided information on. For instance we may not be told the biological parents are coming for a visit, or the foster child has lice, or the foster child has no clothes."

"When I first became a foster parent, I felt like I was given a child and told little about where to get childcare, reimbursements, etc."

They also want to understand the roles and responsibilities for all involved.

"There needs to be more training on what the roles of a social worker are and what the foster parents should expect to receive from the social worker."

"I totally know what my duties as a foster parent are due to the training I have received."

"Explain who is supposed to do what!"

"They explained various roles of the court, social worker, biological parent, etc."

Foster parents appreciate being told how the entire system works.

"I had no clue what was going down, so trainings on what to do when you first get a child were appreciated."

"They have a good variety of topics, but we should spend more time on the WACs. People are getting in trouble left and right because we haven't been kept in the loop about things we should know but are not told about."

"The most helpful aspect has been preparing us for just how the system works and all of its rules. How to navigate all the aspects of it."

2.4 Specific Trainings

PHOTO: Digital Vision/Getty Images

Foster parents overwhelmingly commended the PRIDE training.

"The most helpful session was the PRIDE Training. It took a very realistic view of how it would be about being a foster parent."

"Going to the PRIDE Training was very enlightening."

"The very beginning training, PRIDE was so memorable. It is a realistic training on what to expect and has good examples. It stuck with both of us."

"The PRIDE training didn't whitewash anything – it was a very realistic picture of kids coming into our house."

"We appreciated the PRIDE training when they had actual foster parents, foster families, and biological families actually help present the training."

They like the content of Parenting Plus, but some don't like how long it is.

"Parenting Plus was wonderful since there was a lot of interaction among foster parents."

"I think that the Parenting Plus training that DSHS requires is frustrating because they are offered in modules – which means I have to go five weeks in a row. If I miss one week of training, I lose all the hours I have previously been in class! That's not fair!"

"In the Parenting Plus class it was a big help to be able to communicate with other foster parents."

"Parenting Plus needs to be cut down."

"The Parenting Plus class I thought was very helpful in highlighting specific situations we might encounter and good parent advice."

Some foster parents say that Love and Logic is their favorite class.

"The Love and Logic class was great."

"Loved the Love and Logic training. It was my favorite and it has helped the most."

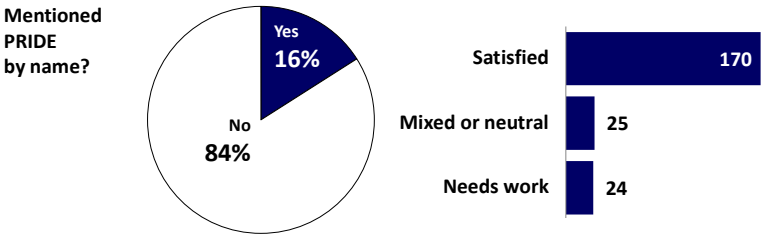
"Love and Logic training in particular was good."

"My favorite class was Love and Logic."

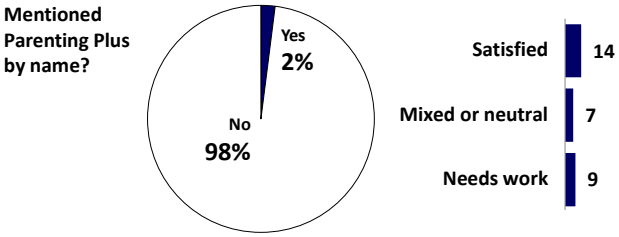
THEME | Trainings Mentioned by Name

Comments about trainings that foster parents mentioned by name were included in this category. Three trainings were often commented upon, and therefore included in this category: PRIDE, Parenting Plus, and Love and Logic.

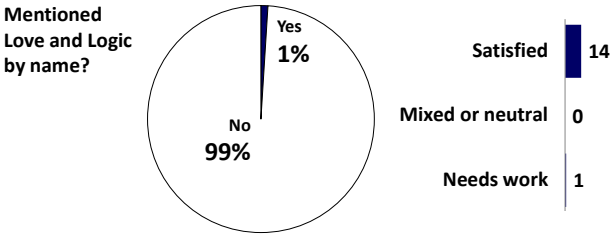
PRIDE. Of the 219 survey respondents who addressed PRIDE training, 78% made positive comments. 11 percent made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. 11 percent made mixed or neutral comments.



PARENTING PLUS. Of the 30 survey respondents who addressed Parenting Plus training, 47% made positive comments. 30% made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. 23% made mixed or neutral comments.

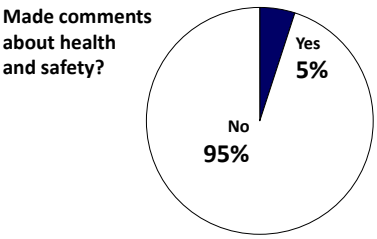


LOVE AND LOGIC. Of the 15 survey respondents who addressed Love and Logic training, all but one made positive comments.



THEME | Health and Safety

Comments about health and safety training were included in this category. Five percent of survey respondents commented on health and safety training.



67 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (5%) mentioned health and safety training.

Of the 67 survey respondents who addressed health and safety training, over eight out of ten (84%) made positive comments. One out of ten (10%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Six percent made mixed or neutral comments.

The majority of comments were about CPR and first aid training. These foster parents appreciate:

- Free CPR/first aid training that gets them certified.
- CPR/first aid training on an annual basis.
- Learning about car seats, cribs, first aid kits, fire extinguishers, and other safety equipment.
- Online first aid/blood born pathogen classes.

Foster parents also mentioned these potential health and safety classes that they would like to see offered:

- Dealing with age-specific medical problems (requested for both young children and teens).
- Shorter CPR/first aid refresher courses.
- Getting the house ready.

PHOTO: Digital Vision/Getty Images

Most foster parents are satisfied with CPR and first aid training.

"I think the most helpful has been the CPR and first aid training."

"I appreciated CPR/first aid training. It is very adequate and sometimes there is almost too much information. They help us keep the foster children safe."

"The first aid and CPR have been helpful."

"I learned how to do CPR with babies."

"Red Cross training was easy and quick. Getting licensed was quick and easy."

"The training on CPR was excellent."

A few suggested changes for CPR and first aid training.

"CPR could be more involved for little kids."

"They should have the CPR classes more frequently."

"Having to have CPR as a full day is a waste of time. It's the same class every two years. I don't need to do it again for an entire Saturday. Could we have a shorter refresher course? Like maybe only a few hours?"

There were other comments about health and safety ideas that foster parents liked or would have liked.

"First aid and CPR were very helpful and also how to approach a child when they are troubled."

"I thought the basics of CPR, first aid, and HIV awareness were really good."

"I liked learning about the safety issues. They cover everything. I had no questions when the class was completed."

"Good option to be able to take training on-line for annual first aid and things like blood born pathogens."

"CPR was good. The general illnesses that kids get and how to handle them."

"We have a child with a G-tube in her stomach – we have had to take special training to help that child and it was good!"

PHOTO: Hemera/Getty Images

Some foster parents praised the cultural awareness training they received.

"I have had many different nationalities of the children and training has helped me learn what to expect culturally."

"The cultural perspective on everything and the child's cultural identification so we can meet the child's needs."

"I like the ethnic training class."

"I really thought it was interesting what was said about tribal children and that there are mentors for them...that help connect them with their culture."

"They help me grow around issues of diversity."

There were requests that other cultural awareness training be offered.

"Training for non-Native American foster parents to prepare for cultural differences when they are caring for Native foster children."

"They might provide help with foreign languages since some foster children come speaking other languages. Sometimes we have the option to take a child speaking another language but obviously it is a barrier right now."

"There is no training on how to do ceremonies for Native American children or how to care for them."

"I think more information on the diversity of the families and how to navigate that. More information about what an IEP looks like and how to advocate for your child at school. (Individual Education Program)."

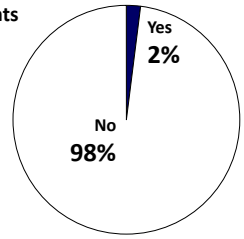
"More information about different cultural traditions and different age groups."

"Offer more on dealing with Native children. Seems like there are really different rules in these instances."

THEME | Cultural Awareness and Cultural Issues

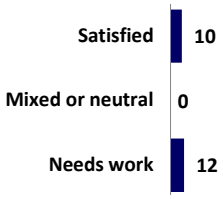
Comments about cultural awareness training, cultural practice issues related to training, and language were included in this category. Two percent of survey respondents commented on cultural issues.

Made comments about cultural issues?



22 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (2%) mentioned cultural issues.

Of the 22 survey respondents who addressed cultural awareness issues and training, just under half (46%) made positive comments. Slightly more (55%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. No mixed or neutral comments were made.



These foster parents like:

- Expanding their awareness of different cultures.
- Training specific to their foster child's culture.
- Discussions on diversity that are connected to the care of the children in their home.

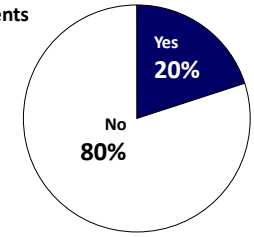
They are particularly interested in some education and ideas around:

- Cultural issues for Native American foster children.
- Help with children speaking foreign languages.

