



# DSHS

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## Foster Parents Speak

# 2017

Foster Parent Survey

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May 2018 | Report 11.243



Washington State  
Department of Social  
& Health Services

*Transforming lives*

Research & Data Analysis Division

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

**Title:** 2017 Foster Parent Survey: DSHS Foster Parents Speak

**Abstract:** Between September 2016 and September 2017, DSHS surveyed 1,348 foster parents who had a child in care on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of August 2016, November 2016, February 2017, or May 2017; or within five months before the interview date. 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.

Foster parents' satisfaction with the support they receive remains steady. Positive responses about the adequacy of support have remained at about the same level since the survey began in 2012. Comments about experiences with social workers are mixed. Positive responses to questions about foster care social workers either declined somewhat or remained constant from 2016-2017. Most respondents reported they can get help when they ask for it, but complaints about responsiveness continue to be a concern. Although most foster parents said they feel included in the care team, some foster parents described challenges rooted in processes and coordination. Positive ratings of training have been at or above 85% since RDA began surveying foster parents; suggestions for improvement included factors affecting whether foster parents are able to attend training, such as scheduling. Foster parents continue to emphasize that participation of experienced foster parents and the ability to interact with one another add value to training.

This report is the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Foster Parent Survey report completed by RDA.

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# DSHS Foster Parents Speak



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## The 2017 Foster Parent Survey provides insight into Washington’s foster care system.

During the 2017 State Fiscal Year, the Research and Data Analysis Division (RDA) of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) conducted 1,348 telephone interviews with randomly selected foster parents in the state of Washington. The survey consisted of seven standardized questions and four open-ended questions, 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, from the perspective of foster parents. Individuals interacting with the system include:

- Children requiring foster care who often have experienced trauma due to abuse, neglect or separation in their birth families
- Foster parents trying to meet the complex needs of those children
- Biological parents who have had difficulty caring for their 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 a vital and valued part of this system. Their voices have much to tell us about areas of strength, opportunities for improvement, and the impact of the foster care system on the lives of foster children.

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**“They are very diligent about monthly visits where we sit down and talk about how it is going and what kinds of things might be coming up in the future.”**

—A Foster Parent, 2017

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## Key Findings: Support for Foster Parents

**Foster parents' satisfaction with the support they receive remains steady.** Positive responses about the adequacy of support have remained at about the same level since the survey began, with the exception of a significant drop in 2015.

- 78% of foster parents said that support was “more than adequate” or “somewhat adequate,” a small decrease (not statistically significant) compared to 2016.
- Of the 452 general comments about support, 67% were positive (the same proportion as in 2016).

**Experiences with social workers are mixed.** Positive responses to questions about foster care social workers either declined somewhat or remained constant from 2016 to 2017.

- 78% of respondents said that social workers always or usually listen to their input, a statistically significant decrease from 81% in 2016.
- Of the 1,163 who commented about social workers, 49% made mixed or neutral comments, often stating that their experiences have varied greatly depending on the individual worker.
- The highest proportion of positive comments about social workers was in the “support” sub-theme (61%), while the highest proportion of negative comments (or suggestions for improvement) was in the “inclusiveness” category (59%).

**Responsiveness and communication are important to foster parents.** Most respondents said they can get help when they ask for it, but complaints about responsiveness continue to be a concern.

- 79% of respondents said they can always or usually get help when they ask for it.
- Of the 556 foster parents commenting on access to social workers, 57% made positive comments.
- More respondents' comments about being able to readily contact their social worker fell into the “Needs work” area compared with last year (67 in 2016, compared to 120 in 2017).
- 60 respondents mentioned the social workers' ability to receive and send text messages (see special analysis, p. 32).

**Foster parents value consistent and fair processes, and smooth coordination of efforts.** Although most foster parents said they feel included in the care team, some foster parents described challenges rooted in processes and coordination.

- 73% said they are always or usually treated like part of the team; and 72% agreed that they are included in meetings about the child in their care.
- Of the 378 foster parents (28% of all respondents) who commented about processes, 89% offered negative comments or suggestions for improvement.

**Most foster parents were satisfied with the information they receive about the children in their care, but many expressed concern about the consequences of inadequate information sharing.** The number of comments on this topic highlights the importance of information for foster parents.

- 69% of respondents agreed that they always or usually get adequate information about the needs of the children placed with them.
- There were 768 comments related to information in 2017 (57% of all respondents). Of these, 49% were negative or suggestions for improvement.
- Foster parents are most concerned when they do not receive information about medical needs and behavioral problems at the time of placement, and when they do not receive information about court hearings or developments in a foster child's biological family.

## Key Findings: Training for Foster Parents

**Most foster parents are satisfied with the training they receive from Children’s Administration and contracted training providers.** Positive ratings of training have been at or above 85% since RDA began surveying foster parents in 2012.

- 87% agreed that the training they had received in the prior year was somewhat adequate or more than adequate in preparing them to care for the needs of foster children.
- Of the 429 comments about the quality and helpfulness of training, 80% were positive.

**When asked open-ended questions about training, many foster parents offered suggestions for improvement.**

Issues that were often mentioned included those affecting whether foster parents are able to attend training, such as scheduling, locations and availability of alternative training modes.

- Of the 747 respondents who made comments about general training issues, 41% made positive comments; 38% made negative comments or suggestions for improvement.
- Of the 817 respondents mentioning specific training topics, 53% made positive comments. The most frequently mentioned topics included child behavior, specific disorders, navigating the foster care system, and Caregiver Core Training. Suggested training topics included how to handle relationships with the foster child’s biological family, tips on navigating the educational system and more specifically focused training on aspects of the foster care system in Washington.
- Of the 398 comments about access to training, 88% were negative or suggestions for improvement. Most of these comments concerned scheduling, childcare, and location. Some mentioned having paid for training they needed out of their own pockets.
- Most who commented on online training appreciate the flexibility and convenience, but some suggested that videoconference technology could allow them to attend “live” training remotely.

**Foster parents continue to emphasize that participation of experienced foster parents and the ability to interact with one another adds value to training.** They especially value opportunities to learn from peers in training or support groups, and the sense of community they get from these interactions.

- Of the 282 respondents who made reference to including foster parents as trainers or encouraging interaction among peers, more than two-thirds (68%) made positive comments; most comments coded as “negative” were requests for more such opportunities.
- Many noted that interaction helps to connect “book learning” with the situations they are likely to encounter.

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**“I liked the Core Training. It gave me insight into the bio parents' struggles.”**

—A Foster Parent, 2017

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## About the Survey

- 1,470 foster parents were randomly sampled on a quarterly basis, if they had at least one child in care on the 15th day of August 2016, November 2016, February 2017, or May 2017.
- Telephone interviews were completed between September 14, 2016 and September 11, 2017.
- Interpreters were available for all languages requested, and alternative methods were available for respondents who were deaf or hard of hearing.
- 1,348 foster parents completed the survey (92% response rate).

## Survey Results at a Glance

The survey included seven structured questions. Two of these were originally selected to inform the Braam Settlement and Exit Agreement (“Quality and Helpfulness” and “Adequacy of Training”). The remaining five questions were designed to support strategic planning for foster parent support. Statistical significance tests were calculated for the change in positive responding since the 2016 survey, and for differences between regions.

The survey also included four open-ended questions—two related to foster parent support and two related to foster parent training. Responses to these questions are summarized in the following pages. The open-ended responses were coded by thematic content. The entire questionnaire can be found in the Appendix (pages 101-102).

### Responses to Structured Questions

#### Foster Parent Support

##### QUALITY AND HELPFULNESS

In the past year, did you get adequate support for your roles and responsibilities as a foster parent?*	2017	78%
	2016	79%

##### SOCIAL WORKERS

Do social workers listen to your input? **	2017	78%
	2016	81%

Are you treated like part of the team? **	2017	73%
	2016	74%

Are you included in meetings about the child in your care? **	2017	72%
	2016	72%

##### ACCESS, PROCESSES AND COORDINATION

Can you get help when you ask for it? **	2017	79%
	2016	80%

##### INFORMATION

Do you get adequate information about the needs of the children placed with you, such as medical, behavioral, developmental and educational needs? **	2017	69%
	2016	71%

#### Foster Parent Training

##### ADEQUACY OF 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 basic needs of the foster children placed in your home? *	2017	87%
	2016	87%

\* Percentage shown is the proportion who answered “More than adequate” or “Somewhat adequate.”

\*\* Percentage shown is the proportion who answered “Always” or “Almost Always” or “Usually.” The decrease from 2016 to 2017 for the question “Do social workers listen to your input?” is statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

## Responses to open-ended questions about support

### Open-Ended Questions about Support

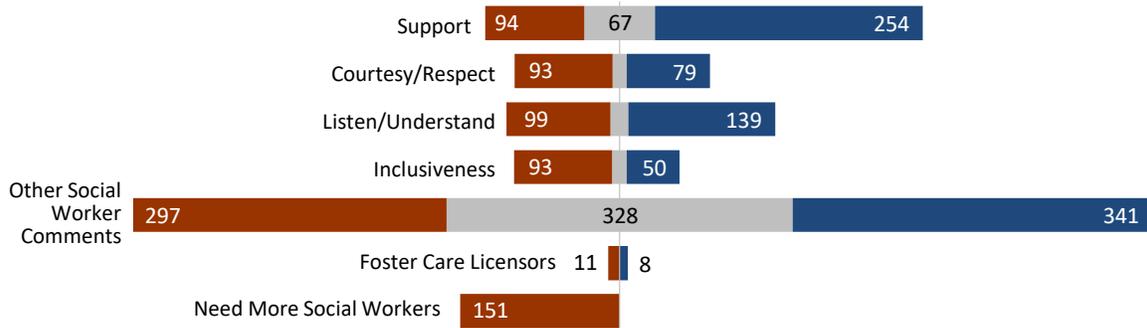
- What do Children’s Administration and your social workers do well to support you?
- What could Children’s Administration do better to support you?



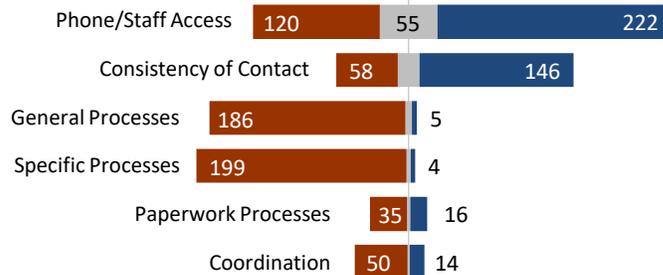
#### QUALITY/HELPFULNESS



#### SOCIAL WORKERS



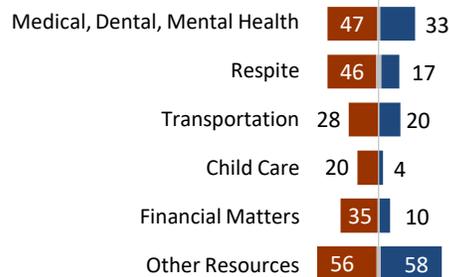
#### ACCESS, PROCESSES AND COORDINATION



#### INFORMATION



#### RESOURCES



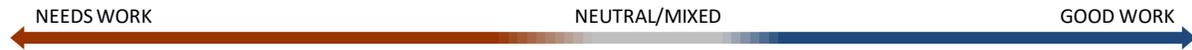
#### OTHER SOURCES OF FOSTER PARENT SUPPORT



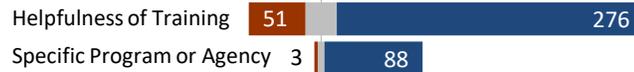
## Responses to Open-Ended Questions about Training

### Open-Ended Questions about Training

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



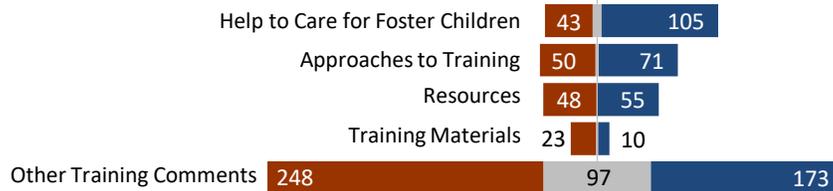
#### QUALITY/HELPFULNESS



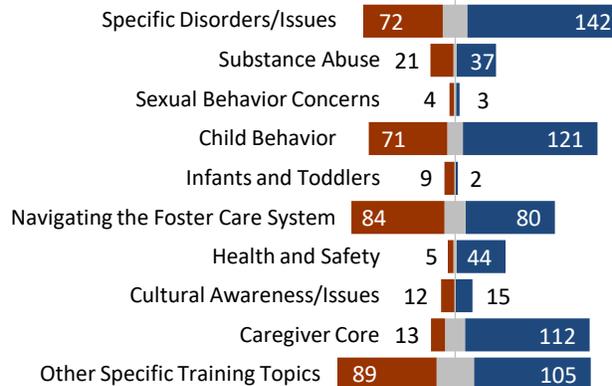
#### TRAINERS



#### GENERAL TRAINING



#### SPECIFIC TRAINING TOPICS



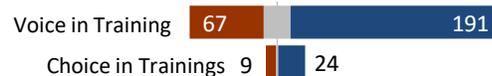
#### ACCESS



#### ALTERNATIVE TRAINING FORMATS



#### VOICE AND CHOICE



#### TRAINING INFORMATION



#### SUPPORT BEYOND TRAINING



## Foster Parent Support



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### **Part 1 of this report analyzes foster parents' responses to questions about the support they receive.**

Most (78%) foster parents responding to the question “In the past year, did you get adequate support for your roles and responsibilities as a foster parent?” described the support as more than adequate (29%) or somewhat adequate (49%).

Positive responses to the question “Do the social workers listen to your input?” fell by 4% compared to 2016, a statistically significant change. Responses to other structured questions about foster parent support did not change statistically since 2016, although there were differences in satisfaction levels among the three DSHS regions.

#### **This part of the report contains the following sections:**

- Section 1.1: Quality and Helpfulness
- Section 1.2: Social Workers
- Section 1.3: Access, Processes and Coordination
- Section 1.4: Information
- Section 1.5: Resources
- Section 1.6: Other Sources of Foster Parent Support



## Quality and Helpfulness



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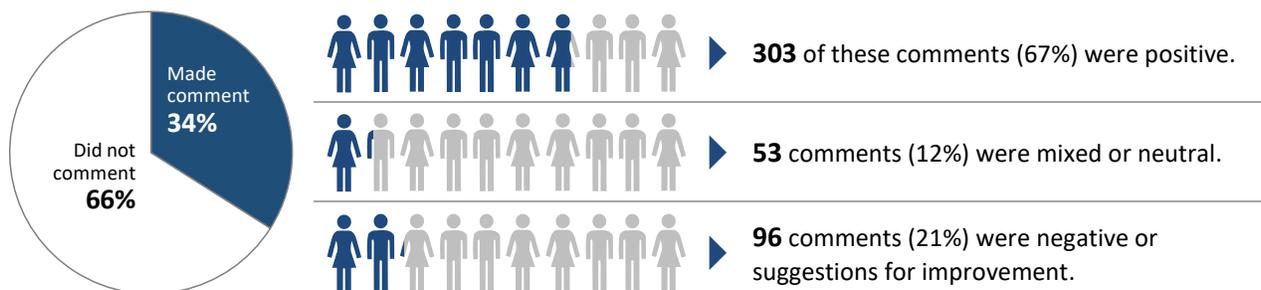
### Foster parents describe a broad variety of experiences in receiving support.

This section describes the overall quality and helpfulness of the support received by foster parents from Children’s Administration and from specific offices, locations, tribes and contracted agencies.

When asked, “In the past year, did you get adequate support for your roles and responsibilities as a foster parent?” more than three-quarters of foster parents responded favorably (Somewhat adequate or More than adequate).

More than one-third of all comments given in response to the open-ended questions addressed the quality and helpfulness of support for foster parents. More than two-thirds of foster parents’ comments about “Overall Quality and Helpfulness” of Children’s Administration in general were positive, as were more than three-quarters of those about support from specific agencies or offices.

#### 452 respondents (34%) commented on quality and helpfulness of support



## 1.1 Quality and Helpfulness



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### Foster parents describe wide variation in the quality and helpfulness of the support they receive.

“The state needs to know that the foster parents are on a volunteer basis, and can quit at any time. They try to make it seem like they are living harder lives than us. I don’t see them waking up at three a.m. feeding a crying newborn. The state forgets that we do this because we want to and we care for the children.”

“I am a very self-sufficient kind of guy but if I need anything, I know they will do their best to get it for me.”

“We have only had one placement and everything has gone really well. I really cannot think of anything I need.”

“I don’t think there is anything the social worker can do more to help us. The rules prevent us from being true parents.”

“The information and training that I received at the beginning was good, but once a foster parent, you are out in the wind to fend for yourself.”

### Support from both DSHS and private agencies is important.

“They are the go-between who will contact the DSHS staff. One of the DSHS social workers is awesome. She is on top of things.”

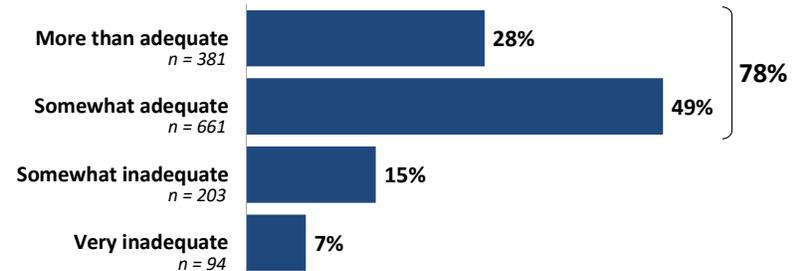
“Our private agency staff does well in listening to us and offering us assistance in any way possible. They are always willing to make whatever attempts they can to help. We deal mainly with our private agency other than the monthly visit by the DSHS social worker.”

“We have a positive relationship with the state and our social worker and all tools to be successful.”

“Based on my experience I don’t think there is anything else they could do. All of them have been great.”

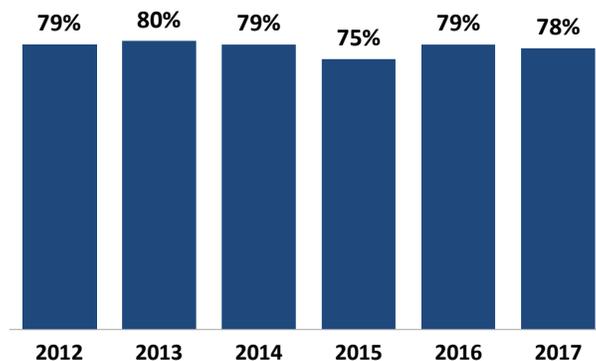
### QUESTION | In the past year, did you get adequate support for your roles and responsibilities as a foster parent?

Of the 1,339 foster parents who answered this question in the 2017 survey, nearly four in five reported that the support they received in the past year was somewhat or more than adequate.



### State Trend

Positive responses (More than adequate/Somewhat adequate) decreased slightly since 2016, but the difference was not statistically significant, and over time this rate has not changed greatly.



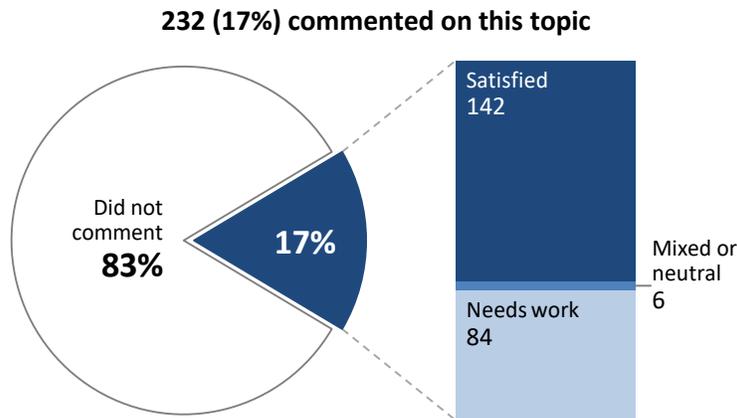
### Regional Detail

Differences among regions were not statistically significant.