THEME | Other Specific Trainings

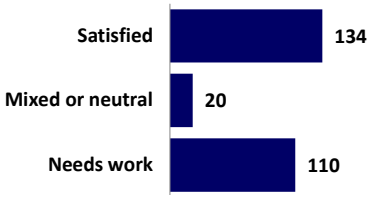
This "Other Specific Trainings" category includes comments about trainings and training types that do not fit into any of the previous categories in the Specific Trainings section. 20% of survey respondents commented on other specific trainings.

Made comments about other specific trainings?



264 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (20%) mentioned other specific trainings.

Of the 264 survey respondents who addressed other specific trainings, more than half (51%) made positive comments. Four of ten (42%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Eight percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Many comments about "other specific trainings" fall into one of these three areas:

- Comments about foster parents' initial training.
- Comments about "Now What" training taken during their first year as a foster parent.
- Comments about the value of participating in training and support groups with other foster parents.

In addition, there were many comments which included the name of a *specific training* or a *specific type of training*. Some of these comments can be found on the next page.

PHOTO: Photos.com/Getty Images

Many foster parents commented on their first training experience.

"The initial training was like drinking out of a fire hose."

"The initial training was really good. Many good scenarios were provided."

"The initial training – about half was helpful, the rest was throw-away stuff."

"Longer for the initial training. You don't know what you are jumping into until you are in it."

"I really liked the initial training. They really helped us to understand where the children are coming from."

Several mentioned they would like training on dealing with the biological parent.

"There needs to be training on the attachment of a child to the biological parents or siblings."

"Give more information up front, such as the role of the biological parent and what our relationship with them is."

"Tell us how to deal with foster children after they return from visiting a biological parent in prison or a biological parent who is drunk during their home visit."

"Offer classes that are informative about biological parents' rights."

"There needs to be training on how the foster parents deal with biological parents."

Others commented on the value of input from other foster parents.

"It would be nice to have a small group of foster parents in a committee to meet with DSHS staff and tell them what kind of training packages they would like to see."

"Have foster parents with different experiences come talk to us."

"In our training, we had a long time foster mom on the training team – I thought that was good."

"The training that had former foster parents who explained their experiences was very great."

THEME | Other Specific Trainings, *continued*

Foster parents commented on a wide variety of trainings or training types. In some cases, they named a training that they found to be beneficial. In other cases, they specified a training they would like to have available to them. Some of their comments are listed below.

Voices . . . .

Some foster parents named specific trainings they found useful.

"**You Have Your First Placement, Now What** training taught me more about what the social worker should and should not be doing in their role, it was very helpful."

"The **mandated reporting** class was helpful."

"There was a lot of information, i.e. **how to react** to children who are throwing fits-different ways to handle different situations."

"**Right Response** training is useful."

"I took one training about **brain development and attachment** that actually made me feel more hopeful that what I was doing could make a difference."

"The **You Have Your First Placement, Now What** class was most helpful."

"The **Children's Justice** training was great."

"The Children's Administration **forums for support group**s are really good."

"The **allegation** training was very good."

"The training called **Show Me the Negative Side of What Foster Children Have Been Through** was good."

"The **paper trail** class was good."

"The **You Have Your First Placement, Now What** was very helpful."

"I took **Right Response** and it was helpful."

"I took one training about **drug affected infants** which was very good."

"I had to go through a **nurse delegation** class to keep one of my kids past eighteen, and that class was excellent."

Others described trainings they would like to have available or changes they would like to see.

"The class **You Have Your First Placement, Now What** should be required BEFORE the first placement."

"Provide a class on **parental controls**: TV, Nintendo, DS, phone, and internet controls."

"I think there needs to be more **interactive training**, instead of listening for hours and hours – like the support groups – and discuss more options like how to handle different situations, etc."

"The training on **You Have Your First Placement, Now What** should be required before you receive any foster children so that you know how to complete the paperwork and know what is expected of you."

"I think that the **biological children of the foster parent** need training about how to deal with children in their home. I think they don't get considered enough since they are sharing their home, parents, food, toys, everything!"

"**You Have Your First Placement, Now What** class should be offered right away – preferably before the placement. Most have to figure out the information taught in it before the class is available to them."

"Had a 13 year old girl for a weekend who was a **bed wetter**. They could better train you for some of those situations."

"Train the regular foster parents that when their child goes to the **respite** provider, bring everything that is needed."

"Provide training on **eating disorders**."

"**Conflict de-escalation** training would be good."

"They should have outside people coming into training to **meet us and tell us what they do**, who they are, and why they may come to our home."

"I would like to have training on how to prepare for **when a child leaves** us and returns to their biological family."

"The pre-foster parenting **SCOPE** class wasn't as relevant to the real experience as I would have hoped."

"There are still lots of topics out there that haven't been touched such as **mental health** and working with **siblings** who are split up."

Access

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

For foster parents, access to training is often challenging.

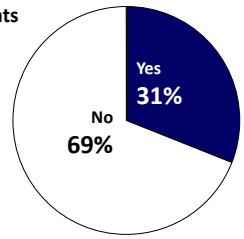
Most foster parents who commented on access to training described problems or suggestions for improvement. In order to access training, many foster parents must lose work time, travel long distances, and make childcare arrangements – all of which require substantial investment of time and financial resources. A small number of foster parents expressed satisfaction with their access to training.

In this section:

- The following page addresses comments about the location of trainings.
- The third page reviews comments about the scheduling of trainings.
- The fourth page looks at comments about childcare during training.
- The fifth page shows other comments about access to training.

Nearly one third of survey respondents (419 out of 1,351, or 31%) made comments about access to training. Of those who commented on this subject:

Made comments about access?



- Very few (5%) made positive comments.

- More than nine out of ten (92%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.

- 3% made mixed or neutral comments.

PHOTO: Digital Vision/Getty Images

Many foster parents want training to be closer to their home, especially in rural areas.

"Make it more easily accessible for people who live in rural areas. For me to go to training, it is generally a two hour drive."

"I just found out that foster parents are required to take a PRIDE Plus class which is 32 hours long and is being held two hours away from where we live. That just isn't realistic!"

"Some training in the winter is across the mountains and I cannot drive in the snow."

"Not necessarily more classes, but classes offered in more cities. We don't want to have to drive a long distance to go to classes."

"I wish they would rent a library room and do satellite training in my specific location!"

"I am in Cowlitz County and most of the trainings are offered in Vancouver. Have more local trainings."

Long travel times can create a financial burden for foster parents.

"Provide training closer to my home. I have to get daycare for my child (which is expensive) and it takes the entire day to go to the training."

"To get the class I wanted and needed, I was forced to drive three hours one-way, pay my own motel bill for two nights, and also buy my own meals. I also had to find my own respite care."

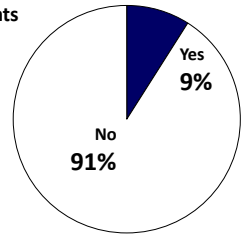
"I had to get childcare and the training was for six or seven nights with an hour commute each way. The foster parent training requirement is a lot, not to mention the childcare costs and gas expense."

"They need to help offset the childcare costs for foster parents so they can afford to attend the offered trainings. We have to pay ten dollars an hour for childcare, and we have to commute an hour each way to training. We end up paying $40 to $50 each time per child, as well as gas expenses."

THEME | Location of Trainings

Comments about the location of foster parent trainings were included in this category. Nine percent of survey respondents commented on location of trainings.

Made comments about location of trainings?



118 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (9%) mentioned location of trainings.

Of the 118 survey respondents who addressed location of trainings, five percent made positive comments. Over nine out of ten (92%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Three percent made mixed or neutral comments.

Foster parents want training to be:

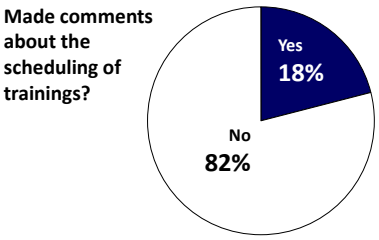
- Close to home.
- Available in multiple locations.

They dislike:

- Traveling a great distance to training.
- Shouldering the personal cost of travel and childcare for trainings that take multiple days and are a long distance from their home.

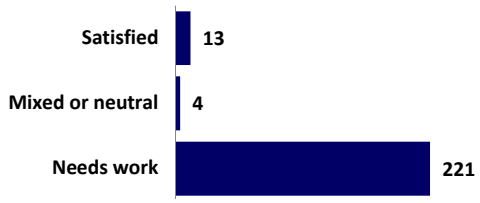
THEME | Scheduling of Trainings

Comments about the scheduling of foster parent trainings were included in this category. Almost two in ten (18%) of those surveyed commented on scheduling of trainings.



238 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (18%) mentioned scheduling of trainings.

Of the 238 survey respondents who addressed scheduling of trainings, very few (6%) made positive comments. Over nine out of ten (93%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Only two percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Foster parents appreciate:

- Evening and weekend trainings.
- Frequently-offered trainings.
- Brief, relevant trainings.

Some foster parents are frustrated by:

- Lack of trainings on evenings or weekends.
- Infrequently-scheduled trainings.
- Long trainings that are not relevant to the foster parent's situation.
- Trainings being cancelled with little or no communication.