**THEME | Overall Quality and Helpfulness of Support**

Of the 1,344 foster parents who answered the open-ended questions, 17 percent commented on overall quality and helpfulness. Some of the responses included in this theme were comments praising or criticizing overall support, while others were simply a response of “Nothing” to one of the questions. Most of these comments (142, or 67%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.



**Detailed Responses**

Ninety-eight foster parents made comments either praising or criticizing the general quality of support.

- 57 made a positive comment about overall support (58% of comments addressing overall support).
- 36 criticized overall support (37%).
- 5 offered neutral or mixed comments (5%).

**“Nothing” Responses**

The comments in this theme also include those made by 162 respondents who answered “Nothing” when asked what has been done well and/or what could be done better.

- 109 respondents replied “Nothing” to the question “What could Children’s Administration and your social workers do better to support you?” (“Nothing” coded as a positive response).
- 52 respondents replied “Nothing” to the question “What do Children’s Administration and your social workers do well to support you?” (“Nothing” coded as a negative response).
- 1 respondent replied “Nothing” to both questions.



Seattle Mariners

“I feel like I am getting really great support so I don't think there is a need to do better right now.”

“The state looks after the child, and the child's best interest.”

“I have had no problems with my local office. They do everything to help support me and the foster children.”

“They always check to see if we needed anything. They don't hesitate to ask, so there is nothing they could do better.”

“The adoption process has dragged on for way too long. This is negatively impacting the children. I feel no support from DSHS.”

“I guess I am just spoiled. I cannot think of anything they could be doing better than they are doing right now.”

“When things get ruined in my home, the state is supposed to repair. It has been a year trying to get my sofa fixed and it's still not fixed or replaced. They put me off all the time and say they didn't get my letter.”

“Whatever I need, they figure out a way to do it. Any call or anything, they're right there, ready and willing to help in any way they can.”

“The social worker was absent a lot without adequate coverage. We have let our license lapse because of this lack of assistance.”

“In the last year, I feel like they have not done well. In the past, it was very helpful and I received a good amount of support, but this last year it has really changed, I feel like it's no longer about the children. I'm not getting paid for some of the children in my care. I've had a child for 11 months, yet I was never asked for a court report or attended any meetings. I did turn in a court report for one child and it still hadn't been turned in by the social worker after three months.”

## 1.1 Quality and Helpfulness



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“Private agency staff is good at finding ways to accommodate all parties when there are emotions involved. There is a very wide range of attitude and abilities of the DSHS staff. I have had some very good caseworkers and some that have not been easy to work with.”

“We are on our eighth social worker in two years. Someone needs to find out what is going internally that there is so much turnover in the Kent office.”

“We had an amazing experience with the Clark County office, I never had a negative experience with them.”

“If it wasn't for the Kennewick office, the system would have completely failed my foster child. The other office has never, even once, been to my house or met the child in 25 months!”

“I deal with several offices, each office I have had different experiences. With my local DSHS office, I feel I have better support.”

“My private agency staff are very responsive. Staff are very pleasant and they are willing to work around my schedule for the health and safety visits.”

“Even our private agency staff have a hard time working with the DSHS social workers.”

“My private agency is amazing. They are there no matter what. I can call them and get answers.”

“I have had some really high needs children. It was hard to get through to the private agency because it always seemed about the money as opposed to helping the kids.”

“They are the only reason why we are successful.”

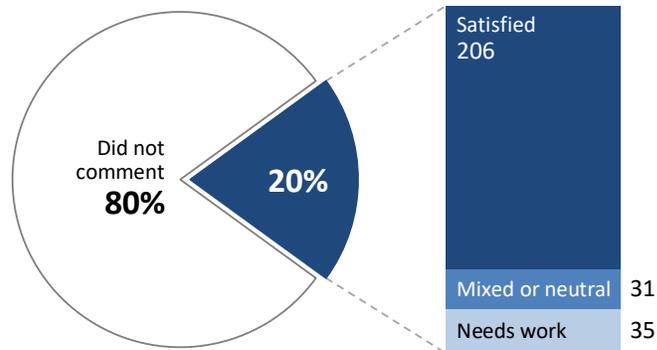
“Dealing with a tribal agency is harder and sometimes there is miscommunication between the social worker and the tribal worker.”

“My private agency totally supports us. They try very hard to reduce stress.”

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

Twenty percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on quality and helpfulness from specific agencies or offices. Most of these comments (206, or 76%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

272 (20%) commented on this topic



### Perceived responsiveness, communication and follow-through were important examples of support from specific agencies or offices.

- Although most responses in this theme were positive (76%), the “Needs Work” comments provided more specific descriptions of how support fell short. 36 criticized overall support in specific terms (37% of specific comments).
- The support that foster parents feel they have received by different locations can vary a great deal, and it may change over time. Interactions with individual staff strongly influence opinions about quality of support.

### Many experiences with DSHS are at the local level, rather than with the agency as a whole.

- Foster parents’ accounts of experience with DSHS may be a result of interactions they have had with staff from private agencies (contracted by DSHS to provide services and support) and/or DSHS offices in their local area.
- These experiences can vary widely from one office or agency to another.

## Social Workers



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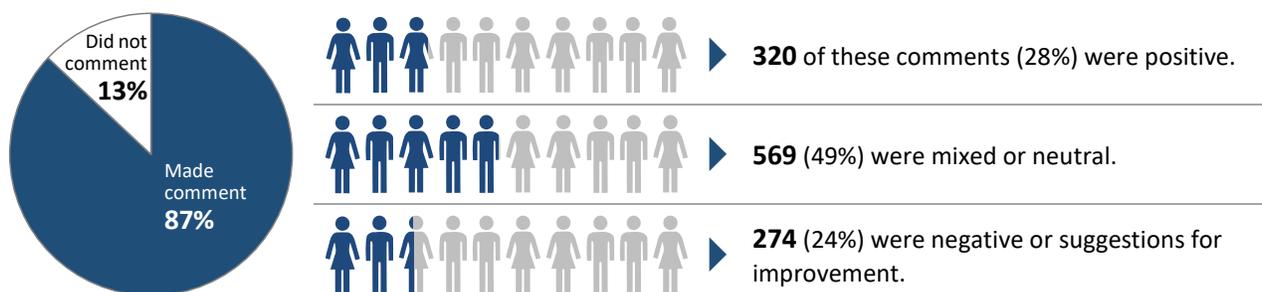
### Social workers are enormously important to the foster care experience.

Foster parents' comments indicate that they value and depend on their relationships with social workers who work directly for DSHS, and those who work for contracted private and tribal agencies. They often comment on individual characteristics such as courtesy, attentiveness, friendliness and competence, but some suggest that larger issues such as social worker turnover and high caseloads contribute to problems.

Positive responses to "Do social workers listen to your input?" were lower compared to 2016, but remained the same for "Are you treated like a part of the team?" and "Are you included in meetings about the child in your care?"

In response to open-ended questions, nearly nine in ten respondents commented on the themes in this section. Almost half of foster parents' comments in the theme "Social Workers" were mixed or neutral.

#### 1,163 respondents (87%) commented on social workers



## 1.2 Social Workers



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"The three I have lately have actually said the words 'What can we do to help?' None of the others have actually said those words. I appreciate that."

"I handle short-term placements, so I deal with Placements more than the social worker. Placements does an excellent job in listening to me and supporting me."

"We feel like we've been on our own. They drop them off and never look back unless they have to. We're a little bitter because we didn't get our kids, but communication is key and we feel like we didn't have that."

"It depends on which social worker Some social workers are amazing and some are not."

"The honesty as part of the team is helpful. I have been happy with the social workers in the area that I accept children from."

"When I first started doing foster care, I expected an 18-year-old boy but I got preemie twins and did not have a lot of clothing for them. My social worker got some clothes together; she is a great supporter."

"They're always communicating. They are prompt to meet every month and supportive to the child and foster parents."

"I have had some really good social workers. Generally, I have felt supported by the social workers. The social workers are doing the best they can with the caseloads that they have."

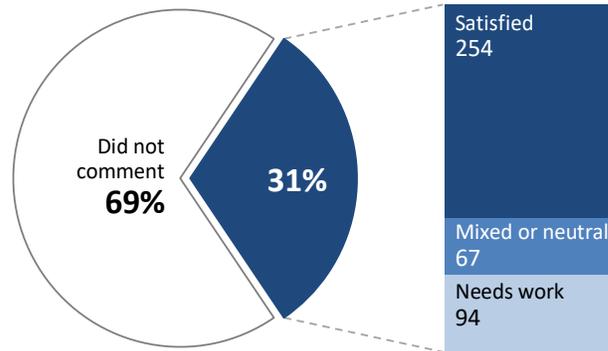
"They support the kids well. We see them once a month. But supporting us varies by case worker. Some have done very well, others have not. They're pretty good at summarizing a conversation and offering help."

"Be more supportive to families who are caring for kids with special needs, and more supportive to the strain and stress that this causes these families."

### THEME | Social Worker Support

Thirty-one percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on social worker support. Most of these comments (254, or 61%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

415 (31%) commented on this topic



### Social workers are the frontline hands and voice of Children's Administration (CA). Perceived support, or lack of support, from social workers can influence whether foster parents:

- Are able to effectively provide care for the children in their homes
- Feel empowered in their role in the foster care system
- Are willing to continue to provide care

### Respondents' answers about support may refer to their primary CA case managers as well as:

- CA social workers providing service through the Placement Desk ("Placements")
- Social workers employed by private foster care agencies contracted by the state
- Case aides and other ancillary care providers
- Foster care licensors (See page 22)

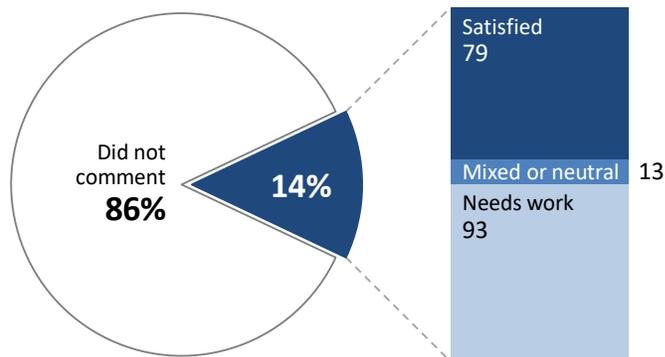
### "Support" can represent many different experiences that foster parents have with social workers, including:

- Responding to requests for specific resources or services needed for individual foster children
- Actively engaging foster parents in discussions about how to provide the care that their foster children need
- Proactively suggesting ways to improve the family's experience, especially with challenging situations

## THEME | Social Worker Courtesy and Respect

Fourteen percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on social worker courtesy and respect. Half of these comments (93, or 50%) were negative or suggested improvements.

185 (14%) commented on this topic



### Acknowledging that foster parents have unique experiences and expertise is important in demonstrating respect.

- Respondents often observe that, since they are with the children “24/7,” they have insights that others may not have.
- Foster parents sometimes describe feeling disrespected as being treated “like a babysitter.”

### Simply being polite and considerate is appreciated.

- Some respondents questioned whether social workers treated children—as well as foster parents—as kindly as they should.
- Other foster parents expressed appreciation for kindnesses such as being asked about their own well-being.



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“They leave us alone to do the job of foster parenting. They trust us to care for the children properly.”

“You need to be more respectful in regards to how much foster parents really care and want to know what is happening with the children.”

“How I'm treated isn't always the best. I don't think the state realizes the level of care that I provide. I had a drug-affected infant in my care and I was getting 30 minutes of sleep every other hour and I just didn't get any respect. If anything, I was disrespected on a regular basis.”

“Social worker has a somewhat negative attitude and is belittling to the children; I've witnessed her in shaming the kids.”

“Our placement coordinator and supervisor are gracious and they really care about placing the right child in the right home. I can talk to them and be treated as part of the team.”

“Listen to what foster parents have to say because we are with the children 24/7. I think that is important because we know the children better than they do. Give us the benefit of the doubt.”

“They listen and attempt to follow through with what they're allowed to do. They're good at appreciating foster parents.”

“Always willing to give me resources, answer my questions. Also willing to work with me on scheduling. It has been a really good experience. She shows interest and caring about me as well as the child.”

“Be more responsive, generally more supportive, understanding that we are foster parents and there is more to this than just completing all the paperwork involved. There are children here!”

## 1.2 Social Workers



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### Foster parents want not only to be heard, but for their input to be seriously considered.

"I like how they listen and I feel like we are included in the decision making."

"If there is a problem at school, they come with me to the school. We have team meetings to try to solve the problem and determine what best serves the child."

"Over time, they take our opinion seriously and also start to treat us like parents and not like a hotel."

"They are in near constant contact and ask for my opinions regarding the children and their needs."

"They are very open to listening to my concerns. My opinions matter."

"They've been open to my wife's suggestions about the care of the kids."

"We need more say about concerns, visits, relatives. We need to be part of the plan, not told what the plan is."

"Stop treating us like we are glorified babysitters and start treating us like we are an integral part of the team."

"They always answer my questions and listen to what I have to say. It has been very rewarding so far."

"Take our input and give it more weight than it is given."

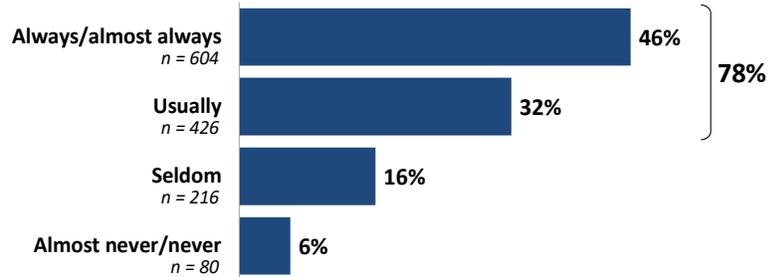
"The doctor wrote a note stating that her naps should not be interrupted. I gave the note to the social worker and she told me I had overstepped my boundaries, and scheduled bio parent visits during naptime."

"The social worker threatened to take the child away from me if I did not stop expressing my opinion and concerns even though I had observed behaviors that were not safe."

"Listen to our input as we have those children in our care 24 hours a day."

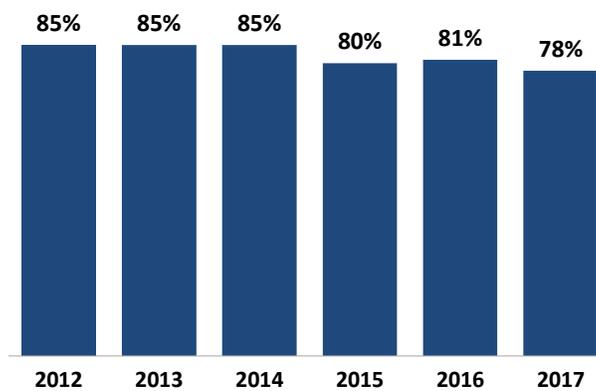
### QUESTION | Do social workers listen to your input?

Of the 1,326 foster parents who answered this question, nearly four in five gave a positive response (Always/almost always, or Usually) about whether social workers listen to their input.



### State Trend

Positive responses were lower compared to 2016, a statistically significant difference.



### Regional Detail

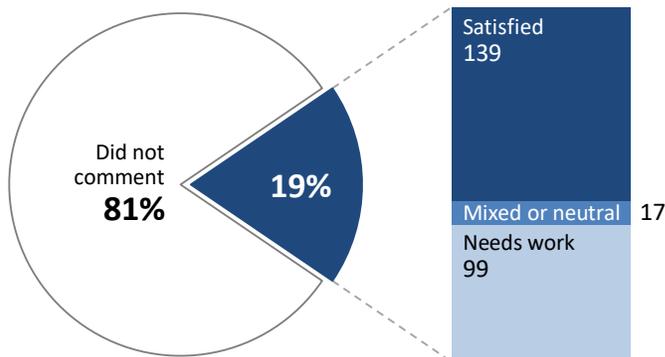
Positive responses were more frequent among Region 1 respondents compared to Region 2, a statistically significant difference. Results of other comparisons were not significant.



**THEME | Social Workers Listen/Understand**

Nineteen percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on how well social workers listen and understand. Most of these comments (139, or 55%) expressed satisfaction.

**255 (81%) commented on this topic**



**Foster parents expect social workers to provide team-based communication that addresses the best interests of the children.**

- Some foster parents discussed their unique insight into the children’s daily lives and want that to be taken into account.
- Others noted the importance of all parties being given a voice in decisions about foster children, including the children themselves.

**Understanding the whole situation is crucial.**

- Some respondents commented on the need for social workers to know about all aspects of the children’s lives—including home and school—in order to effectively understand foster parents’ requests and recommendations.
- They also noted that crises can be dealt with more effectively if foster parents’ views are carefully considered.



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- “I don’t always have all the information at the beginning, but they listen to me as I learn more about the child.”
- “Sometimes I felt that they felt I was exaggerating the things that were going on, and that was frustrating.”
- “They act like they are listening well. Once you go up the chain of command it is better.”
- “We are with the children 24/7 and if you trust us with their well-being, why don’t you listen to us?”
- “When there is a concern about something that has happened, the DSHS reaction is impulsive without asking me or talking with me about the issue.”
- “They listen to us, and let us talk, which helps me brainstorm.”
- “They are willing to brainstorm with us about the best way to solve a problem or to get a resource or just anything we want to talk about.”
- “I would say I felt that I have been listened to and they honor my opinion.”
- “The social workers do not seem to understand that it matters to us what is going on with the foster children in our home.”
- “They have all been to my home and that gives them a clear-cut understanding of my needs and requirements.”
- “The worker went to a football practice, and after practice was over just sat and talked with him.”
- “Listen to the kids more.”
- “They listen to my needs and the needs of my foster child.”
- “Take the time to know the children in their caseload and to understand their needs.”

## 1.2 Social Workers



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### Foster parents see themselves as an important part of the team, and like to be treated as such.

"The social workers seem to care about the child in foster care. They have a team approach."

"I think they believe that we do not share the same goals as the state."

"We may not foster any longer due to the lack of inclusion. Too much happens around us instead of with us."

"We see such a decline in how the state treats foster parents. It's much more of an 'us vs. them' environment now."

"She listens when I advocate for a child and she really tries to help me. She keeps me in the loop and makes me feel like part of the team."

"The DSHS social workers value the perspective the foster parents bring to the table."

"Respond to e-mails and treat me like part of the team. Keep me in the loop as to what is happening in the case."

"We have a team approach included in the decision-making process."

### Some comments dealt with specific situations in which foster parents needed team support.

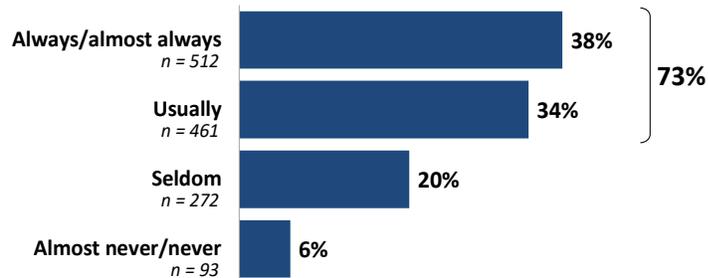
"We have a really high-needs kiddo. We need help and have basically not been able to get it. I feel like we are the whole team, and have to work to get others to become part of the team. We feel very alone in the process."

"I don't feel there is much in the way of teamwork for the development of the child's future."

"Decisions are made and the foster parents aren't part of the process; there has been no guidance in transitioning kids from my home to the future new parents."

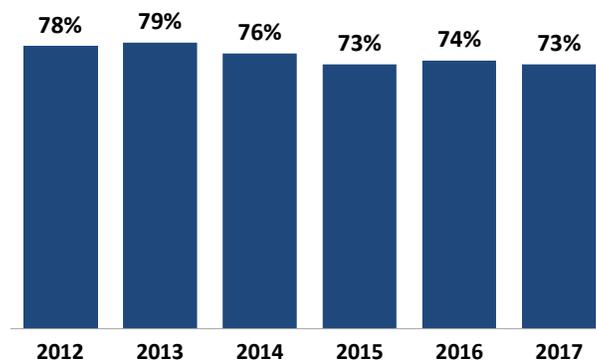
### QUESTION | Are you treated like part of the team?

Of the 1,338 foster parents who answered this question, nearly three-quarters gave a positive response (Always/almost always, or Usually) when asked if they are treated like part of the team.



### State Trend

Positive responses decreased since 2016 (not a statistically significant difference).



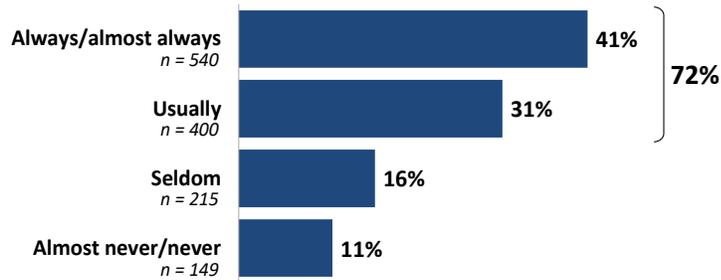
### Regional Detail

Positive responses were more frequent among Regions 1 and 3 respondents (respectively) compared to Region 2. Both were statistically significant differences.



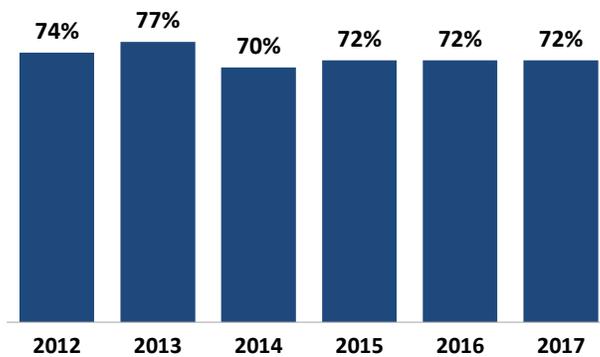
**QUESTION | Are you included in meetings about the child in your care?**

Of the 1,304 foster parents who answered this question, nearly three-quarters gave a positive response (Always/almost always, or Usually) when asked if they are included in meetings about the child in their care.



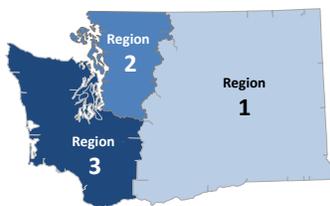
**State Trend**

There was no change in positive responses from 2016 to 2017.



**Regional Detail**

Differences among regions were not statistically significant.



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**Being included in meetings is an important way of showing that foster parents are a part of the team.**

“It’d be nice if social workers realized that a lot of foster parents have other kids and to take that into consideration when scheduling meetings and home visits.”

“Private agency is always there for me at any time. They always have my input in meetings and always listen to me.”

“Both my private agency and DSHS include us in meetings.”

“A lot of times we are just left in the dark. When meetings happen, why did they happen in the first place, when court dates are scheduled, and when to go to appointments with the attorney. Ultimately, I’d like to find out what the outcomes of all the meetings are.”

“They need to include the foster parents in the team meeting, court and other meetings concerning the children in their care.”

**Timely notification of meetings helps foster parents prepare and attend.**

“I get invites to case staffings but only 24-48 hours before, usually as an afterthought.”

“They know I’m a working mom and need to know ahead of time so I need to be invited when the meeting is first scheduled.”

**Some parents report that just being present at a meeting doesn’t ensure that they are included.**

“Even when we were at a meeting and we were asked to express our feelings, when we did we were just shut down.”

“I was invited to the family meeting, but I was told not to say anything. When I did say something, the social worker stated that it was untrue.”

## 1.2 Social Workers



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“The DSHS workers should communicate with us and then we know our opinion is valued which makes us feel good. Some social workers don’t make us feel that way.”

“If we work and can’t make a hearing, a phone call or a message that could be played during the hearing would make a world of difference. We as the foster parents, are the voice of the child and we should be taken seriously.”

“Everyone says the foster system is broken, but we are always engaged and taken care of. They need to make sure foster parents who are less communicative and engaged are brought in and communicated with to help them foster that familial sense that contributes to a better system.”

“The answer on ‘Are you included?’ should be ‘sometimes, last minute.’”

“I feel like we have very open communication. I get answers and responded to in a timely manner. I feel included. Really feel fortunate that we have such a good support system. They help me raise my two grandchildren.”

“The state doesn’t listen to us; they don’t take what we have to say into consideration. If we’re in court, and were asked a question, our responses should be taken seriously; I mean, we’re the ones that live with the children, not the State.”

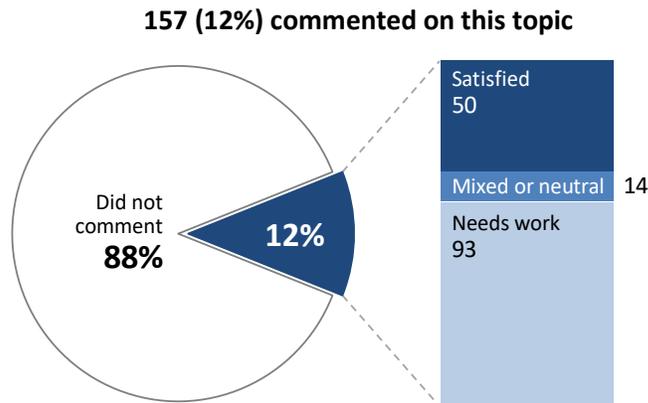
“They are great listeners and they are open to my suggestions and ideas. They make me feel a part of the process.”

“More proactive in their case plans. They need to try to understand the stress of being foster parent and include us in case decisions and as part of the team.”

“When making important, life-changing decisions, they need to maybe get a second person in the mix that’s not so much involved with the case, an unbiased point of view. That type of person needs to be brought in to view the case and all of its circumstances.”

### THEME | Social Worker Inclusiveness

Twelve percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on social worker inclusiveness. Most of these comments (93, or 59%) were negative or suggested ways that support could be improved.



**Social worker inclusiveness overlaps many of the other categories in this report. Foster parents commenting about being included or treated as part of a team often also mention:**

- Feeling that their opinions aren’t heard, taken seriously, or acted upon when possible
- Getting regular feedback and updates from their social workers
- Having the opportunity to discuss—as equals—matters about their foster children
- Getting reasonable notifications of all meetings about their children’s cases

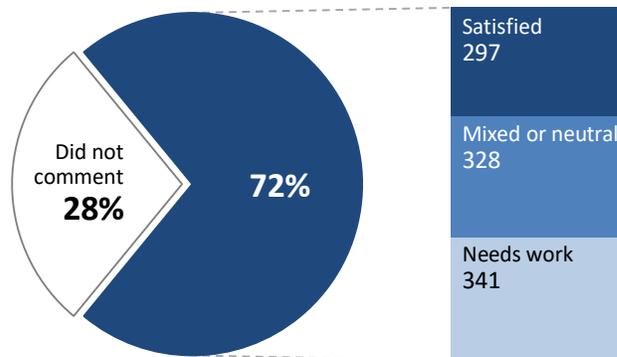
**Some respondents commented on the way that they and others understand their role in the foster care system.**

- Most foster parents who commented on their role take their responsibilities very seriously and would like to receive professional consideration of their opinions.
- For some, being part of a team also means that they can rely on DSHS social workers and other professionals in situations when they need help or advice.

## THEME | Other Comments about Social Workers

Seventy-two percent of the 1,344 respondents who offered a response to the open-ended questions made other comments about social workers that did not fit in other themes. About one-third of these comments were negative/suggested improvements (35%), were positive/expressed satisfaction (31%) or were mixed/neutral (34%).

966 (72%) commented on this topic



### Many respondents expressed the need for communication with social workers that is:

- Proactive and occurring regularly
- Honest and thorough
- Consistent no matter who is conveying information

### Foster parents appreciate social workers who:

- Treat each child's case as a unique situation
- Use creativity and collaboration in solving problems
- Make the child's best interest the top priority

### Other areas of concern included:

- Effects of excessive workloads on social workers' ability to provide adequate support
- Adequate training and supervision for newer staff
- Changes in social workers that may be due to factors other than staff turnover or under-staffing (discussed on page 22)



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"The past year, I have had five different social workers with two foster children. We have gotten mixed messages because of all this change. There is a big lack of communication during all these changes."

"Communication! Don't leave us in the dark so much. Just because we are not squeaky wheels and are calling you all the time does not mean we don't appreciate it when you check in with us. It makes us feel appreciated and less of a glorified babysitter. I know we don't have any legal rights with these children, but we are doing our best to parent them, so anything that makes that easier is a win/win."

"The response times are a little long. Our social worker has a lot of cases, so it is understandable."

"Be honest with us. We are foster-to-adopt and I think our social worker tells us what she wants us to hear so that we don't get anxious. Just be honest. If it's going to be another six months, just tell us. We are already a year and a half into this process and we would have been a lot better off if we had known the truth along the way."

"When they have time, they usually do a good job at most everything we ask."

"They are really good about getting children placed in homes."

"When I ask for someone to come out and talk with one of my kids, they usually try and get someone. Especially when I need help bad."

"More supervisors that are hands-on so that they can help new social workers get organized."

"They are not responsible for policies and they do an excellent job trying to keep the policies in place."

## 1.2 Social Workers

### Need More Social Workers

"I feel like the problem with the second social worker is more that the system had given her too many cases. I contacted her many times and rarely got a response."

"Lighten the loads for the social workers so that they can spend more time with each of their cases."

"Hire more social workers, our worker is very overworked. She has over 22 different cases and that is just too much."

"Too much change in social workers. DSHS should try to keep social workers on a case longer than a month."

"Caseloads seem to be too high so social workers can't spend enough time on each case."

### Foster Care Licensors

"I feel like our licensor might be slowing our process down. At the beginning, we met every requirement and it still took six months to jump start the process."

"My licensing agency made me feel like a valuable player in this process."

"We haven't really had any contact with our licensing social worker, we never get calls about new placements and we haven't had any information on how to keep our license."

"Both the social worker and licensor have always answered my emails and texts promptly and provided clear answers."

### Specific Social Workers

"Taylor was very supportive in helping me deal with the child and on how to do this or that or try this or try that."

"Placement desk is amazing. Rosemary is the best!"

"If it were not for supervisor George Nelson in Smokey Point, we would not have attended court and gotten to meet our little guy's father. The court was awarding dad custody and it really did our hearts good to be able to shake this guy's hand and talk to him."

"Since we switched social workers to Kayla it has gone exceptionally better."

"Alisa Kindle is absolutely wonderful. She takes time with the parent."

"Janelle has been wonderful, she has kept us informed and arranging transportation, she has kept us up with the situation and lets us be involved about the child's hearings."

"They listen to me. I am so happy with Don Jacobs of DSHS!"

### THEME | Need More Social Workers

Eleven percent (151) of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions made a comment indicating the need for more social workers.

#### Foster parents' comments in this theme often mentioned:

- High caseloads
- Poor response times and attention to cases
- Social worker burnout and turnover
- Caseloads becoming even higher
- Cases left in limbo because they "fell through the cracks" when there was a change in caseworkers.
- Inconsistent decisions from one social worker to the next

### THEME | Foster Care Licensors

One percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on foster care licensors. Most of these comments (11, or 58%) were negative or suggested improvements. Eight (42%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

#### These comments included observations that:

- The process works best when licensors and case workers coordinate communication among all parties
- The licensing social worker plays an important role in how smoothly the process goes

### THEME | Specific Social Workers

Seven (less than 1%) of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions mentioned a specific social worker.

#### These comments noted the social worker's:

- Intervention in a difficult situation
- Kind and caring attitude
- Communication and coordination skills

## Access, Processes, and Coordination



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### **Foster parents must navigate a wide range of processes and services in order to care for the children placed in their homes, so they appreciate prompt and reliable support.**

Seventy-nine percent of foster parents said that they can get help when they ask for it (a one point decrease compared to 2016, but not statistically significant). However, foster parents' comments describe persistent challenges in navigating agency processes and coordination of services.

In this section:

- Topics are addressed in the following order: help when you need it; phone/staff access; consistent contact; general processes; specific processes; paperwork; coordination; and communication by text
- The following page provides charts that summarize responses to open-ended questions
- Page 25 highlights foster parents' responses to the question: "Can you get help when you ask for it?"
- Pages 26-31 describe foster parents' comments on access to support, agency processes, and coordination of services
- Page 32 provides a new analysis of comments mentioning the ability to communicate with social workers by texting and smart phones

### 1.3 Access, Processes, and Coordination

Forty-one percent of foster parents (556 respondents) who made comments mentioned access to staff. Of those who commented on this subject:



Less than one-third of foster parents who made comments (378, or 28%) mentioned general or specific processes. Of those who commented on this subject:

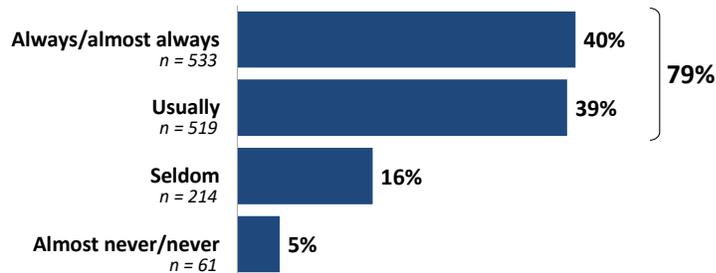


Just 5% of foster parents who made comments (66 respondents) mentioned issues related to coordination. Of those who commented on this subject:



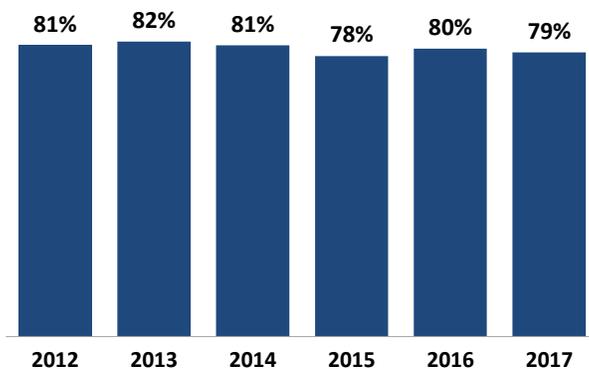
**QUESTION | Can you get help when you ask for it?**

Almost eight out of ten of the 1,327 foster parents who answered this question (79%) gave a positive response (Always/almost always, or Usually) about whether they can get help when they ask for it.



**State Trend**

There was a decrease in positive responses (Always/almost always or Usually) from 2016 to 2017, but it was not statistically significant.



**Regional Detail**

Positive responses were more frequent among Region 1 respondents compared to Region 2, a statistically significant difference. Results of other comparisons were not significant.



Seattle Mariners

**Foster parents value both prompt responses and effective assistance.**

“Any time I call, the social worker calls me back within 24 hours. If she didn't have the answer, she got the answer and called me back.”

“If we have to call the cops because the child is out of control, we need help from the social worker now. In the middle of a crisis, we were told to call the after-hours number because the social worker was going home due to no overtime.”

“Availability could be improved, like when you call. It seems to me that it has improved over the last year.”

“They have come to our house when we have special children that have acted out. They have put people in the house overnight when we had problems. Whenever we have questions we get quick responses.”

“Answer my questions when I ask them. I asked one last year and still have never gotten an answer. They also could be more prompt when a kid tries to contact them.”

“It would be fantastic to have some sort of after-hours support line or email. If we have an urgent question or concern, but it's not an emergency, we usually have to wait until regular business hours.”

“We asked for the Social Security Number for one of our children for our re-licensing, for taxes and for adoption and didn't get it for eight months.”

“When I ask a question, they come to my house and answer.”

“The boss of my foster child is good at returning my calls, but his answers are not very helpful.”

“They listen to me because I insist that they listen. If I call and leave a message and many days pass I will leave more messages. I'm telling you, I'm very persistent.”

## 1.3 Access, Processes, and Coordination



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“Pretty good about calling back; they've been very good lately about doing that.”

“For the last four months, everything has changed for the better. Our calls are being returned and we are getting most things in a more timely manner. We were told that the old supervisor retired and right after that, things really turned around.”

“Answer their phones, clear their voicemail so a message can be left. Return calls in an appropriate time period.”

“My private agency staff always call me back, always respond to my e-mails within 12 hours. They help me problem solve.”

“Improve communication, answer their phone and return phone calls and messages. Our social worker is so hard to get ahold of; it's so frustrating!”

“They just don't answer phone calls and don't return phone calls or e-mails. They are very difficult to reach, and I don't think it is because they are uncaring. I think if staffing was better allocated, they would be able to answer calls and e-mails better.”

“There needs to be more phone support to help put out the little fires (doctors, authorization forms, bus passes etc.), because we know the social worker does not have time for a lot of the little things that can turn into big things if not taken care of right away.”

“If I need help with anything, I can always get ahold of them. Especially since they got a new telephone line that goes directly to the caseworker.”

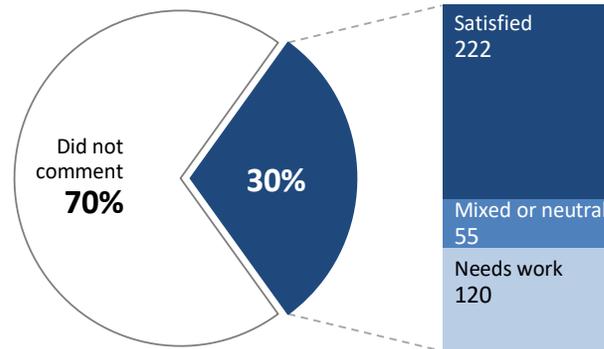
“Need someone to talk to during the weekends when the foster children act out.”

“There are two social workers. One of them responds same day via text; the other one is more challenging to get ahold of and will eventually respond in a few days by e-mail.”

### THEME | Phone/Staff Access

Thirty percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on access to staff by phone or e-mail. Most of these comments (222, or 56%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

397 (30%) commented on this topic



#### In urgent or emergent situations, foster parents need to be able to contact someone, even outside of normal office hours.

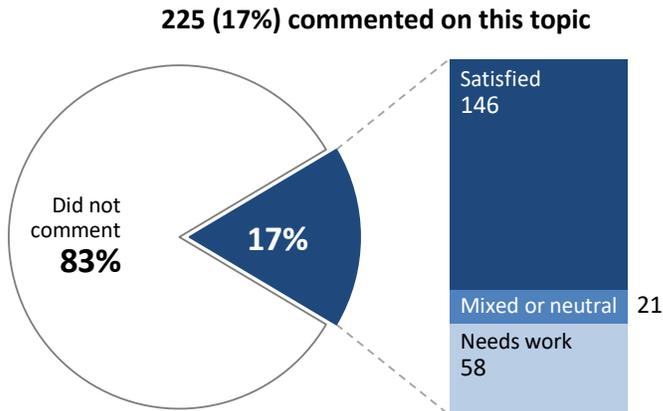
- Situations affecting the health and safety of the foster child or others in the family can arise at any time. Some foster parents related stories where they would have benefited from knowing how to get help from DSHS right away.
- Some of the resources for after-hours contact have not worked as expected in an emergency.