PHOTO: Blend Images/Getty Images

Employed foster parents want trainings on evenings or weekends.

"In my region there was no weekend training available that was compatible with my work schedule."

"The training needs to be available on weekends and evenings so that a working person does not have to take time off from work."

"As a single working foster parent, it is challenging to take training and fit it in with work and taking care of the kids."

They want trainings offered more frequently at a variety of times.

"The frequency is inadequate when we have so many foster kids."

"Offer the trainings more often."

"I did a training outside of the department because of the department's training availability for a working parent – or non-availability."

They want required, long trainings to be more relevant.

"After taking PRIDE training, we noticed it was directed at typical children – not special needs children like many foster kids."

"Have sessions where it is just a question and answer session about our own situation."

They want better communication concerning training cancellations.

"E-mail before canceling training instead of posting it on the room door."

"We attended a class for two or three different sessions and then they cancelled the class due to having only two attendees. Why don't they cancel the class before it starts if that is necessary?"

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents made it very clear they need childcare during training.

"We have six kids we care for and need childcare to attend trainings."

"We had an opportunity to take a great class in Colville – yet it was at night and we had no childcare. This keeps foster parents from attending."

"How can I be asked to take five kids and then be told I need to be at a training with no childcare option?"

"Training is very difficult because childcare is rarely offered."

"Childcare, childcare, childcare! It is not fair to have required training for people taking care of foster children having lots of issues and then not provide childcare."

"I have kids at home and can't go to training if no childcare is provided."

"You have to have the on-going training, and I have three kids of my own, and the childcare is the biggest obstacle."

"When I get my own daycare, I do not get reimbursed. Also, it would be great if daycare was provided at the training site by DSHS!"

"There is no daycare offered. We all have children."

"They offer trainings at times that are very difficult to attend, as childcare is very difficult to obtain. Because they don't offer childcare, I am usually unable to attend."

"Offer childcare. I foster little ones and it is very hard to attend a class with an infant."

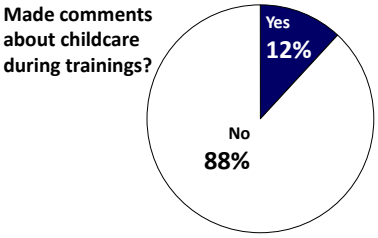
"Offer childcare so I can attend in-class training."

"I have appreciated when there was daycare."

"At least one training per month provides childcare and even a light meal"

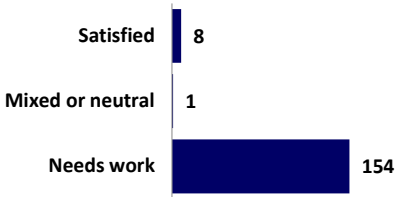
THEME | Childcare During Trainings

Comments about childcare during foster parent trainings were included in this category. 12 percent of survey respondents commented on childcare during trainings.



163 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (12%) mentioned childcare during trainings.

Of the 163 survey respondents who addressed childcare during trainings, nearly all (94%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Five percent made positive comments. One individual made a mixed or neutral comment.

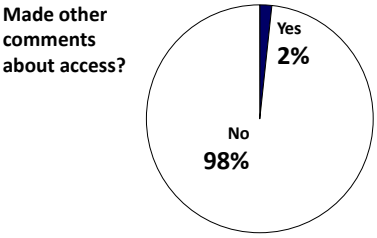


The majority of commenting foster parents reported that they want childcare to be available during trainings. They indicated they would be much more likely to attend a wider range of trainings if such care was available. They suggested they would like:

- Childcare available at training sites.
- Childcare provided in their homes during trainings.
- Childcare for special needs foster children.
- Financial compensation for childcare during mandatory trainings.

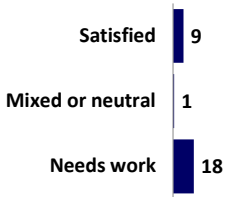
THEME | Other Comments About Access

Other comments about access to foster parent trainings are included in this category. Two percent of survey respondents made other comments about access.



28 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (2%) made other comments about access.

Of the 28 survey respondents who made other comments about access, nearly one third (32%) were positive. More than two thirds (64%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. One respondent (4%) made a mixed or neutral comment.



Foster parents want:

- Accurate information regarding the date and time of trainings.
- Training available when they need it.
- New information during trainings and updates about upcoming trainings.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents want accurate communication about trainings.

"I got a notice stating that I needed to complete the CPR class. I went on-line and tried to register. It would not acknowledge the location of where the training was and so I tried to call. After four phone calls and messages I never received a response."

"The on-line sign up service was missing the dates of trainings and missing contact phone numbers."

"I get good information regarding the classes offered and the fact it is free is good."

Foster parents appreciate new information at trainings.

"I love when Children's Administration does a training night where they have a panel of different departments and they talk about what's new in the law or changes in policies."

"Once you've been a foster parent for three years or so the training becomes redundant."

"Training is very informational and it is continuous –we like that!"

Additional comments:

"In Spanish, please."

"They cancel all the time. I hate to go there and wait. I've taken time off work and then they cancel. I showed up early, waiting for a class, and nobody ever came to help me or talk with me. I wasted three hours that day."

"Allow for more outside education options. I have taken many trainings and learned a lot, but I couldn't use them because they were not credited by the state."

"We have a 36 hour requirement and we have a hard time attending, as we both work and have our kids, and it would be nice if we could share in the requirement and not just one of us."

"The foster parent training requirement is a lot, a huge chunk of time taken away from the child, the child was waking up screaming."

Alternative Training Formats

PHOTO: Design Pics/Getty Images

Foster parents like having alternative training formats available to them.

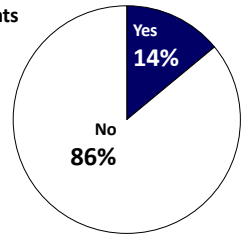
The majority of foster parents who commented on alternative training formats described shortcomings, such as outdated materials, or suggestions for improvement – mostly in the form of requests for more on-line training. Some made positive comments, most notably about the convenience of on-line training and the value of support groups.

In this section:

- The following page addresses comments about on-line training.
- The third page deals with comments about resource libraries.
- The fourth page looks at comments about training in foster parent support groups.
- The fifth page reviews other comments about alternative training formats.

About one out of seven survey respondents (187 out of 1,351, or 14%) made comments about alternative training formats. Of those who commented on this subject:

Made comments about alternative training formats?



- Almost one third (32%) made positive comments.
- 57% made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.
- 11% made mixed or neutral comments.

2.6 Alternative Training Formats

PHOTO: Wavebreak Media/Getty Images

Foster parents appreciate on-line training – and want more of it.

"I would like to see more training on-line. I really like those courses! It is difficult to get an approved babysitter so it helps to have on-line opportunities."

"I have used on-line training as seminars are out of the area…I found the on-line training very convenient."

"Specific trainings not always available when we need them. Offer more on-line and video trainings."

"If training was more accessible or on-line I could possibly recruit more foster parents."

"More on-line training. There are very few alternatives to meeting the training requirements available."

"I like the on-line training as I don't have to get babysitters."

Some want on-line resources updated.

"Update your on-line offering...I've taken everything that is in there within the last three years."

"Update the on-line training. The information is really old! I prefer doing my training on-line, but it needs to be current."

"More updated computer training. They were good, but very dated."

"Getting more videos with even broader topics online for training would be helpful."

Many foster parents see on-line training as a solution to many of the problems on-site training presents.

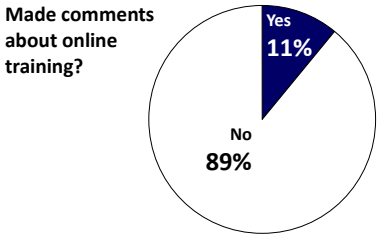
"I like the idea of having classes on-line or videos. The classes that are actually held are totally inconvenient."

"The timing of the training is hard on my family's work schedules. More materials on-line would be helpful."

"I like the on-line training. When you have kids, it's difficult to go to classes."

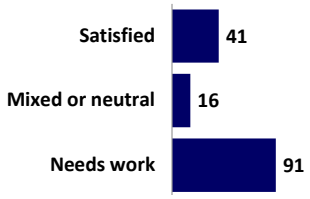
THEME | On-line Training

Comments about on-line training were included in this category. 11 percent of survey respondents commented about on-line training.



148 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (11%) mentioned on-line training.

Over one in four (28%) made positive comments. 62 percent made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement. 11 percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Most commenting foster parents want on-line training that is:

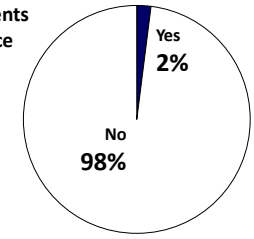
- Comprehensive.
- Up to date.
- Easy to access.

Foster parents that support on-line training value its convenience and reduced cost relative to in-person training.

Requests for more on-line training were coded as suggestions for improvement (i.e. as negative comments). Support for on-line training is likely higher than the percentage of negative comments might suggest.

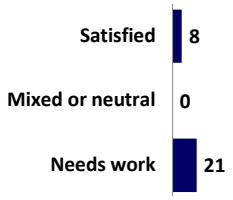
THEME | Resource Libraries

Made comments about resource libraries?



29 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (2%) mentioned resource libraries.

Of the 29 survey respondents who addressed resource libraries, over one in four (28%) made positive comments. Nearly three out of four (72%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Most of these were requests for more resources.



Foster parents would like resource libraries that:

- Are available on-line.
- Have quality training materials to lend.
- Have information about both the needs of foster children.
- Make it easy and convenient to borrow materials.
- Contain material that will count towards their required training.

They would like to see libraries, the resources they hold, and the services they provide to foster parents, expand in the future.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Most foster parents had positive things to say about resource libraries and want them made more available.

"There used to be a lending library for foster parents with materials (i.e. books, CDs) available through the mail. This program was eliminated and we would really like it back."

"They cut out a lot of the lending library, and it had a huge catalog of issues we could take advantage of."

"I liked using the library and using distant education as I do not want to leave the child. Tapes, books, DVDs were all available."

"The library on-line has been taken away. I found this extremely helpful to order materials, have it sent to me and study on my own time. Now I have to go to private sources and pay for the right to use their program."

Some foster parents have complaints or concerns about library materials.

"Some of it is very dated, like the videos. It would be nice if it were more current."

"They have old DVDs. They need to be updated on the different new information on drug related issues, and neglect issues, etc."

"There should be more updated videos. They are a great resource on-line but the topics seem to be outdated."

Many value video trainings, especially when they can be done on their own time.

"The training on video was very helpful."

"Parenting Plus – it seemed ridiculous to be sitting in a classroom watching a TV. It should be offered via DVD or on-line."

"It would be nice to be able to get the training on the CD through Netflix instead of having to be a member in order to get them on the CD."

PHOTO: Hemera/Getty Images

Foster parents praised the training provided in support groups.

"We get training in support groups and they are very inspiring and encourage us. These meetings give us actual methods and it really helps us."

"The support groups are the best for training, as they are people who are doing the same thing as you."

"We attended classes at a visitation facility but they were discontinued. We do not know why. It was a Hispanic support group which was very helpful."

"The interaction between foster parents is wonderful."

"The best trainings have been through Fostering Together, a foster parent support group. People from the department meet and answer questions, and the foster parent support is always helpful."

"We get training through our Fostering Together support group. It is great."

"Our training takes place with other foster parents. It is helpful to have relationships with other foster parents and get advice from them."

"I go to support group meetings where there are quality speakers and resources shared."

"The training when people from the department come out and speak at the support groups has been the most helpful."

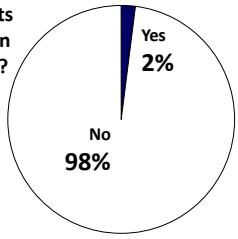
"I go every month to the foster care network — first Tuesday of the month — and they have teachers that come in to provide training. Everything has been pretty good."

"My independent reading and my foster support group training has been more beneficial to me than state-offered training."

"Very helpful to have occasional meetings on special topics. Foster parents support one another."

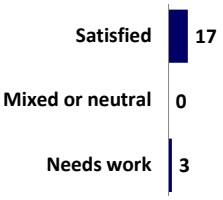
THEME | Support Groups

Made comments about training in support groups?



20 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (2%) mentioned training in support groups.

Of the 20 survey respondents who addressed training in support groups, more than four out of five (85%) made positive comments. The remaining three respondents made negative comments or suggestions for improvement.

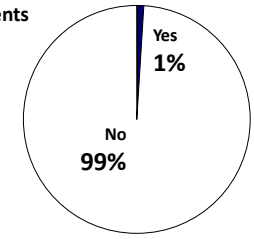


Foster parents commenting about support groups are grateful for:

- The positive environment support groups promote.
- The ability to talk with other foster parents and learn from experts who speak.
- The quality of the support group training.

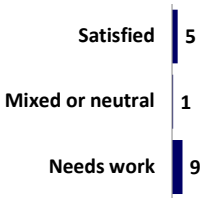
THEME | Other Alternative Training Formats

Made comments about other alternative training formats?



15 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (1%) mentioned other alternative training formats.

Of the 15 survey respondents who addressed other alternative training formats, five (33%) made positive comments. Nine (60%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. One respondent (7%) made a mixed or neutral comment.



These foster parents like:

- Books and other printed training materials.
- Training that can be completed at home, at their own pace.
- Access to an experienced foster parent mentor for guidance and advice.
- Training in languages other than English.
- Individual consultations.

PHOTO: Photodisc/Getty Images

Most comments concerned training that foster parents would like to see implemented.

"The training needs to be in Spanish. That would help us to understand more of it."

"More individual trainings – smaller trainings and specific to the types of children in your home."

"Several years ago I was given a book to read and then it had sections for me to complete. I really liked learning that way."

"Offering more training at home would be a great help to foster parents. DSHS should be more flexible in allowing other training such as reading an approved book or participating in a support group."

"Share new foster parents with mentor foster parents."

"I have done self-training or on-line over the past three years. It is good to have the option to take training independently because of unavailability of childcare."

"Maybe offering other resources outside of the department. Possibly DSHS could buy training from outside agencies, professionals, etc."

"Foster parents with all the different cases get a lot of training how to deal with probation officers, etc. We don't get credit for all of this additional training. A lot of the training is on-the-job but we don't credit since there is not way to quantify it."

Voice and Choice

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents want a foster parent voice in their training – and they want choices.

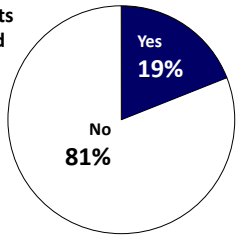
Many respondents value the participation of experienced foster parents during training, as well as the opportunity to interact with other foster parents. Some reported that they appreciate the choices they have in their training options, or a desire for more choices.

In this section:

- The first page addresses foster parents' comments about having a foster parent voice, and a sense of community, while participating in trainings.
- The second page is an overview of foster parents' comments about choosing trainings to attend, or to complete at home.

Less than two out of ten survey respondents (251 out of 1,351, or 19%) made comments about voice and choice in training. Of those who commented on this subject:

Made comments about voice and choice in training?



- Nearly three out of four (73%) made positive comments.
- Less than one in five (18%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.
- 9% made mixed or neutral comments.

PHOTO: Purestock/Getty Images

Foster parents value:

Hearing other foster parent voices as part of their training.

"Getting to hear real stories from experienced foster parents was greatly appreciated rather than just reading about situations in books."

"The training that included other foster parents and their experiences was the most helpful."

"I think the class atmosphere with other foster parents in attendance and the training by folks who used to be foster parents is really helpful. They give us a sense of community and what to expect."

"The best part is when a foster parent discusses something I may be going through and they relate their experience to a similar situation."

Formal and informal networking with other foster parents.

"The part that helped the most was meeting the other foster parents taking the training with me."

"The training that let us connect with other foster parents was great."

"Some of the stories are a bit overwhelming and without the support of other foster parents I would have been scared. "

The ability to receive direct, honest perspectives on foster parenting.

"Have real foster parents come in and talk. Make it more real."

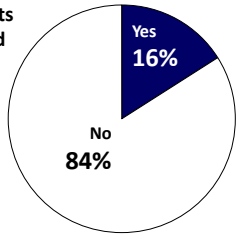
"More foster parents with experience and more realistic input from them would be helpful during the trainings."

"Learning about the different challenges. Listening to some of the stories that were shared. Learning what to expect. Learning about the emotions foster parents will experience."

THEME | Voice—and Community—in Training

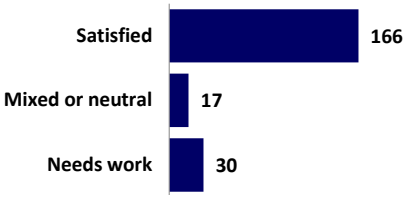
Comments about foster parents participating in training and their sense of community were included in this category. 16 percent of survey respondents commented on voice and community in training.

Made comments about voice and community in training?



213 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (16%) mentioned voice and community in training.

Of the 213 survey respondents who addressed voice and community in training, more than three in four (78%) made positive comments. Fewer than two in ten (14%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Eight percent made mixed or neutral comments.



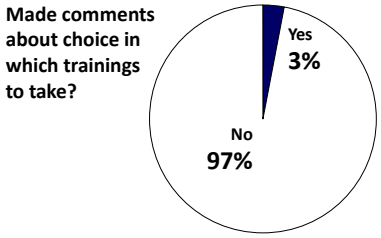
Foster parents appreciate being able to:

- Learn from experienced foster parents in their trainings.
- Develop networking connections with other foster parents they meet in training.
- Share their experiences, and reflect upon the experiences of others.

Nearly all comments related to voice and sense of community consisted of statements of appreciation for the participation of experienced foster parents in training, and opportunities to connect with other foster parents in and out of training. Most negative comments were statements of concern that opportunities for interaction were lacking.

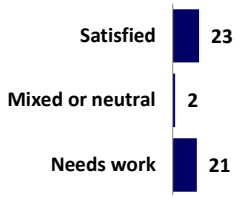
THEME | Choice in Trainings

Comments about foster parents having a choice in which trainings to attend, or complete at home, were included in this category. Three percent of survey respondents commented on choice in trainings.