#### Even for routine questions and situations, a timely call-back or e-mail is important.

- Respondents suggested a number of different timeframes. For example, they suggested a requirement that social workers respond to calls and other inquiries within 24 or 48 hours.
- Some foster parents have found that since social workers have smart phones, being able to text back and forth has improved responsiveness. (See additional analysis, page 32.)

**THEME | Consistency of Contact**

Seventeen percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on consistency of contact by staff. Most of these comments (146, or 65%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.



**Most foster parents who talked about the monthly health and safety visits appreciated their value. Specifically, they like it when:**

- The visits occur at predictable times that take the foster parents’ and children’s schedules into account
- Staff make foster parents aware of any schedule changes
- Time is well spent

**Some requested that:**

- When there is more than one foster child in the household, the caseworkers coordinate their visits if possible
- They use the time to visit with both the foster parents and the children
- Social workers check in from time to time, even though there is no news to relay



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“When my social worker comes for the monthly visit, she always asks me if I have concerns or questions and we have a good talk.”

“One worker would report the child’s safety and well-being over the phone; the worker never even met the child. When I brought this concern up to her, her response was that she was busy and coming all the way out to our home just didn’t fit into her schedule.”

“It differs. Some are in contact with us all the time, some we don’t hear from at all.”

“They are very flexible. They come out and do Saturday visits since we both work during the week.”

“Our courtesy social worker was great. She came every month and listened. My private agency responds to my questions. As soon as they get information about the case, they let me know.”

“Private agency does really good about checking in with me and responding to e-mails.”

“The social workers are pretty good at touching base with us and doing their monthly meetings.”

“They reached out a lot because we had a child with very specific needs.”

“They’ve been consistent with the monthly visits, haven’t missed a month. There’s always some face-to-face time.”

“If the social worker does her health and safety check timely, we are grateful.”

“Check in or reach out more often. Don’t assume that because we don’t call you all the time, that we don’t enjoy a call or visit from you to ask how it’s going.”

“I receive e-mails asking if I need anything.”

## 1.3 Access, Processes, and Coordination



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“They do their best within the confines of the rules. We are thankful to have the child we have now.”

“The social workers and staff need to go by the WACs.”

“The system ties the social worker's hands, and therefore it is hard for her to do anything better.”

“DSHS should be following the law. We have had our foster children for two years and they have been in the system for five. DSHS is just now filing for removal of bio parental rights. It has taken way too long and DSHS have given the mother too many opportunities to fail; it has gone on too long.”

“When our social worker was ill, they gave us another one to fill in for her. She completely altered the direction of the case trying to ‘fix’ things and it turned out very badly. I am not sure what CA could do to fix that, but it was not good.”

“Allow a social worker to stay with one foster child for a reasonable period of time. I have had a foster child for five months and he has had five social workers in that period of time.”

“I have not had to change social workers or deal with other workers, so I feel very fortunate in that way.”

“More funds and less load for the social workers.”

“They consider the needs of the child but I wish they would consider them above what the bio parents want.”

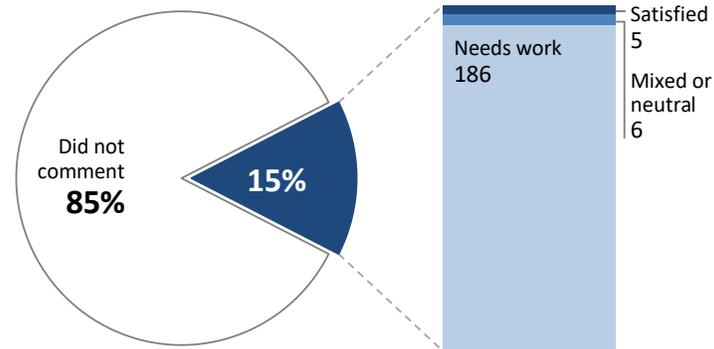
“The state really needs to find a way to make foster parents feel like they are part of the process. I am sure I do not know all the rules and regulations, but I know that this state needs to contract all their foster parent stuff to private agencies. They do a much better job.”

“There has to be a swing away from a focus on parental rights and refocus on the best outcome for the kids.”

### THEME | General Processes

Fifteen percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on general processes. Most of these comments (186, or 94%) were negative or suggested ways that processes could be improved.

197 (15%) commented on this topic



Comments about the foster system in general were included in this theme.

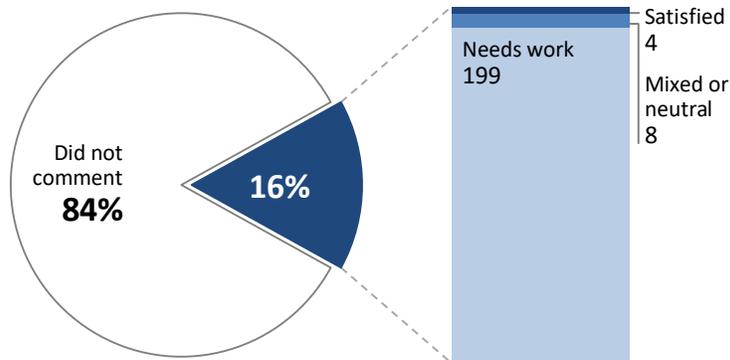
- Many respondents noted that the social workers are doing the best they can, given the laws and rules that govern foster care in Washington.
- Some foster parents expressed frustration with how the state deals with the children's biological parents.

Some respondents mentioned policies regarding social worker caseloads.

- Management practices that prevent caseworkers from staying with one case for an extended period are unpopular with foster parents.
- Large caseloads as a cause and effect of social worker turnover is discussed on page 22.

**THEME | Specific Processes**

Sixteen percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on one or more specific processes. Most of these comments (199, or 94%) were negative or suggested ways that processes could be improved. Eight comments (4%) were mixed or neutral, and four (2%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

**211 (16%) commented on this topic****Comments about the foster-to-adopt process often mentioned frustration with:**

- Long waits and unexpected delays
- Poor communication about changes in the case's status
- Inconsistent information about steps required for adoption

**Issues about reuniting foster children with their biological parents included:**

- Excessive time and "second chances" given to biological parents before terminating parental rights
- Policies and processes that favor the biological parents' wants and rights over the best interest of the child
- Abrupt removal of children from foster homes to be reunited with bio parents

**Respondents expressed concern about interactions between foster parents, social workers and the courts, including:**

- Concerns that the courts do not receive important information from the foster parents, and that foster parents are not updated about court processes concerning the child
- Excessive and unexplained delays and postponements

**Other comments on specific processes included requests that DSHS staff:**

- Follow the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) and other laws and policies consistently
- Provide more information and take more time during the placement process



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"Not visit the children at school and visit with the family instead."

"If the kids have a guardian ad litem the kids do not need an attorney."

"I feel that if there are questionable things happening in a foster home, they should be looked into. Or there should be someplace where we can voice our concerns anonymously."

"They could make all the rules for the social worker the same. Have complete and uniform rules for foster licenses as well."

"While adoption was our ultimate goal, there were some hiccups that I wanted to take our time with. The state was really pressuring me to adopt and I felt like it messed with the kids and my family. I wanted to take our time and we weren't able to do any of that."

"I would like to see some kind of standard policy, in writing, how private agency foster homes are supposed to work within DSHS and private home. It is confusing."

"The court system is very slow and it seems like the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing."

"It would be helpful if the child's attorney could talk to the foster parent. We have helpful information for the attorney that they never hear."

"In our most recent placement the adoption social worker did a phenomenal job making the whole process go smoothly and faster than is typical."

"Why are we not following the WAC guidelines? As a foster parent we have to adhere to all the guidelines, yet the state seems to keep dropping the ball, sending kids back to situations that they know are already on rocky ground. Yet we keep doing it, only for the child to come back into the system."

## 1.3 Access, Processes, and Coordination



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"The private agency staff makes the paperwork easier for us."

"If there is something the child needs, they are on top of it; or if they need a waiver for something, they get it."

"Do a better job of getting their paperwork in order and not having to send out so many copies of papers every month. For example, do not send me a monthly notice that I have a child in my care. In the past, it would be one letter that gave me a range of dates of care."

"Communication between the social worker and me, especially about court dates and even getting the actual 'caregivers report to the court' form for the court hearing."

"Be more forthcoming about information. We should not have to wait several months after placement to get vital information. The paperwork needs to be more current than two years old as it turned out to be incorrect."

"When I am waiting for consent forms to be sent to a psychiatrist, the appointment comes up and I go only to find out the consent forms were never sent to the doctor's office."

"Maybe they should make a respite form to look more like the mileage reimbursement form. The foster parent then could submit the requests to the social worker so he or she could simply approve them for payment."

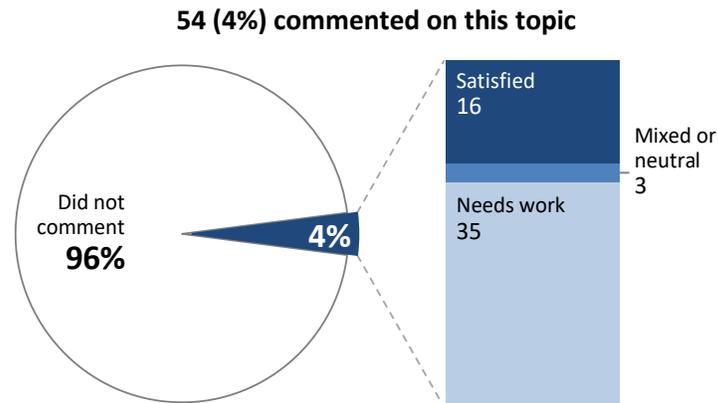
"They need to process paperwork better, and they need to be willing to answer questions about the paperwork."

"The problem we have is mainly with our licensing. The process and paperwork are extremely slow! We adopted one child and it took over six months to get everything in order."

"We want to take our kids on a vacation and the worker is dragging her feet on getting the paperwork together and our travel and placement letter."

### THEME | Paperwork Processes

Four percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on paperwork. Most of these comments (35, or 65%) were negative or suggested ways that paperwork processes could be improved.



#### Some foster parents suggested ways that specific forms and letters could be improved.

- Reduce the number of letters and notifications mailed to foster parents, especially when the information remains the same for many months.
- Make the paperwork for similar processes look the same and require the same type of information.

#### Many paperwork comments focused on how long it takes to receive necessary forms and authorizations, including:

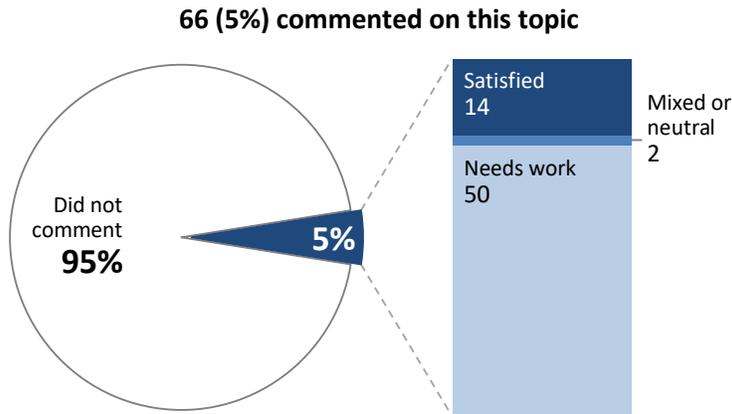
- Authorization for foster children's medical treatment
- Permission to take the child out of state
- Adoption forms and information

#### Other paperwork-related comments discussed:

- Needing help with filling out forms correctly
- Having more support staff who can organize paperwork (instead of social workers)

**THEME | Coordination**

Five percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on coordination. Most of these comments (50, or 76%) were negative or suggested ways that coordination could be improved.



**The foster parents who commented on this topic were mostly dissatisfied with coordination. They mentioned problems with coordination and communication among:**

- Individual social workers
- Social workers and their supervisors
- Private foster care agencies and Children’s Administration (CA)
- Various other government programs (such as courts) and social workers, agencies and CA

**When coordination goes well, it is appreciated by foster parents.**

- Private foster care agencies, which are funded by CA, often play an important role in ensuring that everyone involved knows what’s going on.
- Some social workers make particular efforts to make sure that all services work together to serve the child’s interest and to make things go more smoothly for the foster parents.



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“Honestly I would say, that they need to communicate better with one another. My private agency and the state do not communicate very well. I feel like the messenger for both parties.”

“Licensing and social workers need to find a better way to get along. When they can't agree and something doesn't get done, the child suffers. Communication needs to be ongoing and consistent from one social worker to another. Social workers need to keep their supervisors updated about cases. That way when we need to call the supervisor, she can actually help.”

“Our courtesy social worker that does the monthly visits is really wonderful. She intervenes on our behalf with the child's social worker when the social worker does not get back to us or is not helping.”

“One of the biggest things I don't like is that every social worker says and teaches something completely different. I can't tell you how many times inconsistencies have happened. I'll be told one thing from one worker, and then get the exact opposite from another. Same thing goes for traveling with a foster child. The laws are so confusing, and I don't think the workers are on the same page.”

“It is hard when kids' cases transition to different social workers. More communication between workers as the transition happens!”

“The private agency social workers come out monthly and work with us, and they advocate for us when we need answers by dealing with the state social workers, so we can try to get on the same page.”

“They combine their visits so that we do not have too many and just one.”

## 1.3 Access, Processes, and Coordination



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“My social worker responds to text messages within a very quick period of time. It helps knowing there is someone there helping us when we have questions to ask.”

“Good communication and easy to get ahold of them; really like texting so that’s been good.”

“Open communication and make sure they call us back or reply to our text message!”

“Once in a while it takes a while to get a response to a text, but this is a minor problem.”

“I get a pretty speedy response. Texts are great because they respond within a half hour; now that I see that I share with others; I’ve worked with three different social workers and all three have responded.”

“I really enjoy my social worker, she is very open to different means of communication. She e-mails, and texts, and the flexible communication is really awesome.”

“They are very, very good at answering their text messages.”

“My kids have said many times that getting in touch with social workers is basically impossible for them. Texting has been great for the kids to try and contact the workers so I have a written record of the conversations.”

“Have a quicker response time to our texts or e-mails; they sometimes seem to go into a black hole.”

“Lately the workers have new numbers where we can text, call and leave messages. That’s really nice.”

“Our previous social worker was awesome. She would text me with answers which was a huge deal.”

“Now that they have texting, they get back to me in a more timely manner.”

“Text message updates once a month would be very helpful.”

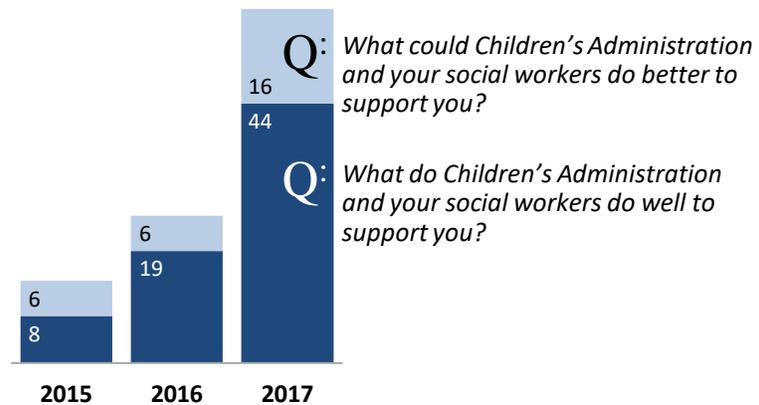
### THEME | Communicating by Text

In the fall of 2015, approximately 400 Children’s Administration (CA) employees were given dedicated work iPhones to pilot their usefulness followed by full statewide deployment of iPhones between April and June 2016.

In the survey done between October 2016 and September 2017, 44 foster parent respondents mentioned the words “text” or “cell” when asked what Children’s Administration or their social workers do well to support them; 16 respondents mentioned these terms in answer to the question about what could be done better.

Foster parents mentioned “cell” or “text” more frequently in 2016 compared to 2015, and more frequently in 2017 compared to 2016. Most mentions were found in response to Question 1, which asks about positive experiences.

#### Number of times “text” or “cell” mentioned



Although it is too soon to tell whether being able to text has improved communication between foster parents and social workers, these results suggest that making this mode of communication available has made a favorable impression with foster parents in general.

## Information



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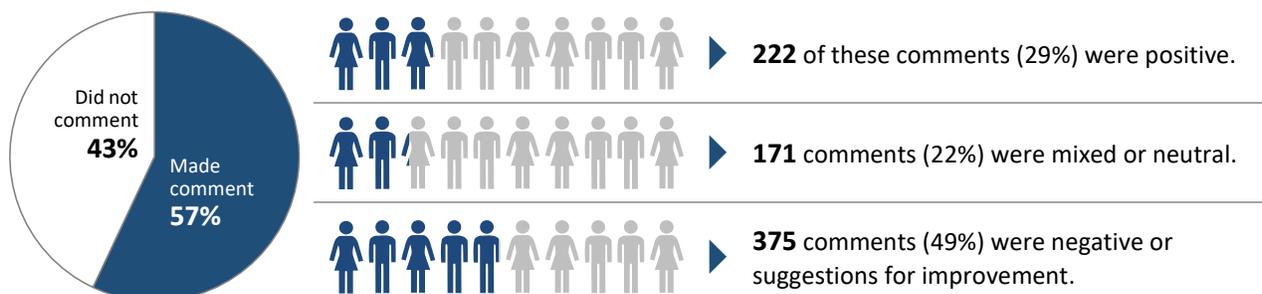
### Foster parents want accurate and timely information about the child in their care, the child’s case progress, and available resources.

Information is very important to foster parents. When asked directly, nearly seven in ten foster parents said they usually, almost always, or always received adequate information needed to care for the children placed with them. However, about half of those who made comments (49%) suggested that information sharing could be improved.

In this section:

- The following page shows answers to the structured question about adequacy of information
- Pages 35-36 summarize open-ended responses related to information

#### More than half of respondents (768, or 57%) commented on information



## 1.4 Information



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### Foster parents commented on how important it is to know the whole story—before and during a placement.

“Case workers very informational; any time I need anything and I call either the liaison or case workers they give me what I need, no problems.”

“Keep us updated about what's going on in the case. They will answer us when we ask a question but they are not very good at keeping us updated without us asking. Sometimes we don't get all the info before a child is placed; it would make life much easier for everyone.”

“Increase sharing of information that is important to supporting the child and keeping my home safe. Some social workers feel that foster parents are baby sitters and don't deserve to know anything about the child, which leaves the foster parent vulnerable and unable to adequately prepare for the child's known needs and behaviors.”

“Give us better information about the foster child. We can provide better care of the child if we know the whole story and the needs of the child.”

“Children's Administration and our social workers do well at providing medical insurance needs, connecting us to some services, and providing basic information.”

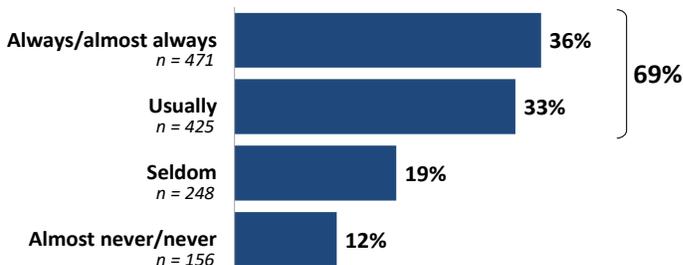
“Don't tell us important information after the child is gone from the house.”