46 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (3%) mentioned choice in trainings.

Of the 46 survey respondents who addressed choice in trainings, half (50%) made positive comments. Just under half (46%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Two individuals (4%) made mixed or neutral comments.



These foster parents appreciate:

- Having many different trainings, and types of training, to choose from.
- The freedom to select which trainings they want to take based on the needs of the children they are caring for in their home.

Some described potentially valuable training opportunities that may not be credited towards training requirements.

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Foster parents like being able to choose their training topics.

"I pick and choose my own training and it helps me immensely."

"Targeted classes are very helpful. I was able to take classes that were targeted to the needs of the children placed in my home."

"The training needs to be more directed at the children placed in the foster parent's home and the foster parents needs to be able to pick what training they need."

"I think they need to listen to the foster parents more – they know what's going on in their home and what kind of foster children they are dealing with."

"The training DSHS picks for me doesn't address where I want to go and what I want to learn."

Foster parents want more official recognition of training from alternative sources.

"I am a teacher and I attended a 'sexually aggressive' training that was lead by the same trainer that puts on training for Children's Administration, but they would not give me credit for it. I was there all day, not just the two or three hour session. Maybe give credit where it is reasonable."

"Sometimes people learn better from the people doing the job alongside them instead of from formal training sessions by state staff."

"Training was offered at the tribal staffing level and I think it should be offered to the general community. If they could help with current foster parent and biological parent communication my situation would be much better."

"They have allowed my nurse training to be counted as foster parent training – that has been very helpful."

"There needs to be a way that other training can cross over and be counted."

Training Information

PHOTO: Photodisc/Getty Images

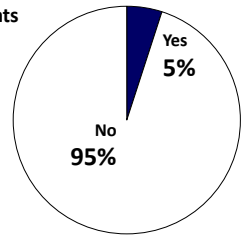
Foster parents want accurate and timely information about upcoming trainings.

Some foster parents made positive comments about the training information they receive. However, the majority of comments indicated improvements could be made in this area.

In this section: the following page addresses foster parents' comments about training information.

One out of twenty survey respondents (73 out of 1,351, or 5%) made comments about training information. Of those who commented on this subject:

Made comments about training information?



- Nearly one quarter (23%) made positive comments.

- Nearly three quarters (73%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.

- 4% made mixed or neutral comments.

2.8 Training Information

PHOTO: iStock/Getty Images

Most foster parents were unsatisfied with the information they received about training.

"We do not get adequate notice of available training and sometimes no notice at all. I don't know where to go to get access to that information. I always have to ask for it and it's not volunteered to us."

"I haven't had or been invited to any training since I got my license and I'm worried about that."

"Be clearer with information about training. We don't know what kind of training we need to relicense and this could be a problem."

"It would be helpful if there was a regular resource e-mail that went out to foster parents announcing training opportunities. Maybe there is such a list but I am not on it."

"Sometimes I can't find all of the training sessions offered. I hear of them from third parties or through the grapevine."

"Sometimes it is hard to find what and where trainings will be held. The website is not user-friendly."

"What are the requirements? How many hours do I need per year? I have received no information about the on-going education requirements. I receive information about offerings, but I am not sure what is required."

A few reported more positive experiences.

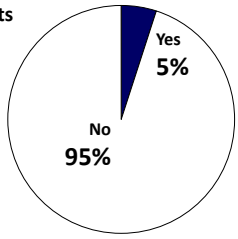
"Keeping everybody updated with e-mails about upcoming training has been helpful."

"We have received packets with information about upcoming trainings for several months. This helps me plan my days and months regarding training."

"The networking e-mails that are sent out with web links full of information and web seminars that are countable hours for training are very helpful for working parents like us."

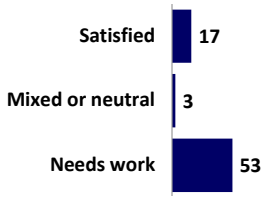
THEME | Information About Trainings

Made comments about information related to trainings?



73 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (5%) mentioned information about trainings.

Of the 73 survey respondents who addressed information about trainings, nearly one quarter (23%) made positive comments. Nearly three quarters (73%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Four percent made mixed or neutral comments.



Most comments indicated a lack of adequate information.

- Sometimes foster parents are not informed of upcoming trainings in a timely manner – or at all.
- Sometimes they are not aware of what trainings they are required to take, or when they must be completed.

Some foster parents made positive remarks about:

- Timely notification of trainings.
- Training information received by mail.
- Training information received by e-mail or Internet.

Support Beyond Training

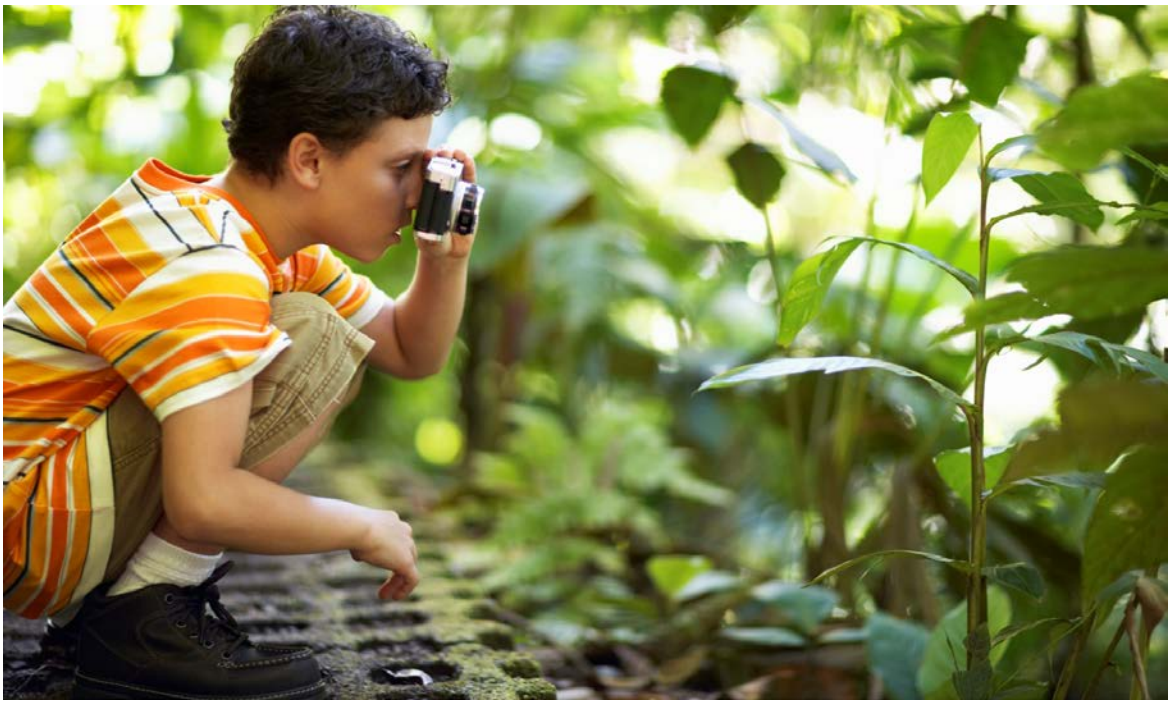


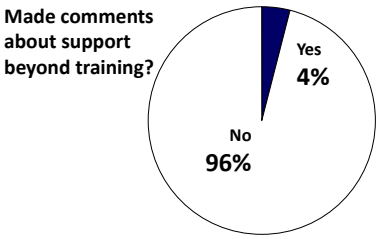
PHOTO: Fuse/Getty Images

Foster parents described other kinds of support that help them give foster children the best possible care.

When asked about training, a number of foster parents made positive comments about existing support that is important to them. Some made suggestions about types of support that would be helpful to them, and to others responsible for the care of foster children – such as foster parent support groups, mentoring, and special needs discussion groups.

In this section: the following page addresses foster parents' comments about support beyond foster care training.

One out of twenty survey respondents (58 out of 1,351, or 4%) made comments about support beyond training. Of those who commented on this subject:



- Half (50%) made positive comments.
- Another four out of ten (40%) made negative comments, or suggestions for improvement.
- 10% made mixed or neutral comments.

2.9 Support Beyond Training

PHOTO: Digital Vision/Getty Images

Foster parents appreciated:

Regular support groups.

"In the last three years, I have gone to a monthly support group. It really helps to get together with other foster parents and network."

"Support groups give foster parents a head start, and plus you don't feel alone."

"I think they could do a better job of pointing people towards groups like the support group I am in. It really helps to network."

"I think they should have a support group for kids, too."

Formal mentoring programs.

"I think they should match foster parents up with a mentor foster parent. Veteran foster parents are good mentors and give us good advice."

"More workshops, with experienced foster parents giving the workshops."

Access to information on demand

"I wish I had someone to call, like a 'hotline,' to get advice or support. There is so much support for the kids, but there is not a lot of support for you and your family."

"Networking with other foster parents and the liaison people works very well. Often, when I had social worker problems, I would speak with the liaison and get assistance there."