“While having a foster child in my care, it would be nice to know the family history of the bio family so when I take the foster child to the doctor, I have backup information to provide to the doctor so he can treat the foster child.”

“The initial placement was done well. The medical and educational history was provided.”

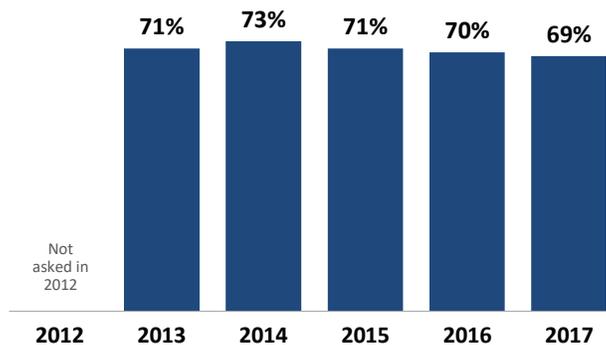
### QUESTION | Do you get adequate information about the needs of the children placed with you, such as medical, behavioral, developmental, and educational needs?

Of the 1,300 foster parents who answered this question, about two-thirds reported that they get adequate information always, almost always, or usually.



### State Trend

There was a decrease of 1% in positive responses (Always/almost always or Usually) from 2016 to 2017, which was not statistically significant.



### Regional Detail

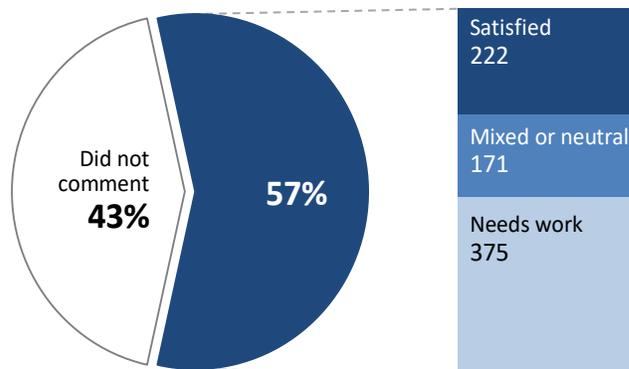
Positive responses (Always/almost always or Usually) were more frequent among Regions 1 and 3 respondents compared to Region 2. Both differences were statistically significant.



**THEME | Information**

Fifty-seven percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on the information they receive about their foster child or the foster care process. About half of these comments (375, or 49%) were negative or suggested ways that information could be improved.

**768 (57%) commented on this topic**



**Many comments in this theme focused on the importance of knowing as much as possible about a foster child's situation, so that the foster parents can:**

- Be comfortable that they will be able to care for the child well
- Respond appropriately if problems arise
- Prepare their homes, families, and schedules accordingly

**Foster parents also commented on the need for information about the foster child's situation, such as:**

- Dates and times of court hearings and other meetings
- Details about the child's biological family's situation so that they can let the child know what's going on
- Developments in the biological parents' cases, especially when they may have serious consequences for the foster family and the children in their care

**Comments in this theme also included requests and appreciation for information about resources, including:**

- Educational and medical programs that are available at no or reduced cost to foster children
- Community organizations that provide enrichment for the child and support for the family
- Other ways to access advice and help

More on resources can be found in the next section of this report.



Meri Waterhouse, DSHS/CA

"Being more forthright and open to the foster parent regarding where they see the case going or strengths and weaknesses that they see in the bio parents' case. Give the foster parents more information so they can help with the case instead of sort of being in the dark. Then, we don't know if the bio parents are on the right track: what can the foster parents do to help them? If the social worker doesn't see the foster child going back to bio parents, it is hard for foster parents to know what to expect."

"I got a good social worker who was very seasoned; she was given the opportunity to stick with us beginning to end and she knew she had to be there 100%, so she was right there with answering any questions."

"The social workers could open up more, include us more in the information of court and other case progress. Right now we are being left with a lot of uncertainty. Include us in decision making for certain situations, especially since we have had our child since birth."

"Provide more information about the children; they need to stop being so 'hush-hush' about the bio parents and give us all the facts. The state workers need to come out for more home visits, check-in visits."

"Overall, they do a good job keeping us in the loop. We did have one child in the past year where we did not have all the information we could have. She was moved without us knowing this was going to happen. We had no notice of this move especially since we were told this was going to be a long placement with this child."

"I wish all the parties shared information with each other so that we don't have to spend so much time rounding it all up."

## 1.4 Information

### THEME | Information

Although foster parents recognize that some information about the child in their care and the biological families' situations must be kept confidential, they often described situations in which they feel that more open sharing of information would have improved their experiences as foster parents. They would also like to know more about resources available to help the children in their care.

#### Voices

##### **Information about the foster child's case is important.**

"More communication and being included in the meeting about the child. Updating the foster parents as to what is happening in the case. When I call, he is good about providing me with the information, but it would be good that he calls me first with this information when there is current information to be passed on."

"The plan for our kids is adoption and I think there needs to be better communication in the process; more clarity when we're trying to move into the process."

"I would really like to know what the long term plan is, but I don't know what is going on until I get into court hearings and then surprises come out. I get one message at home and then hear brand new things at court hearings."

"Send out court reports in a timely manner and notifying us of the court dates."

"We are in the process of adopting our foster child. When termination was recently postponed, we were not told why. The social worker needs to be invested in the foster children. It was three months before the social worker came to meet us and the children. I had to contact her supervisor to get any action from her."

##### **Foster parents frequently comment on the need for more information about the child's background, before placement when possible.**

"Have standard packets of information that are given to anybody who has a child placed in their care. There should not be a separation between relative care and licensed foster parents with regard to information on requirements and resources for the children. I think it does a disservice to anybody in relative care when information is withheld and not provided. Relative care providers should not have to research for that information when they do not know what they are looking for."

"They need to stop dumping these kids at my house and then ignore me for up to two weeks at a time; no one is in contact with me. When you first get a foster child they don't tell you anything about them; that is horrible. We have the right to know everything about the child placed in our care."

"Any time we have needed their help, they have stepped in to help us. A few of our social workers have had really good advice on how to serve our child who has special needs."

"They get back to me in a timely manner. If she cannot answer my questions she points me in a direction to get the answer."

"We are going through adoption right now. It would be very nice if they would give foster parents more information about adoption and resources. We are very much on our own on these issues especially when we are adopting foster children with special needs."

"They need to track to PCP, dentist information, old medical records, no matter how long the child has been with the Department. There is very little information about how to support my child in regards to family for sibling contact. There is no information about resources available for clothing vouchers, Christmas boxes for foster children, etc. I just found out about his eligibility for youth bus passes. I have been paying for these. My foster child is close to aging out of the system. The social worker has no information about what will be available to him. I have to get information from other foster parents. Set up a system that tracks medical records for foster kids, especially those who have been in care for years. Develop resources in the community and make this information known."

"There is no education tutoring available for the foster children that are very behind in school. The foster parents need to be informed if the child is behind in school."

"They are very good about sending out information about the needs of the child."

"Offering resources is a big way that they support us. And helping us be aware of the process was pretty good."

##### **Some respondents offered general comments about how information should be provided.**

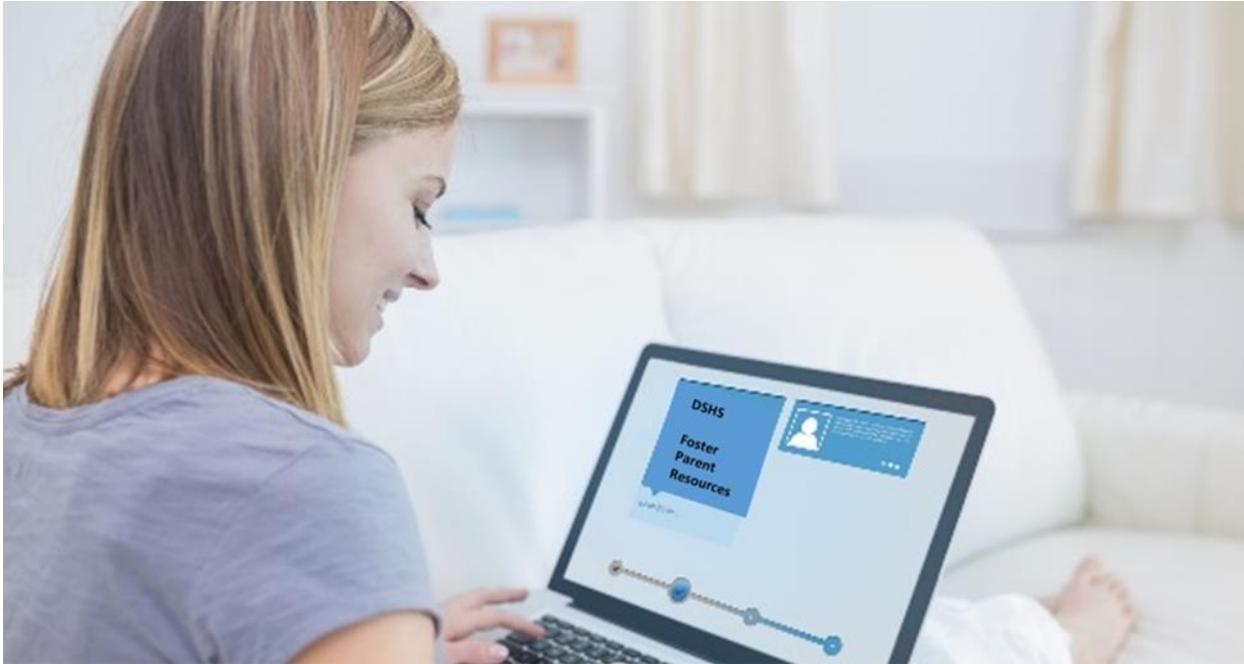
"They are very responsive to questions. If they don't have a ready answer, they find an answer."

"The current social worker that I have is in training, and whenever I would ask her for something she would have to get the answer from her supervisor and I would never get the answer by the time that I needed it."

"Hire former foster parents to be available to answer practical questions and even go out to a home to help in any way they can. The most valuable information and help comes from those that have been there/done that."

"The social worker needs to present information in a more sympathetic manner."

## Resources



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### Foster children may need a variety of resources when placed in a home, from basic clothing items to complex medical and behavioral health services.

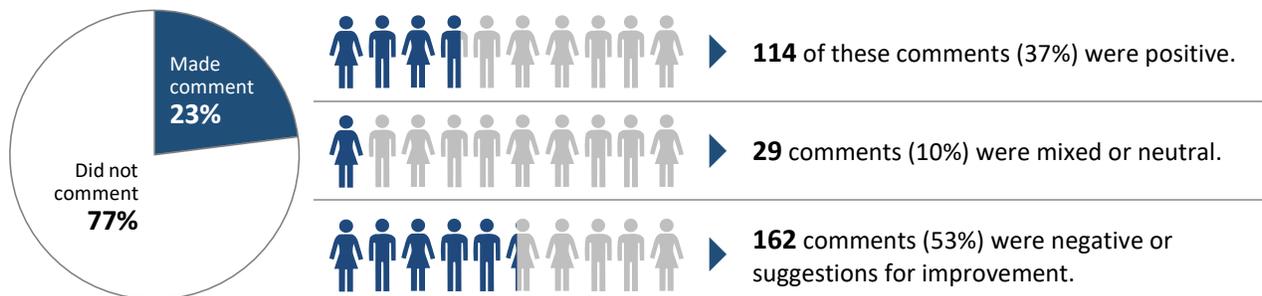
This section focuses on resources provided to foster parents for the children in their care, such as respite care or clothing vouchers. Comments related to payments and reimbursements to foster parents from DSHS are also included in this section.

Just over half (53%) of foster parents who commented about resources identified problems. However, 37% indicated that they are pleased with the resources available to their foster children.

The first five pages of this section are arranged by topic, in the following order: medical, dental, and mental health resources; respite care; transportation; child care; and financial matters.

Page 43 contains an overview of comments about various other resources.

#### 305 (23%) respondents commented on resources available for foster families



## 1.5 Resources



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“We had a lot of difficulty in navigating the insurance and doctor system through DSHS.”

“They come with me to doctor appointments to verify that everything is okay with medications.”

“We had a little girl who needed a surgery done, and it took five months to get anything approved.”

“When it comes to giving us services for the kids, one size does not fit all. I don't know how to explain it except that there should not be a cap on services like counseling. If the child is progressing, keep letting them go until the counselor or doctor says they are stable enough to taper down.”

“They schedule appointments for him and keep track of when he needs dental and medical check-ups.”

“About a year ago I had a foster child diagnosed with cerebral palsy after five months in my care. I came to find out that he was previously diagnosed with this disease and no one had shared this with us. I could have provided him all kinds of services if I had known this at the beginning.”

“They are good about referrals for the kids' medical needs.”

“I wish that the social workers were more informed as to available services; and people who are willing to supply those services to the foster children. We were recommended a neurologist, but the social worker told us it was not an option even though it was recommended. Later, we went up the chain of command, and were offered a neurologist and told how to get one.”

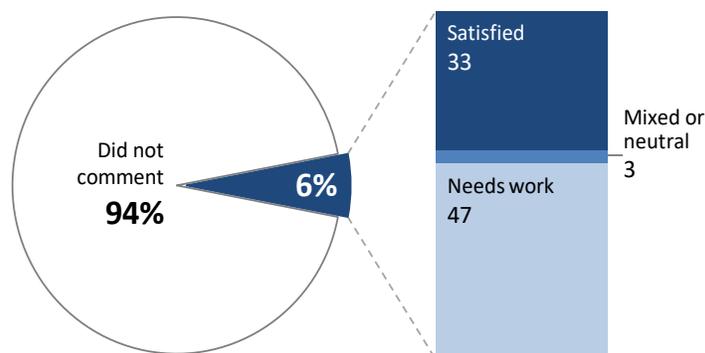
“My foster daughter is diabetic, so we had a lot of help with her medical needs. I really appreciate that.”

“We have a child with special needs so our case worker responds like immediately with doctor visits and hospital visits.”

### THEME | Medical, Dental, and Mental Health Resources

Six percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on medical, dental, and mental health resources for the children in their care. Most of these comments (47, or 57%) were negative or suggested improvements.

83 (6%) commented on this topic



#### Positive comments in this theme tended to concern:

- Social workers assisting with referrals to doctors, specialists and mental health services
- Special care taken with children who are medically fragile or have special needs
- Help with getting the child to their appointments
- Help navigating the insurance system

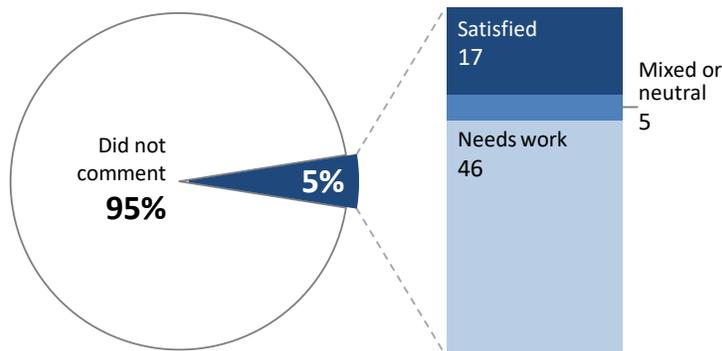
#### Many of the negative comments about medical, dental, and mental health resources discussed situations in which:

- Information about the child's medical history is not communicated
- Seemingly arbitrary decisions when DSHS staff approve or deny a request for health-related services

## THEME | Respite Care

Five percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on resources for respite care. Most of these comments (46, or 68%) were negative or suggested improvements.

### 68 (5%) commented on this topic



### Foster parents who commented on respite care often mentioned:

- Difficulties in arranging for appropriate care in a timely manner
- Uncertainty about the policies and procedures for getting respite services
- Delays in getting paid when they provide respite care for others

### Those who made positive or mixed comments about respite agreed that:

- Social worker help in arranging respite care is appreciated
- Access to respite improves their fostering experience, especially when they care for children with serious problems



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“Our social worker is wonderful. When we were going on vacation, she worked really hard to find us respite care.”

“When I needed respite, I gave DSHS five months’ notice; when I called DSHS three days before my trip, they had forgotten. My private agency stepped in and within three hours I had respite care provided.”

“Have more respite available. Once every couple years is not enough.”

“I gave them plenty of notice and they gave me the gal who was supposed to cover my respite; it was all neatly organized. A couple days in, I called and the gal told me they changed plans and he was taken to a different respite provider than we expected. When we got home, we expected him to be returned to us. We found out after calling around that he was not going to be returned to us, and was taken to a previous foster home. He is autistic, so all the information I gave to the respite provider was useless because they changed the respite provider to someone who didn’t know all the issues that would have been easily handled with the original respite provider.”

“They are willing and helpful in looking for respite care.”

“We are grateful that they were able to find respite care for our foster child with behavioral problems. I know it was difficult and we were very happy we did not have to cancel our vacation plans.”

“Just because we are stay-at-home mothers does not mean we don’t need a day or two to ourselves. It would be so great to know that I could get daycare a couple times a month to go grocery shopping or just even take a shower and have lunch with a friend. Also, I did respite care in July, August and September for several different kids. I haven’t gotten paid for that yet.”

## 1.5 Resources



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“Worker was great; when unable to take child to the doctor, the caseworker did. Very accommodating with foster mom’s work schedule.”

“The transportation system needs improvement so that our jobs are not affected by visits with bio parents.”

“It would be helpful if there was some assistance in getting everyone to the places that they need to go.”

“More transportation help would be huge because we have 5-7 kids most of the time, and it is very difficult to juggle full-time jobs, the kids’ school schedules, and the free-time activities they need. If we could get more help with transportation, we could actually take more kids.”

“Problems with transporter not going through social worker or the agency before they reschedule transportation.”

“The social worker should not expect my spouse to take time off work all the time to provide for the child, such as transportation. Some of the requests by the social worker for transportation have been downright unreasonable.”

“She is very good in emergencies. For instance, if our child needs to be picked up from school and I cannot leave home, she sends a case aide to pick the child up. This is very good.”

“Mileage reimbursement should be given on time without a hassle.”

“No follow up, no information on what to do to get the reimbursement. Give correct information on procedures so everything goes through the first time.”

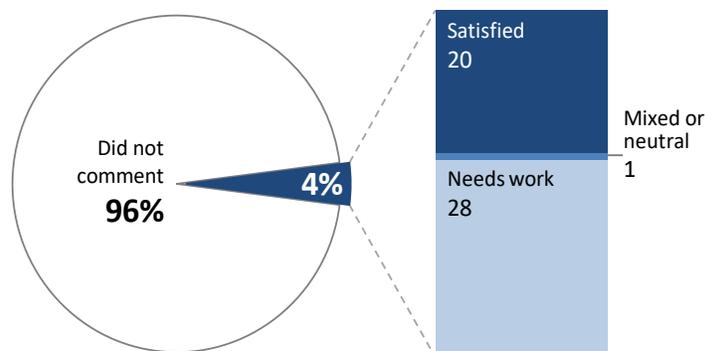
“You want us to drive the foster child to appointments but it is difficult to get paid for gas costs.”

“Transporters and training for transporters, more availability. Telling us more about the system.”

### THEME | Transportation

Four percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on transportation resources. Most of these comments (28, or 57%) were negative or suggested improvements. Forty-one percent (20) expressed satisfaction, and one (2%) was a mixed response.