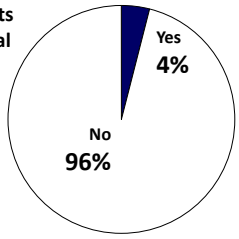
"Webinars should be available for foster parents already trained in the basics."

"Offer a blog where foster parents can discuss things."

"The foster parent liaison has been very available and helpful. Having a Facebook connection with other foster parents is very helpful, too. The training regarding dealing with allegations was good."

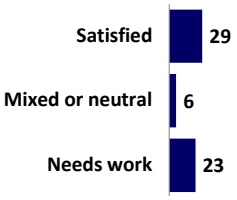
THEME | Additional Support for Foster Parents

Made comments about additional support for foster parents?



58 of the 1,351 foster parents surveyed (4%) mentioned additional support.

Of the 58 survey respondents addressing additional support for foster parents, half (50%) made positive comments. Four out of ten (40%) made negative comments or suggestions for improvement. Ten percent made mixed or neutral comments.



These foster parents value:

- Moderated support groups with other foster parents.
- Formalized peer-to-peer mentoring.
- Access to immediately needed information.

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2014 Appendix

Response Glossaries, Supporting Tables and Survey Questions

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Foster Parent Support (2014) – Response Glossary

Question 1: What do Children's Administration and your social workers do well to support you?
Question 2: What could Children's Administration and your social workers do better to support you?

Response Category	Description
QUALITY/ HELPFULNESS	
QS – Overall Support	CA has supported/not supported me and my family; good/bad service overall; grateful for help, appreciative (or not); like/don't like CA/everything. They help/don't help. They do/don't provide good services.
QP – Specific Agency/Area/Office Support	Named specific CA program/location/office that was supportive/not supportive; mentioned support/non-support of "private agency" (named or not).
QN – Nothing	"Nothing," "Can't think of anything," etc. (Negative, if about what has been supportive; Positive, if about what needs to be done better.)
SOCIAL WORKERS	
SS – Social Worker Support	Social workers have supported/not supported me and my family; good/bad service overall; grateful for their help, appreciative (or not); like/don't like social workers and the work they do. Social workers help/don't help. Social workers do/don't provide good services.
SC – Social Worker Courtesy/Respect	Compliments/complaints regarding social worker courtesy, respect, helpful attitude (*tries* to help), sensitivity, kindness, friendliness, niceness, caring (about both foster children and parents), compassion.
SL – Social Workers Listen/Understand	Social worker does/doesn't listen; is – or isn't – attentive; does/doesn't understand what foster parents say, and what they (and the children) need.
SI – Social Workers Inclusiveness	Social worker gets input from foster parents; lets them help make decisions and plans; collaborates with them; keeps them "in the loop"; invites them to participate in meetings (or fails to do these things).
SO – Other Social Worker Comments	Like/don't like social workers' follow-through; commitment; professionalism; responsiveness; customer service; timeliness; showing up for scheduled appointments; fairness; flexibility; problem-solving; looking for resources. Specific supportive or non-supportive actions not covered in other codes. Social workers are/are not knowledgeable, honest, well-trained; good at communicating (if they don't specify IN or SL).
SF – Foster Care Licensor Support	Compliments/complaints about foster parents' experience with foster care licensors. (Comments specific to the licensing *process* are coded PS.)
SW – Specific Social Worker	Named specific social worker.
SN – Need More Social Workers	More social workers are needed to serve foster parents; workload too heavy; social workers too busy; caseloads too high/need smaller caseloads; turnover a problem.
ACCESS	
AP – Phone/Staff Access	Able/unable to reach social workers by phone/voicemail/e-mail/website. Social workers do/don't return calls and messages; social workers are available/unavailable; it's easy/hard to reach social workers
AR – Consistency of Contact	Social workers are/aren't in regular contact via home visits, phone calls, etc.
PROCESSES	
PR – General Processes	Compliments or complaints about the system – efficiency, bureaucracy, continuity, consistency, errors, rules, time it takes to get services (overall). System should care more about children and less about biological parent

	rights.
PS – Specific Processes	Likes or dislikes/wants a specific process/way of doing things, time it takes to get specific services. Includes the time it takes to terminate rights and adopt.
PP – Paperwork Processes	Likes or dislikes/wants paperwork processes (general or specific). Paperwork lost.
COORDINATION	
CO – Coordination	Coordination of services for foster parents, inside or outside of Children's Administration (includes coordination between foster parents and biological families); communication to accomplish effective coordination. Includes social workers should communicate better with each other and other agencies. "One hand doesn't know what the other is doing." Inconsistencies between social workers or offices.
INFORMATION	
IN – Information from Social Workers	Get/don't get useful information from social workers about foster child; foster system; available resources; meeting times/court dates; trainings. Social workers do/don't answer questions; give clear explanations; give consistent responses, provide feedback/advice; provide referrals. Get/don't get useful information online (IO). Likes or dislikes/wants access to interpreters, bilingual staff, native English speakers on staff (IL).
RESOURCES	
RR – Respite	Likes or dislikes/wants respite services. Doesn't get paid for respite.
RF – Financial Matters	Likes or dislikes/wants financial payments (ongoing, or one time) to foster parents.
RM – Medical, Dental, Mental Health	Likes or dislikes/wants medical/dental/mental health services (includes speech and occupational therapy), medical supplies.
RT – Transportation	Likes or dislikes/wants transportation services (includes mileage reimbursement). Difficulty getting payment for transportation.
RC – Childcare	Likes or dislikes/wants childcare services.
RO – Other Resources	Likes or dislikes/wants other resources (or just says "resources," not specified).
OTHER	
OS – Other Sources of Foster Parent Support	Comments about support for foster parents from sources other than social workers inside CA (foster care liaisons, foster care recruiters, support staff) and outside CA (CASA/GAL, extended family, support groups, other community groups). Include events to say "thank you."
O – *Not* about Support	Other miscellaneous comments that don't fit elsewhere. Comments about good/bad support that occurred in the past; comments about future support.
DK – Don't Know	Don't know. Have no answer. Unsure. Too new to foster parenting to answer. No contact with CA/DSHS; no need for support.

NOTES:

- "No comment," "No response," "Don't want to answer," and N/A are not coded.
- The majority of codes in the glossary above can be coded in three different ways: positive (P), negative (N), or neutral (E). For example, comments that fall under SC – Social Worker Courtesy – can be coded SC-P (positive comments about social worker courtesy), SC-N (negative comments about social worker courtesy) or SC-E (neutral comments about social worker courtesy, like Social workers are friendly sometimes or Some social workers are respectful to foster parents, and some aren't).
- A few codes – QN (Nothing), SW (Specific Social Worker), SN (Need Social Workers) and DK (Don't Know) – can only be coded in one way. For example, comments that fall under DK can only be coded DK; this code is not further divided into DK-P, DK-N and DK-E.

Foster Parent Training (2014) – Response Glossary

Question 1: What about foster parent training has been helpful?
Question 2: How could foster parent training be improved?

Response Category	Description
QUALITY/HELPFULNESS	
TH – Overall Training	Training is helpful/not helpful; training was good (great)/not good (great); did/didn't like training (without further clarification).
TP – Specific Agency/Program Training	Named specific program/location/office that provides training; names private agency; mentions "private agency" training (no name given); mentions continuing education, college classes, or classes in the community.
TN – Nothing	"Nothing," "Can't think of anything," "No suggestions" etc. (Negative, if about what has been helpful; Positive, if about what needs improving.)
TRAINERS	
TR – Trainers	Trainers are good/bad; specific trainer qualities; want more/less of specific categories of trainers (male trainers, experienced foster parents, etc.); includes comments about guest speakers/presenters at trainings.
TT – Specific Trainer	Named specific trainer.
GENERAL TRAINING	**Comments on aspects of training foster parents like/want or don't like/don't want**
TG-C – Caring for Foster Children	Dealing with/caring for foster children. Includes communicating with children; knowing/meeting their needs; making them part of foster family; understanding situations in foster children's bio-homes; what to expect from foster children in foster homes.
TG-A – Approaches to Training	Approaches used in trainings. Includes small groups; roundtable discussions; brainstorming; using case scenarios, real life examples.
TG-R – Resources	Information about resources (what they are, where they are); contact information.
TG-M – Training Materials	Quality/usefulness of materials used in trainings – written materials, videos, etc., specific topics to add/delete.
TG-O – Other Training Comments	Other comments about trainings. Includes more/less training; variety in trainings; repetitious training; updated training; training pace too fast/too slow; tell it like it is; limit socializing during trainings; general parenting information; information for FP who haven't parented; refresher courses for long-term FP. Complaints about training requirements.
SPECIFIC TRAININGS	**Comments on specific trainings/training types foster parents like/want or don't like/don't want**
TS-D – Disorders/Issues	Training focused on particular disorders/disabilities/issues. Includes training on trauma (grief and loss); abuse/neglect; attachment disorder; anorexia, bulimia, hoarding; anger issues; ADD/ADHD; autism; special needs; medications for disorders/issues. Includes behavior problems outside normal developmental issues.
TS-S – Substance Abuse	Training focused on substance-related issues. Includes fetal alcohol syndrome; effects of bio-parents' drug use on children.
TS-Y – Sexually Inappropriate Behavior	Training focused on youthful sex offenders, sexually aggressive behavior.

TS-B – Child Behavior	Training focused on child behavior/child development; age-specific populations and issues (toddlers, school-age, teens); includes behavior management except that which falls in TS-D.
TS-I – Infants and Toddlers	Training focused on infants and toddlers. Includes infant care, medically fragile baby care.
TS-F – Navigating the Foster Care System	Training focused on how to navigate the foster care system. Includes how to interact with social workers; paperwork issues; rules and regulations; court procedures; other processes and procedures; what to expect from the system.
TS- P – PRIDE	Like/don't like PRIDE training.
TS-A – Parenting Plus	Like/don't like Parenting Plus training.
TS- L – Love and Logic	Like/don't like Love and Logic training.
TS-H – Health and Safety	Training focused on health and safety. Includes protecting children from abuse; first aid/CPR; immunizations; car seat training.
TS-C –Cultural Awareness and Language Issues	Training focused on cultures and cultural issues. (Includes Native American culture and issues; how tribes interact with DSHS; tribal courts.) Cultural sensitivity of trainings.
TS-O – Other Specific Trainings	Other trainings. Includes dealing with bio-parents; advocating for youth; children's rights; grief/loss/stress experienced by foster care *providers*; other specific trainings liked or disliked/wanted. Mentions taking specific classes/trainings/workshops, without identifying them. Mentions "first placement training" or "initial training."
ACCESS	**Comments about what made it easier/harder for foster parents to attend trainings**
TA-L – Location	Location of trainings. Includes having training in more places; having training closer to foster parents' homes; making it easier to get to trainings.
TA-S – Scheduling	Scheduling of trainings. Includes scheduling more training sessions; having training on more – or different – days; training in the evenings, on weekends; duration of training; ongoing training.
TA-C – Childcare	Childcare available during trainings.
TA-O – Other Access Comments	Other likes/dislikes, or wants/don't wants, regarding access to trainings. Includes comments about transportation to trainings.
ALTERNATIVE TRAINING FORMATS	**Comments about training formats (other than standard classroom training)**
TF-N – Online Training	Like/dislike online training, including online videos.
TF-L – Resource Libraries	Like/don't like library for foster parents (sometimes called "resource library" or "lending library"); like/don't like training DVDs or other materials from library.
TF-S – Support Groups	Like/dislike training offered during support groups.
TF-O – Other Alternative Training Formats	Like/dislike other alternative training formats (newsletters, individual training (TFI), etc.); like/want wider variety of formats.
VOICE AND CHOICE	**Comments that indicate foster parents felt/didn't feel included, involved, empowered by trainings**
TV – Voice – and Community – in Training	Foster parent involvement in training (including foster parents as trainers); interactions between foster parents and trainers, or among foster parents during trainings; interactions between new and experienced foster parents; sense of community/support in trainings; networking.

TC – Choice in Trainings	Foster parents do/don't choose which trainings to attend, what is addressed in trainings.
TRAINING INFORMATION	
TI – Information about Trainings	Like/want information about upcoming trainings; mailings; training calendars. Don't like/don't want such information in the form it is currently provided. Comments about training certificates.
OTHER	
TOS –Support Beyond Training	Includes support groups for foster parents/mothers; family preservation services; early childhood education support groups; ongoing advocates or mentors for foster parents/families; crisis intervention when trauma occurs (in bio-families or foster families); general comments about training in the community.
TO – Response *not* about Training	Other miscellaneous comments that don't fit elsewhere. "*Experience as a foster parent is the best teacher."*
TDK – Don't Know	Don't know, not sure, can't answer, haven't attended trainings.

NOTES:

- "No comment," "Don't want to answer," and N/A are not coded.
- The majority of codes in the glossary above can be coded in three different ways: positive (P), negative (N), or neutral (E). For example, comments that fall under TI – Information about Trainings – can be coded TI-P (positive comments about training information), TI-N (negative comments about training information) or SC-E (neutral comments about training information, like The online information about training is great, but the mailings are really hit and miss, and not all foster parents have computer access.
- A few codes – TN (Nothing) TT (Specific Trainer) and TDK (Don't Know) – can only be coded in one way. For example, comments that fall under TDK can only be coded TDK; this code is not further divided into TDK-P, TDK-N and TDK-E.

Foster Parent Support (2014) – Narrative Comments Report

1,351 Respondents (1,337 made comments)

MAJOR THEMES AND SUBTHEMES[1]		Total		Satisfied		Needs Work		Mixed or Neutral	
		#[2]	% of All[3]	#[2]	%[4]	#[2]	%[4]	#[2]	%[4]
Quality/Support		347	25.7%	213	61.4%	91	26.2%	43	12.4%
CA Support	QS	107	7.9%	69	64.5%	27	25.2%	11	10.3%
Specific Program or Agency Support	QP	146	10.8%	86	58.9%	31	21.2%	29	19.9%
Nothing[5]	QN	151	11.2%	102	67.5%	49	32.5%	0	0.0%
Social Workers		1,099	81.3%	334	30.4%	333	30.3%	431	39.2%
Social Worker Support	SS	411	30.4%	228	55.5%	104	25.3%	79	19.2%
Social Worker Courtesy	SC	136	10.1%	82	60.3%	47	34.6%	7	5.1%
Social Workers Listen/Understand	SL	228	16.9%	148	64.9%	71	31.1%	9	3.9%
Social Workers are Inclusive	SI	190	14.1%	73	38.4%	104	54.7%	13	6.8%
Other Social Worker Comments	SO	792	58.6%	258	32.6%	359	45.3%	175	22.1%
Foster Care Licensor Support	SF	29	2.1%	7	24.1%	21	72.4%	1	3.4%
Specific Social Worker	SW	19	1.4%						
Need Social Worker	SN	142	10.5%			142	100.0%		
Access		643	47.6%	364	56.6%	185	28.8%	94	14.6%
Phone/Staff Access	AP	522	38.6%	290	55.6%	180	34.5%	52	10.0%
Consistent Contact	AR	207	15.3%	129	62.3%	57	27.5%	21	10.1%
Process		220	16.3%	3	1.4%	206	93.6%	11	5.0%
Process, General	PR	71	5.3%	0	0.0%	68	95.8%	3	4.2%
Process, Specific	PS	131	9.7%	1	0.8%	125	95.4%	5	3.8%
Paperwork	PP	23	1.7%	3	13.0%	18	78.3%	2	8.7%
Coordination		58	4.3%	11	19.0%	45	77.6%	2	3.4%
Coordination	CO	58	4.3%	11	19.0%	45	77.6%	2	3.4%
Information		690	51.1%	227	32.9%	323	46.8%	140	20.3%
Information from Social Workers	IN	690	51.1%	227	32.9%	323	46.8%	140	20.3%
Resources		340	25.2%	119	35.0%	176	51.8%	45	13.2%
Transportation	RT	51	3.8%	20	39.2%	29	56.9%	2	3.9%
Medical, Dental, Mental Health	RM	84	6.2%	25	29.8%	51	60.7%	8	9.5%
Childcare	RC	37	2.7%	13	35.1%	22	59.5%	2	5.4%
Respite	RR	61	4.5%	15	24.6%	41	67.2%	5	8.2%
Financial	RF	57	4.2%	11	19.3%	41	71.9%	5	8.8%
Other Resources (includes training)	RO	146	10.8%	78	53.4%	59	40.4%	9	6.2%
Other		181	13.4%	44	24.3%	62	34.3%	75	41.4%
Other Support	OS	56	4.1%	33	58.9%	17	30.4%	6	10.7%
Not about support	O	86	6.4%	18	20.9%	50	58.1%	18	20.9%
Don't know	DK	48	3.6%					48	100.0%

[1] Major themes (in blue rows) are rollups of the subthemes listed below. They are unduplicated - not the total of the numbers below; i.e., a person who made "Satisfied" comments in both "Childcare" and "Respite" is counted only once in the "Resources" row. A person who has a "Satisfied" comment in the "Childcare" row and "Needs Work" in the "Respite" row would be counted as a "Mixed" comment in the "Resources" row.

[2] All # columns show how many persons made any mention of this theme. Multiple comments on the same theme by a single person are only counted once in that theme row. A person with both "Satisfied" and "Needs Work" comments on the same theme is counted in the "Mixed" column.

[3] Respondents who commented on this theme as a percentage of the total number of respondents.

[4] Percentage of comments in this theme that were "Satisfied," "Needs Work," or "Mixed or Neutral," respectively.

[5] In the report, "Nothing" responses are combined with positive or negative comments according to question context (p. 13).