49 (4%) commented on this topic



#### Foster children may have many needs for transportation, including doctor appointments, school activities and family visits. Foster parents who commented in this category mentioned:

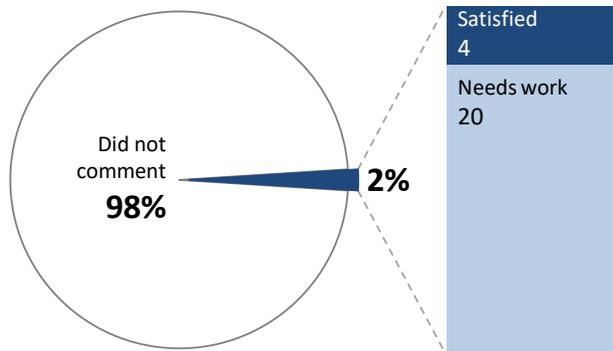
- Appreciation for DSHS staff who provided or arranged for transportation when needed
- Difficulties in meeting all the children’s transportation needs, especially when they care for several children

#### Some problems were reported with reimbursement for transportation costs, such as:

- Reimbursement paperwork being lost or not being filed promptly
- Foster parents not being given enough information or being given incorrect information about how to use this resource

**THEME | Child Care**

Two percent of the 1,344 respondents who offered a response to the open-ended questions commented on resources for child care. Most of these comments (20, or 83%) were negative or suggested ways that child care assistance could be improved.

**24 (2%) commented on this topic****Most comments in this theme identified ways that obtaining child care for foster children could be improved, including:**

- More consistent assistance paying for child care
- More assistance in finding care for children with special needs
- Better communication about child care resources that are available for foster families
- More flexibility in applying rules in special situations



Getty Images/iStock

"I have a special needs child. I had a ridiculously hard time finding child care for this child and I tried everything. I would hate to give up this placement just because I can't find someone to watch her so I can go to work."

"The state needs to pay for after-school daycare and activities."

"We need more child care options in the Eastern Washington area."

"We need after school supervision for older kids. Right now it's only provided for kids under 12 years. I don't like having them unsupervised at home, so I don't take these older kids. But, I'd like to take the older kids if you would change these rules."

"DSHS has never paid for anything. They're not covering her child care, even though the state is legally required to pay for it. Her care needs far exceed my income. I have paid for everything out-of-pocket and never once been reimbursed for it."

"They help me with after-school child care."

"We were told that we could find our own babysitter. And when we did, the people we found were never paid for the child care they provided. No one ever told us that we could be reimbursed for child care if we were working parents. We provided and paid for a nanny for many months before another foster parent told us that we could be reimbursed."

"We cannot get any care for our children if we don't work and make extra money. I think we should be entitled to daycare a couple times so that we don't have to pay for day care. It is easy to pay for daycare when you work, but it is harder when you live on Social Security."

"They do well providing support or child supervision; with two working parents, you know, it's very hard."

## 1.5 Resources



Getty Images/iStock

“The payment system is all wrong, I’m still waiting for a check from the summer, and that is ridiculous.”

“Foster parents need a higher reimbursement. It takes a lot to provide for these kids, and I sometimes think that the state forgets that. Not that it’s about the money, but it would just be very helpful to get a bit more. We send our kids to private school, if that’s what they want to do, and the state does not offer any help with that, but the state could offer more support in other areas.”

“They make our monthly payments on time, except for mileage reimbursement.”

“The children that I have are way off of the scale for what is normal. The state needs to increase the money that foster homes get every month.”

“Give us our reimbursement for sports, etc. in a timely manner instead of months to a year later.”

“They did absolutely nothing to support us except get us our money on time.”

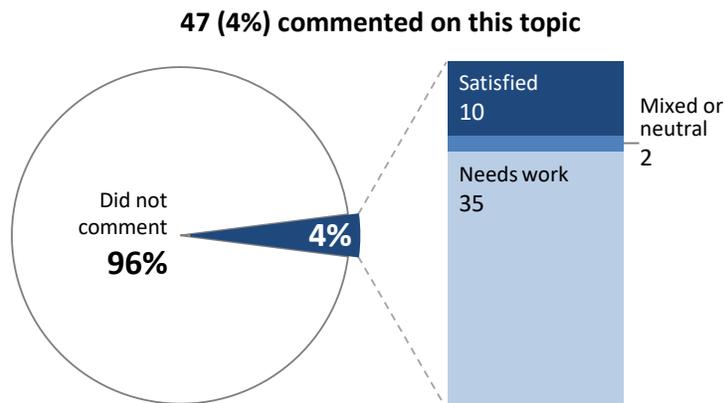
“Financial compensation seems to be good for what we are doing.”

“Foster parents need to be reimbursed for their time and travel to go to meetings like HUB meetings, 1624 meetings, any meetings that foster parents go to, including trainings that are required to do. Classes are free but we still have to pay for daycare.”

“One case worker told me that I could buy some formula for the baby on Friday afternoon and get reimbursed. The case workers changed and the new case worker said no to the reimbursement. We have submitted paperwork all the way back to February 2017 for many expenses and many of these requests have not been paid. One item was a car seat. No reason has been given for non-payment.”

### THEME | Financial Matters

Four percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on financial resources, including reimbursements. Most of these comments (35, or 75%) were negative or suggested improvements.



#### Respondents mentioned several issues that have come up regarding payment and reimbursement from DSHS:

- The time it takes to receive reimbursement seems unreasonably long
- The scales used to decide how much to compensate foster parents seem to be mismatched to certain situations
- There is a lack of information about which resources and services are reimbursable

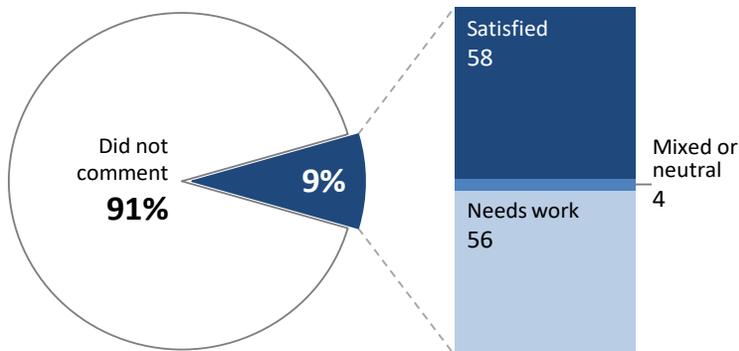
#### Foster parents appreciate it when:

- They receive reimbursements promptly
- Reimbursement is available for extra activities and services that individual children need
- The amount they receive for providing services seems fair

## THEME | Other Resources

Nine percent of the 1,344 respondents who offered a response to the open-ended questions commented on other resources to help them care for foster children, such as clothing vouchers. About half of these comments (58, or 49%) expressed satisfaction and about half (56, or 48%) were negative or suggested improvements.

**118 (9%) commented on this topic**



### Foster parents mentioned resources not covered in the previous themes, including:

- Clothing vouchers
- Extra food
- Special educational assistance
- Services such as day camps

### Experiences receiving other resources vary. Foster parents mentioned:

- Appreciation for social workers who “go the extra mile” to get kids what they need
- Frustration with long delays in receiving resources, especially clothing for children who do not have any at the time of placement
- Inconsistencies in how much social workers and foster parents know about what resources are available



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“They leave us alone to do the job of foster parenting. They trust us to care for the children properly.”

“Should not take two to three months to get a voucher when the child has no clothing at time of placement.”

“Educational support for the child.”

“They need to have resources for the children that have special needs and have more support towards the foster parents caring for these children. That's the children that get kicked out of day care and school and have nowhere else to go; kids with behavior problems.”

“The clothing vouchers help a lot; otherwise, I do it myself.”

“There are a lot of resources available to the foster child and that is a good thing. But to keep kids from moving from home to home, the focus should also be on resources for the foster family should they need them. Having a foster child can be very difficult and disruptive at times. Before it gets to the point where the child is so disruptive that the family can no longer deal with it, someone should be on hand to help solve the problem in place. The solution should not be that the problem is just passed on to another foster family. More transparency with regard to resources available.”

“Tribal license provides vouchers for food and clothing for the foster child.”

“We need help with providing a day camp for one of our kids. The judge agrees with us, but the state isn't going along with it.”

“They have provided me with resources that have been very helpful.”

“The DSHS office is paying someone's salary to run a clothing store for foster parents to get clothing at no cost for the foster kids.”



## Other Sources of Foster Parent Support



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### Foster parents receive support from a variety of sources.

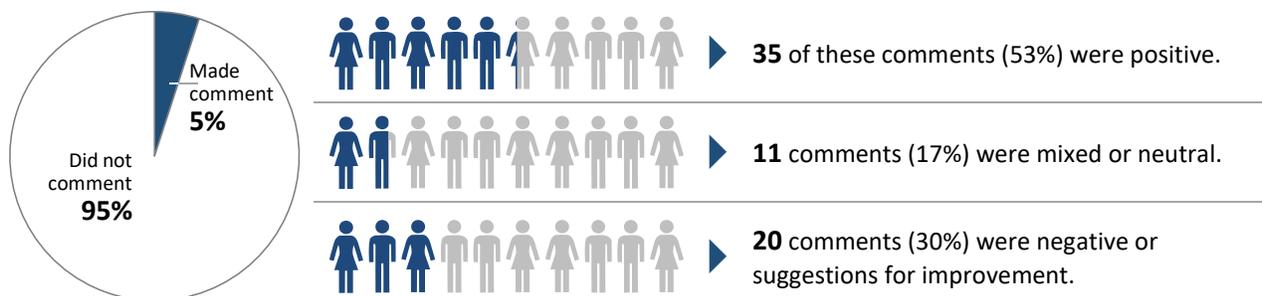
This section focuses on support provided to foster parents and foster children by two groups:

- 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

Most foster parents who commented on support received from various sources in their community were pleased. However, some do not feel well supported and others find that existing support is not well coordinated. Positive comments about support groups suggest a desire for more contact with their peers.

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

### 66 respondents (5%) made comments on other sources of support not covered in the previous sections



## 1.6 Other Sources of Support



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“The CASA staffer was fantastic and a constant source of calm. We were blessed to have her in the process.”

“The Fostering Washington group has made themselves available to me for anything I need and I think they are great.”

“When disabilities are diagnosed for the child, help more with groups and extra support.”

“I think it would be good if foster parents were offered some sort of counseling support like the children are. Think of the foster parents as family like the bio parents are.”

“They give us quite a bit of information as to foster child needs and the past that they can tell us. Private agency communication is very good. Foster child’s guardian ad litem is very easy to contact.”

“My guardian ad litem is an angel from God, but everyone else is a no.”

“My private agency is starting a support group which should be helpful. Need more of a support network for the foster parents.”

“Set up a group to help foster parents deal with the grief when a foster child who has been in their home for a long time is moved out.”

“Suggest that each foster family write a profile of themselves and put it on the DSHS website so that we can connect with one another. This would build community for the foster parents.”

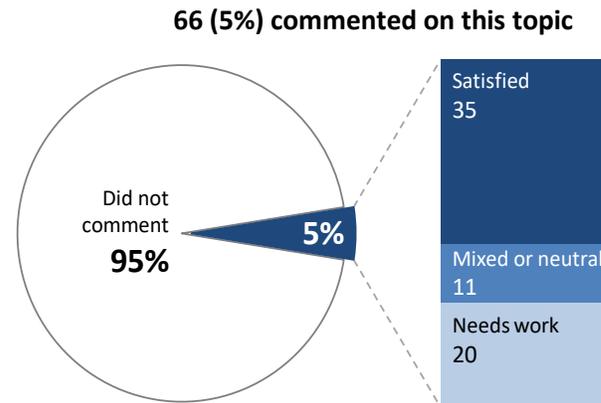
“The private agency supports me with case aid support which is very helpful with special needs children in the home.”

“They have events and things like that, those are nice.”

“We need genuine foster parent contacts. Help us. I need a daytime or evening support group. They tell us how they handle certain challenges of the foster children and the system.”

### THEME | Other Sources of Foster Parent Support

Five percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on other sources of foster parent support for their roles as foster parents. Most of these comments (35, or 53%) expressed satisfaction.



#### Other professionals provide important support for the foster care process, including:

- Court-appointed guardians ad litem and special advocates who help represent the child’s interest in court cases
- Not-for-profit community-based organizations

#### Support groups for foster parents are often mentioned and help in a variety of ways, including:

- Sharing practical advice about local resources
- Encouraging foster parents who are experiencing a difficult situation with a foster child
- Providing input from experienced, sympathetic foster parents

#### Parents commenting about other types of support expressed:

- Appreciation for foster family events sponsored by Children’s Administration
- Desire for grief support for foster parents when children leave their home

## Foster Parent Training



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### **Part 2 of this report examines foster parents' responses to questions about training provided by Children's Administration and affiliated agencies.**

The Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, a partnership between Children's Administration and the state's leading universities, offers education and training programs to Washington child welfare staff and caregivers. Both Children's Administration and the Alliance use foster parent feedback from this survey and other sources to update training opportunities. Foster parents also receive training through other organizations. The survey responses reflect training received from all sources.

Most respondents are satisfied with training, especially increased access to training through the Internet. Difficulties remain with access to in-person training due to schedules, locations, travel costs and the need for child care. Also, the interaction that in-person classes facilitate is greatly valued. Some foster parents requested increased options and flexibility in choices.

#### **This part of the report contains the following sections:**

- Section 2.1: Training Quality and Helpfulness
- Section 2.2: Trainers
- Section 2.3: General Training
- Section 2.4: Specific Training Topics
- Section 2.5: Access
- Section 2.6: Alternative Training Formats
- Section 2.7: Voice and Choice
- Section 2.8: Training Information
- Section 2.9: Support Beyond Training



## Training Quality and Helpfulness



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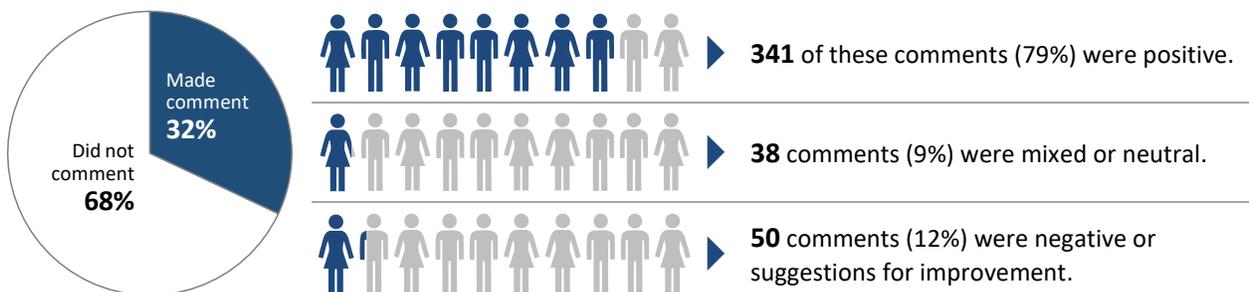
### Most foster parents give high marks to the training they receive.

Since 2012, foster parents have given the training they receive consistently positive ratings, and 2017 was no exception. Eighty-seven percent of respondents agreed that the training they received adequately prepared them to care for the foster children in their homes. However, positive responses to this question were significantly higher among Region 3 respondents compared to Region 2.

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?"

Pages 51-52 address foster parents' comments about the quality and helpfulness of training as a whole, and from specific agencies or programs.

### 429 respondents (32%) commented on foster parent training quality and helpfulness



## 2.1 Training Quality and Helpfulness



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### Most foster parents said that the training they've received has been helpful.

"All the information was helpful. They told us what we could do and what we could not do."

"It's taught us a lot about emotional support and a lot about understanding. The training is quite useful."

"It seemed helpful at the time, but too much of the regulations turned out to be incorrect."

"Overall, it is really good training and it covers just about everything. It covered a broad range of issues and concerns."

"I think the training has been excellent. The required components of training are very helpful. These are important topics."

"It's good. There are a lot of opportunities to learn and the trainers are good. It's pretty solid as-is."

"Some of the Core training regarding basic needs was helpful. Have gone to the Refresh Conference and that was very helpful and was well done."

### Some expressed reservations about the quality and helpfulness of training.

"The classes are helpful, but I am 72 years old and I have five kids, been fostering for years. So some classes are a bit 'are you kidding me, I know this song and dance.'"

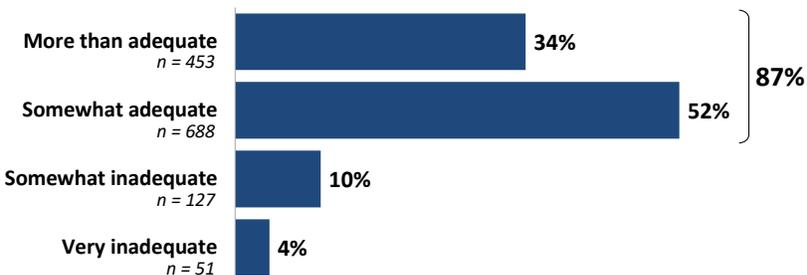
"I felt like all the training we did receive was really helpful and beneficial information. A lot of this is stuff you really have to experience. I also thought it was beneficial that our agency had experienced foster parents come in and talk to us. That was valuable."

"The training is okay. They don't tell you the bad side of it."

"Based on my work background, I already knew so much that I didn't get a lot out of the training."

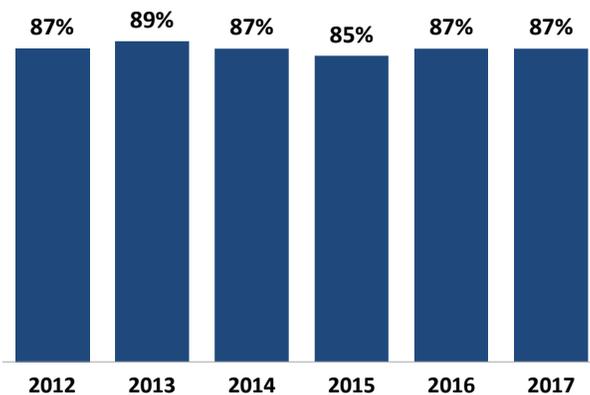
### QUESTION | Overall, thinking about all the training you have had in the last three years, how adequately has it prepared you to care for the basic needs of foster children placed in your home?

Of the 1,319 foster parents who answered this question, most reported that they always, almost always or usually get adequate information.



### State Trend

There was a change of less than 1% in positive responses (Always/almost always or Usually) from 2016 to 2017, which was not statistically significant.



### Regional Detail

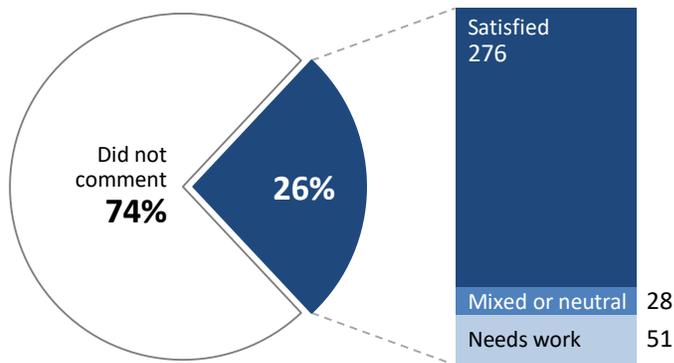
Differences among regions were not statistically significant.



**THEME | Overall Quality and Helpfulness of Training**

Twenty-six percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on the overall quality and helpfulness of training. Some of the responses included in this theme were comments praising or criticizing overall training, while others were simply a response of “Nothing” to one of the questions. Most of these comments (276, or 78%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

**355 (26%) commented on this topic**



**Detailed Responses**

Comments praising or criticizing the general quality of training were provided by 221 foster parents.

- 169 made a positive comment about overall training (76% of comments addressing overall training).
- 30 criticized overall training (14%).
- 22 offered neutral or mixed comments (10%).

**“Nothing” Responses**

The comments in this theme also include those made by 187 respondents who answered “Nothing” when asked how foster parent training is helpful or could be improved.

- 160 survey respondents replied “Nothing” to the question “How could foster parent training be improved?” (“Nothing” coded as a positive response).
- 22 respondents replied “Nothing” to the question “What about foster parent training has been helpful?” (“Nothing” coded as a negative response).
- 5 respondents replied “Nothing” to both questions.



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- “I learn a lot. We love the things we learn and I really like to go.”
- “Absolutely helpful when obtaining our license, but ongoing training should be mandatory. Foster parents should have to continue training in order to keep their license.”
- “We've been doing this for a year and the training's been pretty good, so keep doing what you're doing.”
- “The ones I've been to are fine, but I'm looking for a heavier connection and more of a one-on-one learning experience.”
- “It was all so helpful to us. Everything from emotional attachment to documenting so we can protect ourselves.”
- “At the time I thought it was helpful. They prepare us for children who want a loving home, but that is not the type of children placed in the home.”
- “Overall, I learned a lot. Nothing specific stands out. I have two children of my own so I felt I already knew a lot.”
- “It was all good and all helpful, but there are just some things you cannot train in advance for.”
- “I always want to learn, the trainings are always beneficial. I go to weekend classes because I want the extra training, I love going.”
- “I think I am satisfied with all training except for one thing. It would be helpful to have training in Spanish.”
- “The majority of my skills come from my own educational background, not from the trainings provided. The trainings provided a good overview of the system, but in terms of skills and behaviors, not so much.”
- “It has been helpful to me since I have never done anything like this before. I learned a lot.”

## 2.1 Training Quality and Helpfulness



Verda L. Parker, USMC

“The classes provided by the private agency are wonderful. They’re very useful, and learning about the behaviors and everything have been excellent.”

“Most of the classes I have taken through the Alliance have not been helpful to me. I am taking a class at my church right now that I think will be more helpful than any other training.”

“We attend the Refresh conference every year and that is amazing. It’s the way to do it. There’s such a wonderful community there and it really just gives you a major boost in this whole thing. It’s been the most beneficial and exciting thing we’ve done. The quality of the trainers and speakers they have makes it more valuable.”

“We went to the Refresh conference. Getting together with the foster parents and having their support and be able to pick their brains is awesome. WIC has been very helpful as well.”

“We got most of our ongoing training from our private agency. We have a once-a-month dinner and training along with it and that has been very helpful.”

“The FLO (Families Like Ours) experience was so good. Their advocacy, support and referrals were stellar and we learned a lot from other families going through the adoption process.”

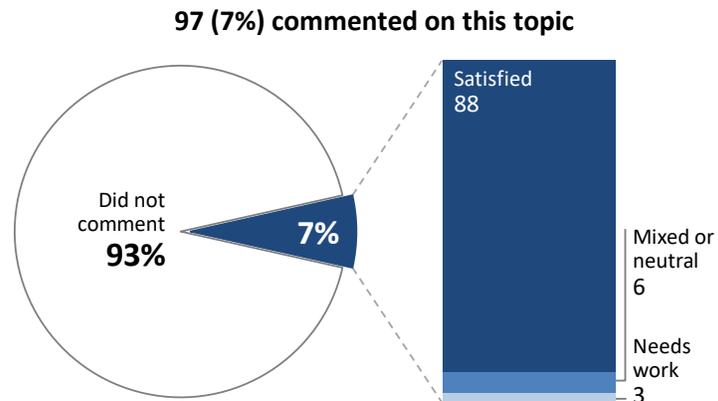
“I attended a religiously affiliated course called Refresh and having a non-denominational option like that would be great. For two or three days we picked classes. The only problem with Refresh is that there was too much religious stuff and not enough training.”

“I work for the school for the ECAP program so I get monthly mandatory training which is about working with the children; the trauma, brain development, etc.”

“These chicks who train in Region 2 are amazing and they know what they are doing.”

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

Seven percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training offered by specific agencies or programs. Most of these comments (88, or 91%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.



#### Specific programs or locations that foster parents mentioned included:

- Refresh, a private, religiously-focused conference for fostering and adoptive families
- Specific DSHS offices or regions
- Private foster care agencies
- Local community or church groups

#### Aspects of training that foster parents liked about these training opportunities included:

- The opportunity for intensive interaction with other, experienced foster parents
- Focused sessions of particularly relevant topics
- Meals and/or child care provided along with the training

#### Other topics covered in this theme included:

- Appreciation when Children’s Administration gives credit for training hours acquired through other providers
- The need for training requirements to be flexible so that foster parents can get training in areas that particularly meet their current situations

## Trainers



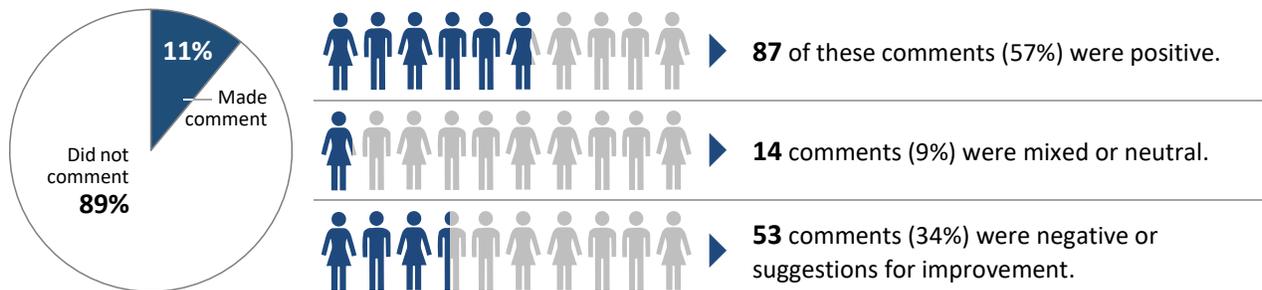
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### Trainers provide an essential foundation for foster parents.

Most foster parents who commented on trainers are satisfied. They value trainers who share personal experiences and create an interactive environment. Some made suggestions for improvement, such as providing realistic examples and relying more heavily on experienced foster parents.

This section contains general comments about trainers.

#### 154 respondents (11%) commented on trainers



## 2.2 Trainers



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“The training and the trainers I have had were very good. They were good at explaining things and getting the participants involved in the training.”

“The people who deal with the severely special-needs kids should get more help and more information. When we go through the trainings and some of the trainers and even some of the foster parents say dumb, uneducated things, it just makes me mad. How about, we quit saying stupid stuff at trainings?”

“The classes were definitely beneficial, the instructor was great and never sugar-coated anything.”

“The social workers that come and talk that are not educated, and they don't have experience in the actual foster field, are a bit bothersome, and sometimes not relatable.”

“The training lacks information about teenagers. The trainers just say to ask the social workers.”

“They were very supportive. They laid it all out for us on what we were getting into. They explained things that are difficult to understand.”

“To me, our trainer was very honest about everything. They offered some really great perspective on the whole thing. For example, the coping skills they touched base on was really fantastic.”

“The knowledge of the trainers and how everything applies to what we deal with.”

“We need more trainers that are seasoned foster parents.”

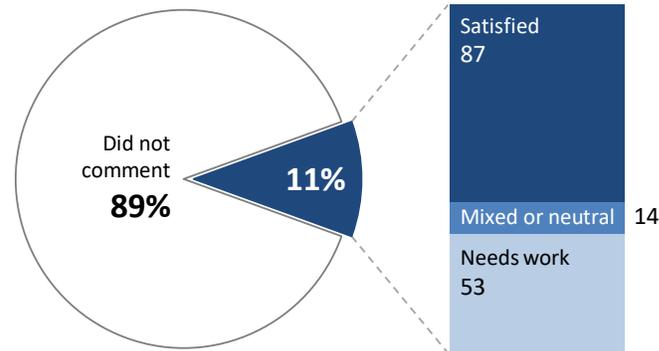
“I like it when the trainers have been personable and take the time to take questions and give real-life examples that you can identify with or perhaps use if the situation comes up.”

“Very good, very upbeat, and gave me a ton of information.”

### THEME | Trainers

Eleven percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on trainers. Most of these comments (87, or 57%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

154 (11%) commented on this topic



### Respondents described several ways that foster parent trainers make their classes worthwhile, such as:

- Providing real-life examples
- Encouraging interaction from the students
- Presenting information that is realistic and not “sugar-coated”

### Many foster parents expressed the desire for more trainers who are or have been foster parents.

- Some mentioned that information is more believable or relatable coming from someone who has been in the situation.
- There are concerns that those without experience as foster parents focus more on unlikely situations or do not present realistic options for dealing with difficult scenarios.
- More about this topic can be found on page 84.

## General Training



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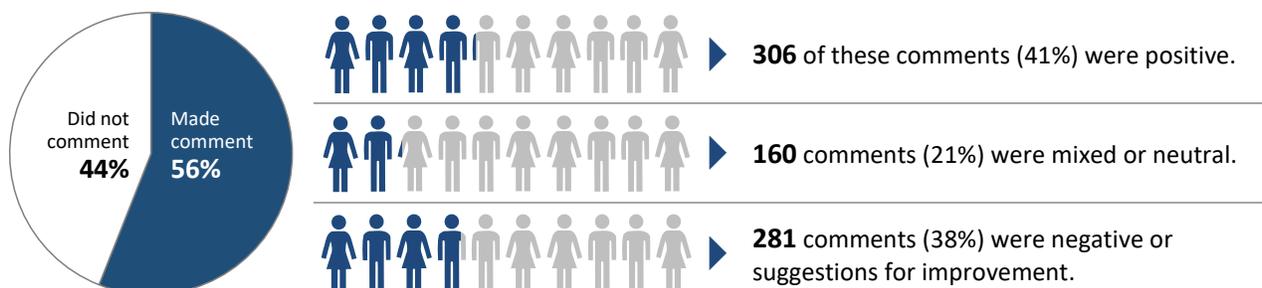
### Some respondents had positive comments and some had suggestions for improvement, but nearly all who commented recognize the importance of training.

Foster parents expressed the most satisfaction with training that addresses specific, realistic and current topics through a variety of interactive approaches.

In this section:

- The following page presents foster parents’ perceptions of training focused on understanding foster children
- Page 57 discusses comments about various approaches to training
- Page 58 reviews comments about training on accessing resources
- Page 59 presents comments about training materials

### 747 (56%) respondents commented on the themes in this section



## 2.3 General Training



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“The perspective of the kids and how traumatic it is to be put in foster care and where they came from.”

“The two-weekend required training course. It provided a good perspective on the purpose of foster parenting which is reunification and informed us on some of the potential challenges.”

“I think the overarching view of the difficulties we may run into was helpful. We learned about the challenges the children may have.”

“Parenting tips and tricks and the nuances for caring for children in the foster system was the most helpful to us.”

“The trainers we had shared some of their horror stories, and that made it more relatable. Later down the road when we had some instances similar to those, it was nice to know that it was normal and that it was okay to feel the things you were feeling.”

“They need to train us that no situation is going to be the same. Boundaries need to be taught as well. Everyone is happier when strong boundaries are enforced. The classes should teach more of that.”

“The attitudes of what the kids are like opened our eyes to view things through what they have gone through. That way we look at what the kids have been through and build a program around them to create trust in the home.”

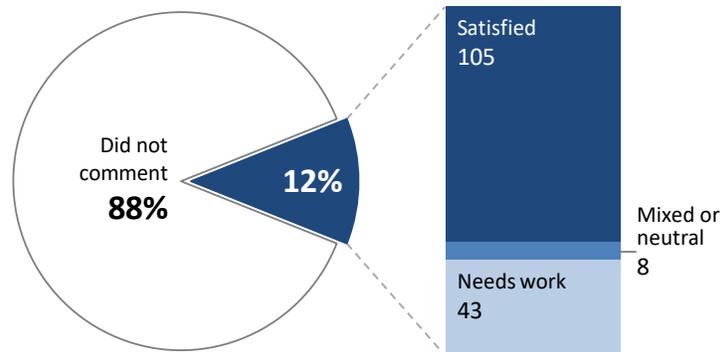
“They did give good scenarios on how children might react to new situations. That was quite helpful because it did come up.”

“I understand the children have been through a lot, but it really bothered me that in the first class the state gives, it was always about ‘broken kids,’ all about how they are broken and difficult and problematic. I get that they are trying to relate the information, but it was disheartening. Yeah they have had a rough life already, but everybody deserves hope.”

### THEME | Taking Care of Foster Children

Twelve percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training that prepares parents for the special circumstances that go along with caring for a foster child. Most of these comments (105, or 67%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

156 (12%) commented on this topic



**Overall, foster parents’ comments about the training they have received were positive. These comments focused on:**

- Real-life, honest examples of situations they may encounter (see page 57 for more detail.)
- Learning about how foster children’s experiences and needs may differ from those of other children they have cared for (see page 65 for more detail.)
- Getting a general picture of how the foster care system works and what its goals are (see page 67 for more detail.)

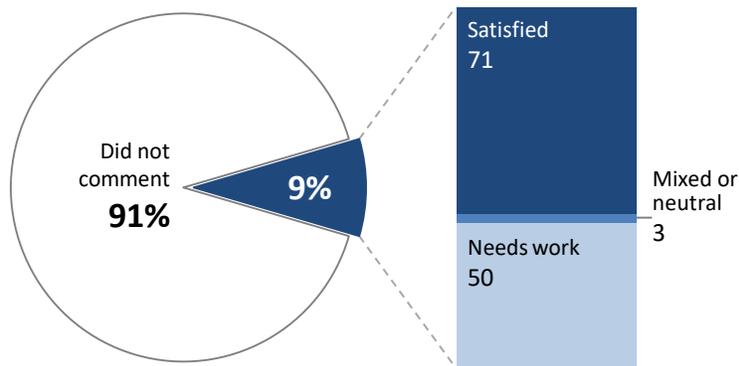
**Some aspects of training received more comments suggesting that they fall short, such as:**

- The need to incorporate viewpoints from experienced foster parents, as well as former foster children (see page 84 for more detail.)
- Trainers who don’t provide realistic scenarios
- Curriculum that isn’t tailored for specific situations, such as foster parents who have many years of experience or have attended all of the basic training many times

**THEME | Approaches to Training**

Nine percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on class structure and tools that trainers use. Most of these comments (71, or 57%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

**124 (9%) commented on this topic**



**Foster parents often commented on the benefits of or need for more:**

- Sharing of detailed, true-to-life case studies that give a real feel for the kinds of situations that they may encounter
- Perspectives from people with different roles in the foster care system

**Approaches to training that got positive comments included:**

- Having panels of presenters with different experiences
- Giving plenty of opportunity for questions and answers
- Interactive, hands-on activities



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“I appreciated being trained for the worst case scenarios. They made it as true-to-life as they could. They wanted us to be sure we really wanted to be foster parents.”

“I guess more dynamic training. Less reading, less boring. More interactive, not just sitting in a room doing only reading.”

“The panels were great, they give you a first look into everything.”

“I wonder if they could do something like in-home training when a foster parent gets their first placement and it is usually different than one expects. They could give us hands-on how to handle the type of foster child we have.”

“More hands-on type training. I am not a sit-and-listen type of learner, so more hands-on would be nice. Interactive trainings.”

“It could be practical application. They sit there and go over PowerPoints, but we need practical information. We need a tool box, not words on paper.”

“Networking with other foster parents. Being able to have question and answer sessions to ask what you would do in certain situations.”

“They did a parenting class that was really great. I loved how small it was, it made it so I could ask as many questions as I wanted.”

“It was very broad so that we were prepared for a lot of situations. It was very frank as to where the system was at and what it could and could not do. It gave us a lot of scenarios so we had the opportunity to experience a lot of things that we might experience.”

“Have a lot more on how to navigate DSHS. More getting input from foster parents, instead of just having the classes built on theory.”

## 2.3 General Training



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“It helps me find resources that help me with my kiddo.”

“They need to tell us how to find doctors and dentists with the state insurance. It is so difficult to find doctors and dentists that are in-network.”

“Getting the packets in class to help us look up information.”

“The initial training gave us a pretty realistic picture of what we were getting ourselves into and we came away with some good resources.”

“Keep training more local. When we go out of area, some of the information does not apply, especially regarding resources.”

“We need a lot more training about special education needs, resources that are in areas near and far and how to access those resources.”

“We found out who to call in case of emergencies, and all our questions were answered.”

“Probably more about the overall procedures: When am I required to contact someone, and who do I contact and where at after hours?”

“I think the resource handbook has been helpful, and think connecting us with other foster parents in the community early on has been helpful.”

“Learning who to talk to. Specifically training with both agencies.”

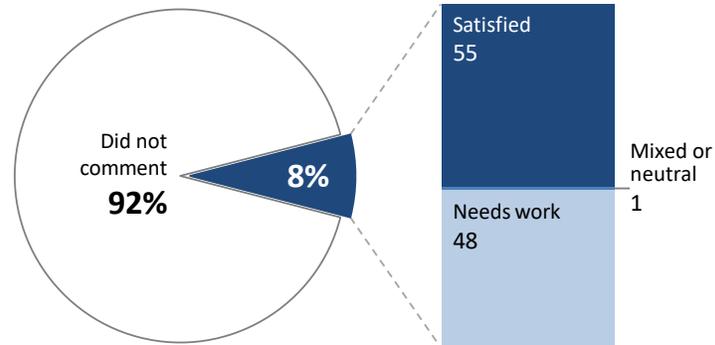
“I wish there was a comprehensive list of counselors and areas of expertise. Like a list of resources that you don’t have to spend time constantly searching for. A list that someone pays attention to so that is up to date, and filled with actual resources, not dead-end leads.”

“More information with how to deal with CPS. It was difficult to deal with them in the case. Getting more resources for support groups. Making sure that the resources for new foster parents are readily accessible for when situations arise suddenly.”

### THEME | Accessing Resources

Eight percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training that addresses how to access resources for foster children. About half of these comments (55, or 53%) were positive or expressed satisfaction. Forty-eight comments (46%) were negative or suggested improvements.

104 (8%) commented on this topic



#### Each family, child and placement is different, but foster parents expressed interest in learning how to:

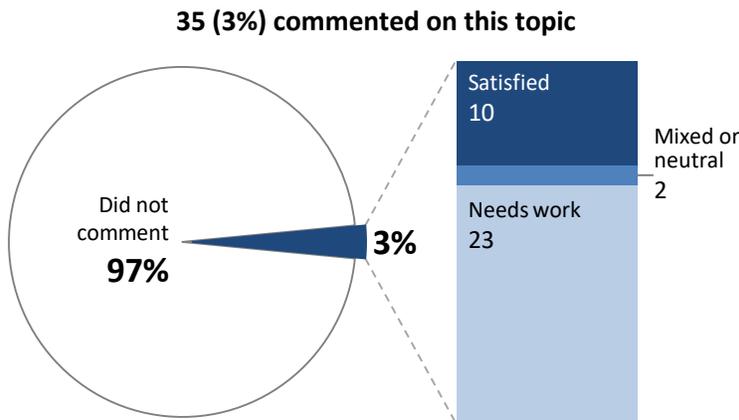
- Locate and engage providers and other resources to help with their foster child’s specific situation
- Navigate special programs available to foster children, including medical, behavioral health and special education resources
- Know what state agencies and programs to turn to in different circumstances

#### Respondents were glad when training gave them:

- Lists of names, phone numbers and Internet links they could use in future situations
- Understanding of what help the state offers for foster children with particular needs

**THEME | Training Materials**

Three percent of the 1,344 respondents who offered a response to the open-ended questions commented on materials used in training. Most of these comments (23, or 66%) were negative or suggested ways that materials could be improved.