Foster Parent Training (2014) – Narrative Comments Report

1,351 Respondents (1,330 made comments)

MAJOR THEMES AND SUBTHEMES[1]		Total		Satisfied		Needs Work		Mixed or Neutral	
		#[2]	% of All[3]	#[2]	%[4]	#[2]	%[4]	#[2]	%[4]
Quality/Help		393	29.1%	325	82.7%	33	8.4%	35	8.9%
Helpfulness of Training	TH	260	19.2%	220	84.6%	15	5.8%	25	9.6%
Specific Program or Agency	TP	46	3.4%	39	84.8%	1	2.2%	6	13.0%
Nothing[5]	TN	144	10.7%	121	84.0%	21	14.6%	2	1.4%
Trainers		113	8.4%	78	69.0%	23	20.4%	12	10.6%
Trainers	TR	113	8.4%	78	69.0%	23	20.4%	12	10.6%
Specific Trainer	TT	12	0.9%						
General Training		676	50.0%	311	46.0%	208	30.8%	157	23.2%
Caring for foster children	TG-C	201	14.9%	171	85.1%	25	12.4%	5	2.5%
Approaches to Training	TG-A	96	7.1%	42	43.8%	50	52.1%	4	4.2%
Resources	TG-R	106	7.8%	55	51.9%	46	43.4%	5	4.7%
Training Materials	TG-M	25	1.9%	7	28.0%	15	60.0%	3	12.0%
Other Training Comments	TG-O	394	29.2%	142	36.0%	173	43.9%	79	20.1%
Specific Trainings		812	60.1%	434	53.4%	164	20.2%	214	26.4%
Substance Abuse	TS-S	35	2.6%	24	68.6%	11	31.4%	0	0.0%
Sexually Inappropriate Behavior	TS-Y	5	0.4%	1	20.0%	3	60.0%	1	20.0%
Infants and Toddlers	TS-I	16	1.2%	3	18.8%	12	75.0%	1	6.3%
Child Behavior	TS-B	155	11.5%	86	55.5%	59	38.1%	10	6.5%
Health and Safety	TS-H	67	5.0%	56	83.6%	7	10.4%	4	6.0%
Disorders/Issues	TS-D	130	9.6%	63	48.5%	57	43.8%	10	7.7%
Navigating Foster Care System	TS-F	195	14.4%	102	52.3%	78	40.0%	15	7.7%
Cultures/Cultural Issues	TS-C	22	1.6%	10	45.5%	12	54.5%	0	0.0%
Love and Logic	TS-L	15	1.1%	14	93.3%	1	6.7%	0	0.0%
PRIDE	TS-P	219	16.2%	170	77.6%	24	11.0%	25	11.4%
Parenting Plus	TS-A	30	2.2%	14	46.7%	9	30.0%	7	23.3%
Other Trainings	TS-O	264	19.5%	134	50.8%	110	41.7%	20	7.6%
Access		419	31.0%	22	5.3%	384	91.6%	13	3.1%
Location	TA-L	118	8.7%	6	5.1%	109	92.4%	3	2.5%
Scheduling	TA-S	238	17.6%	13	5.5%	221	92.9%	4	1.7%
Childcare	TA-C	163	12.1%	8	4.9%	154	94.5%	1	0.6%
Other Accessibility Comments	TA-O	28	2.1%	9	32.1%	18	64.3%	1	3.6%
Alternative Training Formats		187	13.8%	60	32.1%	106	56.7%	21	11.2%
On-line Training	TF-N	148	11.0%	41	27.7%	91	61.5%	16	10.8%
Library	TF-L	29	2.1%	8	27.6%	21	72.4%	0	0.0%
Support Group	TF-S	20	1.5%	17	85.0%	3	15.0%	0	0.0%
Other Formats	TF-O	15	1.1%	5	33.3%	9	60.0%	1	6.7%
Voice and Choice		251	18.6%	183	72.9%	46	18.3%	22	8.8%
Voice (and sense of community)	TV	213	15.8%	166	77.9%	30	14.1%	17	8.0%
Choice	TC	46	3.4%	23	50.0%	21	45.7%	2	4.3%
Training Information		73	5.4%	17	23.3%	53	72.6%	3	4.1%
Information related to trainings	TI	73	5.4%	17	23.3%	53	72.6%	3	4.1%
Other		208	15.4%	30	14.4%	80	38.5%	98	47.1%
Other Support - Training & Groups	TOS	58	4.3%	29	50.0%	23	39.7%	6	10.3%
Response not about training	TO	85	6.3%	6	7.1%	66	77.6%	13	15.3%
Don't know	TDK	78	5.7%					78	100.0%

[1] Major themes (in blue rows) are rollups of the subthemes listed below. They are unduplicated - not the total of the numbers below; i.e., a person who made "Satisfied" comments in both "Location" and "Scheduling" is counted only once in the "Accessibility" row. A person who has a "Satisfied" comment in the "Location" row and "Needs Work" in the "Scheduling" row would be counted as a "Mixed" comment in the "Accessibility" row.

[2] All # columns show how many persons made any mention of this theme. Multiple comments on the same theme by a single person are only counted once in that theme row. A person with both "Satisfied" and "Needs Work" comments on the same theme is counted in the "Mixed" column.

[3] Respondents who commented on this theme as a percentage of the total number of respondents.

[4] Percentage of comments in this theme that were "Satisfied," "Needs Work," or "Mixed or Neutral," respectively.

[5] In the report, "Nothing" responses are combined with positive or negative comments according to question context (p. 55).

2014 Foster Parent Survey: Survey Script and Survey Questions

INTRODUCTION

I have been asked by the Department of Social and Health Services to talk with foster parents about how well DSHS supports and trains them. You should have received a letter explaining this survey:

- The results of this survey will help DSHS measure how well they support and train foster parents. It will help DSHS make improvements if they are needed.
- You have been randomly chosen from all licensed foster parents.
- Your survey answers will in no way affect your status as a foster parent.
- Your answers will be kept strictly confidential. We promise that no one from the foster care system will know how you individually answered the survey questions.
- Your name is never used; the researchers combine all the survey answers into one report.
- Your participation is completely voluntary, but is very important to us. We want to make sure the sample represents all foster parents.
- Please feel free to ask questions at any time. If I come to any question that you prefer not to answer, just let me know and I will skip over it. Please be honest. We want to know how you really feel.

Did you have a foster child in your care on [TARGET DATE]?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If No: Have you had a foster child in your care in the past 5 months?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No [Ineligible]

SUPPORT QUESTIONS

1. Question about Overall Support

   In the past year, did you get adequate support for your roles and responsibilities as a foster parent?

   Response Options for Question 1:

   - ☐ *More than adequate*
   - ☐ *Somewhat adequate*
   - ☐ *Somewhat inadequate*
   - ☐ *Very inadequate*
   - ☐ *Not applicable*

2. Questions to Facilitate Strategic Planning for Support

   Preface to Questions 2A-2E:

   Please answer the following questions about your experience with Children's Administration staff. For each of the statements below, tell us how often the statement was true in the past year.

   A. Do social workers listen to your input?
   B. Are you treated like part of the team?

C. Are you included in meetings about the child in your care?
D. Can you get help when you ask for it?
E. Do you get adequate information about the needs of the children placed with you, such as medical, behavioral, developmental and educational needs?

Response Options for Questions 2A-2E:

- ☐ *Always or Almost Always*
- ☐ *Usually*
- ☐ *Seldom*
- ☐ *Almost Never or Never*
- ☐ *Not Applicable*

3. Open-ended Questions to Facilitate Strategic Planning for Support

A. What do Children's Administration and your social workers do well to support you?

B. What could Children's Administration and your social workers do better to support you?

TRAINING QUESTIONS

4. Overall Training

Overall, thinking about ALL the training you have had in the last three years, how adequately has it prepared you to care for the needs of foster children placed in your home?

Response Options for Question 4:

- ☐ More than adequate
- ☐ Somewhat adequate
- ☐ Somewhat inadequate
- ☐ Very inadequate
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ I haven't had training

5. Open-ended Questions to Facilitate Strategic Planning for Training

C. What about foster parent training has been helpful?

D. How could foster parent training be improved?

2014 Foster Parent Survey: Technical Notes

Population and Sampling

The survey sample is representative of all foster homes with a child in care on the 15th day of August 2013, November 2013, February 2014, or May 2014. In each of these quarters, 350-380 homes were selected at random from a list of all foster homes to meet the goal of 333 completed interviews per quarter. Foster parents who had already participated in the 2014 survey year were not eligible to participate and were removed from the sample. In total, 1430 foster homes were selected from an average quarterly population of 2,684 homes and 4,835 individual foster parents.

Statistical Significance testing and comparisons by survey year

For the 7 standardized questions, statistical significance tests were calculated to assess differences in the percent of positive responses across regions, and between the 2013 and 2014 survey years. The criterion for statistical significance was set at $p < .01$ to reduce the likelihood of spurious results. Differences across the three regions were evaluated with the chi-square test of independence; none were found to be statistically significant. Differences between the 2013 and 2014 survey years were evaluated with the 2-sample binomial test of proportions. For the statement "Are you included in meetings about the child in your care?" there was a significant decline in the percent selecting "Always or Almost Always" or "Usually". This percentage declined from 77% in 2013 to 70% in 2014 ($z = 4.15$, $p < .01$). No other comparisons were statistically significant.

Rounding

Results described in the narrative report are rounded to the nearest whole number. In the Appendix, percentages for coding categories are rounded to one decimal place. In several cases, correct rounding results in an apparent discrepancy. For example, a percentage of 55.47 would round to 55.5% when rounded to one decimal point, which would be rounded to 56% in the absence of any other information. However, the underlying figure is correctly rounded to 55% (verifiable by hand calculation).

2014 Foster Parent Survey

DSHS Foster Parents Speak

Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services

RDA Research & Data
Analysis Division