**More than half of the responses in this theme discussed videos used in training.**

- Some foster parents expressed dissatisfaction with outdated films.
- Some mentioned specific movies, such as “The Period of PURPLE Crying.”
- One said that they would like to have more videos available in Spanish.

**Other comments included:**

- Appreciation for handouts to refer to later
- Desire for materials such as recommended books that they can read at home



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- “Update the videos for training. They are very old. We need to have what is going on these days and not back in 1970.”
- “The training research and reading is outdated. There are many books that I read but do not receive credit for because they are more modern and up to date.”
- “The class about why children cry and how to deal with it is really good, I think it was called ‘Crying Purple’ or something of the sort, very helpful. There are times where there isn’t anything you can do and that video gave a lot of useful techniques for those type of times.”
- “The first class is a lot to take in. Thank goodness they have handouts.”
- “There is no way the instructors can get through that big Caregiver Core training manual they have in the time allotted, so I don’t blame them for skipping around. But it’s also frustrating because when you are a new foster parent you want to know as much as possible.”
- “Training materials should keep up with the changes in society and treatment. For example, need more information on opioids and their impact.”
- “Updating the videos and information. Times have changed and the situations are completely different than they were in the 80’s and 90’s. Get new material.”
- “They did a good job. The materials they passed out have been helpful.”
- “Need videos in Spanish.”
- “I think that they should give us more material for reading. Articles and books are great in my case. Others need more hands-on experience. I like reading more about medications available for children, traumas and other materials. Having that available more would be good.”

## 2.3 General Training



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“We only did the training that was required. It was more irritating than helpful. Sometimes you feel like they're talking down to you, like you don't even know how to take care of a child.”

“What I don't understand is, with as many years as we have been in the program, why we have to do so many courses when we have so much experience backing up our knowledge. I understand the importance of the CPR course and those like it, but not the rest.”

“We went to a training where the trainer said that foster parent should not go into fostering looking to adopt because they are not an adoption agency, especially here in the Tri-Cities area. Looking back, I think that was very good advice.”

“What's been helpful is, I can't remember the exact name, but the trainers had a lot of experience and gave pointers and gave us the know-how on everything.”

“The requirement to do annual and bi-annual refresher classes kind of stokes your engine again.”

“Sometimes we have no idea how to answer these questions we have. The trainings help us do that.”

“Make the training more case-specific and not require us to put in so much training once we complete the initial training.”

“Make the classes smaller.”

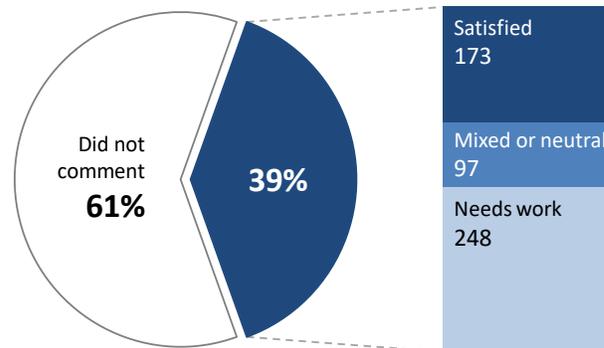
“By staying consistent. At one point, they were requiring a course that was 36 hours, and then they changed their mind and no longer required it. Changing the rules is frustrating.”

“You can go to the department of social services website and look up all different kinds of training. So anything about the situation you are dealing with, you can find a training for.”

### THEME | Other General Training Comments

Thirty-nine percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions made other comments about foster parent training not included elsewhere. Nearly half of these comments (248, or 48%) were negative or suggested ways that training could be improved.

518 (39%) commented on this topic



**Foster parents made a variety of comments that did not fit in other themes, such as suggestions to:**

- Adjust training requirements according to the foster parent's experience and professional background
- Offer realistic examples, with best- and worst-case scenarios
- Provide smaller classes that address more specific issues

**Some also mentioned that:**

- They enjoy interaction with other foster families and appreciate the new information they get in class
- They would like the opportunity to go more in-depth with certain topics
- They may not be able to take all the information in before they have a placement, but would like refreshers once they've had a foster child
- Meeting the required number of hours can be difficult in some situations

## Specific Training Topics



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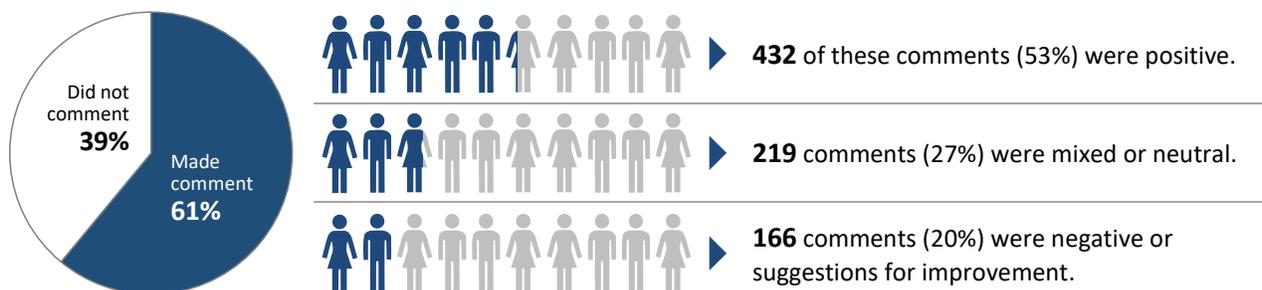
### Foster parents commented on a variety of specific training topics.

Although many respondents expressed appreciation for the training they have received, some requested more targeted courses that address their actual circumstances. Others were interested in delving deeper into specific subjects or matching training opportunities with the needs of their current foster children.

Topics that have their own section are specific disorders and issues; substance abuse; children with sexual behavior concerns; child behavior and development; infants and toddlers; navigating the foster care system; health and safety; cultural awareness and cultural issues, and Caregiver Core training. This section also includes comments about specific classes which did not give the name of the class; for example, responses that mentioned “the initial training” are included in “Other Specific Topics” at the end of the chapter.

Finally, the last two pages provide a list of training topics that foster parents have either experienced and liked, or would like to see offered. These include courses offered by the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence and other organizations.

### 817 respondents (61%) made a comment about specific training topics



## 2.4 Specific Training Topics



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“Team up with boarding schools or other specialty schools where they work with children with problems and develop training.”

“I am a BRS foster parent, so the training in working with aggressive behavior has been really helpful. The Dialectical Behavioral Therapy training was very valuable in learning how to communicate with foster children.”

“The company we work for has more kids with behavioral issues, so the basic training did not prepare us for the Behavioral Rehabilitation Services (BRS) kids.”

“They need to include training for autistic children. They don't have classes on this and it's really sad.”

“There should be more emphasis on addressing the needs of the special needs foster child.”

“More hands-on training dealing with special needs children.”

“They need to include more about the special needs children, not just behavioral, but children with medical disabilities.”

“I was encouraged to go to the trauma classes, and I really liked that. Sometimes, when it comes to trauma and what not, us parents are not prepared for things like that.”

“It needs to involve research. The effects of trauma on the brain, needs to be re-evaluated.”

“The training on how trauma affects behavior was excellent.”

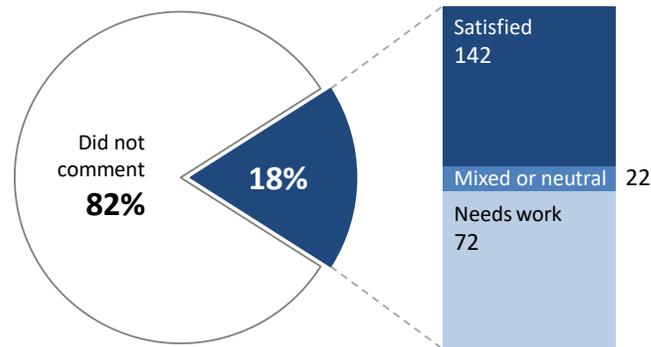
“The training on trauma helped me understand children's behavior better.”

“It taught me to look at how I talk to kids about their parents. Learning to be PC and friendly in our conversations; taught me to pull back and be more genuine because these kids have had trauma.”

### THEME | Specific Disorders and Issues

Eighteen percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training about specific disorders and issues. Most of these comments (142, or 60%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

236 (18%) commented on this topic

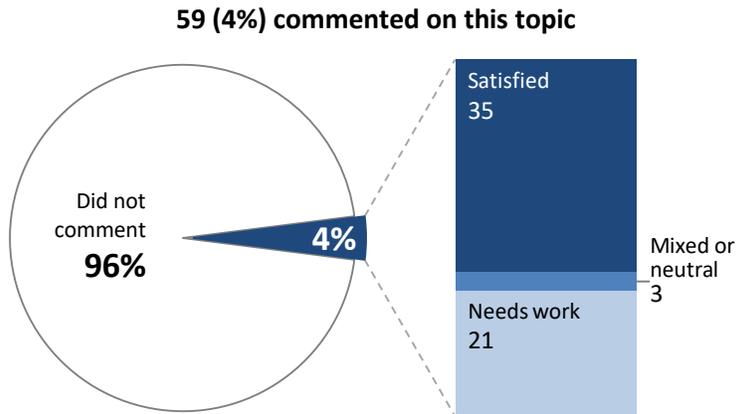


**Foster children may have experienced trauma, or have specific medical, cognitive or behavioral challenges. Foster parents can benefit from training that focuses on these issues.**

- Some respondents mentioned the benefits of covering specific scenarios and hands-on approaches in these classes.
- Many mentioned how useful it has been to learn about the effects of trauma on child development.
- Others requested more classes on the medical and cognitive needs of children they may foster.

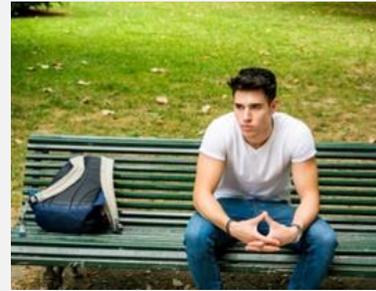
**THEME | Substance Abuse**

Four percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training about the effects of substance abuse among foster children. Most of these comments (35, or 59%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.



**Foster parents may encounter substance abuse-related problems that they are not prepared to deal with; this includes both the effects of prenatal exposure and teen drug use.**

- Many parents who commented on this theme expressed satisfaction with training they have attended on prenatal exposure to drugs and alcohol.
- Some expressed a desire for more training on how to recognize and address drug use in their foster youth.
- A few mentioned the need to get more information on community-wide substance abuse problems.



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“Have a class on how drug addiction affects babies and young children. There is not much training on this and is touched on briefly in Core training.”

“I found the information about the drug impact on children to be especially helpful.”

“For me, some of the useful information is the drug information; drugs seem to be a major issue with my babies and I know what to expect.”

“Really, there was one class I took that I found helpful. It was for Drug-Impacted Babies and Toddlers.”

“The training that we do with our private agency about infants and children who are withdrawing from drugs, is very helpful.”

“Any of the behavioral classes regarding foster children exposed to drugs, toxins and alcohol were very helpful.”

“I would like to see some trainings about suicide prevention and how to know if your teen is on drugs. Having never used drugs I don't know what all the signs and symptoms are.”

“We need more drug recognition classes.”

“More training on drug and alcohol effects on the family. It needs to be updated.”

“I would like to see more trainings address the drug issues in this area, which have increased a lot. Also, need more training on the behavioral issues related to drug use.”

“The classes about dealing with kids from abusive situations, or drug-affected situations. Those type of classes are great.”

## 2.4 Specific Training Topics



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“The sexually aggressive youth (SAY) area doesn't have enough classes and it makes it difficult for foster parents to educate themselves.”

“One training I would really like to see more of, is how to understand kids who act out sexually, and how to keep the other kids safe from it. Most people don't want to talk about it, but they need to do that. It's the kind of shocking information that you need to know and you need to be aware of. Help us to have a handle on this. What do we need to look for; what do we need to ask; how to word the questions; and what signs we should be aware of.”

“Each year they have training at headquarters in West Seattle. They have highly trained staff and consultants available, and that is very helpful especially in working with foster children with sexual issues before age 18.”

“More training on how to handle children coming from sexual abuse. I feel we are learning as we go and, even though we are teachers, we feel ill-equipped to handle some of the situations that come up.”

“The information that we have received on sexually abused children has been somewhat adequate for what we need. But we do not find out the needs of the children until we run into these issues and then have to resort to training methods to assist.”

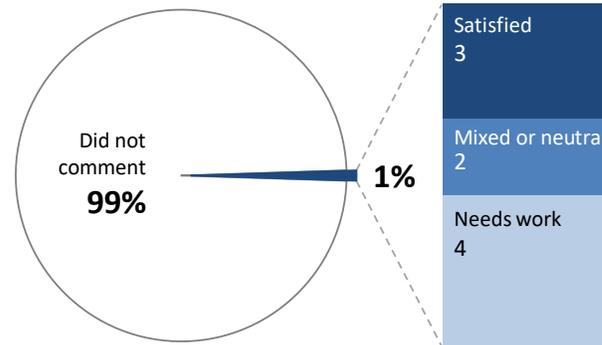
“We need more trainings on how to work with children who have been sexually molested, assaulted or abused. That training is necessary to understand especially with kids who are nonverbal or who are too young to speak.”

“Situational training is needed, specifically training on things like disabilities or sexual abuse that goes deeper would be helpful as an optional class.”

### THEME | Sexual Behavior Concerns

Nine (1%) of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training about the sexual behavior concerns among foster children.

#### 9 (1%) commented on this topic

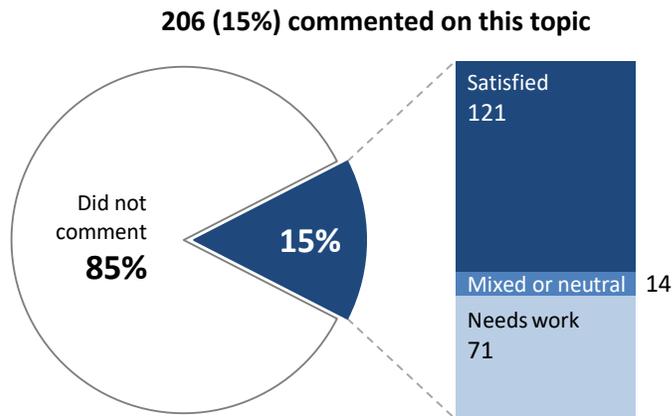


**Foster parents may feel unprepared to deal effectively with sexual issues that foster children face, and training on the topic can be helpful. Two areas generated the most comments in this theme:**

- How to help children who have been exposed to sexually harmful behavior
- How to respond to children and youth who have themselves demonstrated sexually inappropriate behavior

**THEME | Child Behavior and Development**

Fifteen percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training about child behavior and development. Most of these comments (121, or 59%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.



**Foster parents expressed the desire to learn about specific ways to handle discipline issues, including:**

- Information about how disciplining foster children is different from one’s own children
- Realistic scenarios with practical strategies

**Others appreciated getting a development and behavior refresher when:**

- Their own children are older and they no longer deal with guiding behavior on a daily basis
- They do have their own young children in the home, but are looking for ways to improve their parenting



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- “They explain what you can’t do with the child, with correcting behavior and what not, but there aren’t examples on how to deal with a screaming, hitting child. That would’ve been very helpful.”
- “Include evidence-based trainings and have good responses for the questions at hand, like about time-outs, disciplinary actions, etc. If I didn’t have my background or education, I would be very lost.”
- “The distinction between positive discipline and punishment are important things to know.”
- “I would say that a lot of our unanswered questions were finally answered. Like about discipline and whatnot.”
- “Need more information about adolescents in the certification training. Most of the information is for children under five years of age.”
- “To offer more training for the younger kids, and not just focus on the older kids and teenagers.”
- “Help with the behavioral issues with teens. Very helpful.”
- “Well for me it was the refresher parenting classes. Kids are really different these days and getting to go to the classes and learn how to handle difficult behaviors was really good for us.”
- “It helped open my eyes about a lot of things even with my own children. It was great advice for a foster child and for my own dealings with my own children. Our communication got better after the classes, even with our own children.”
- “My children are grown, so it was really helpful to have all the refresher classes. Especially regarding different behaviors and how the state wants you to handle them.”

## 2.4 Specific Training Topics



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“There is a big hole regarding infants. Need current information about taking care of their physical needs, such as how to identify different rashes: which is serious and which is not.”

“Having to sit through training about babies, when I would never take a baby, was a waste of my time.”

“The baby and infant classes are good. We had a baby once and that class really helped.”

“The newer trainings about babies and the ethnicity ones are up to date and are good.”

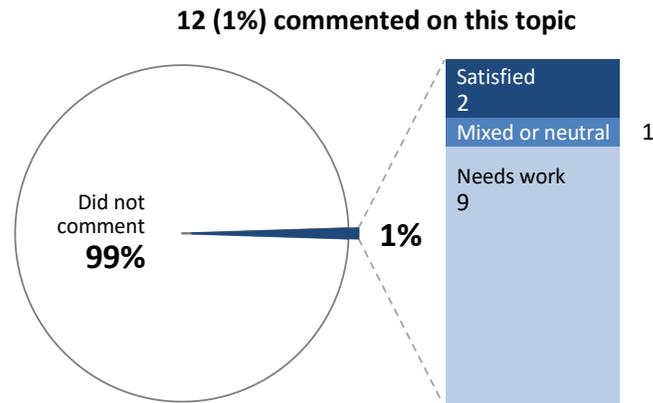
“More training on medically fragile children and what to do when there's not an ideal handoff between placements. I got a temporary placement for a weekend; the child was six months old and had two open heart surgeries and came with an oxygen monitor. The person who dropped him off had no idea what to do and had no instructions. So, I had to call the previous placement to find out what to do. Therefore, agency needs better training for these kinds of transitions.”

“I've had babies under 12 months, and we've had training for violent older kids. So, more training on infants to two years of age. Seems like training is for older kids.”

“The training was lacking in how to deal with infants and younger children. It was all about older kids, which is fine. But there are those of us that are home all day with multiple toddlers that need some extra information.”

### THEME | Infants and Toddlers

Twelve (1%) of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training focused on infants and toddlers. Most of these comments (9, or 75%) suggested ways that this training could be improved.



#### Foster parents want more training options that are focused on the ages and situations they are most likely to encounter.

- Those who foster infants and toddlers appreciate training on those age groups and some would like opportunities to learn more about them.
- Families who are not willing to take infants and toddlers do not want to be required to take classes that spend a lot of time on dealing with very young children.

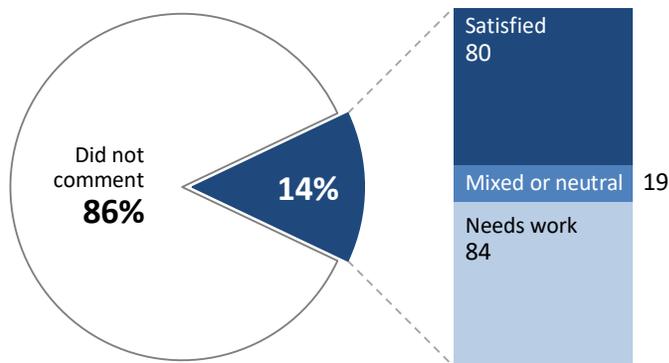
#### Infants and toddlers have unique needs that some foster parents would like to understand better, including:

- Common health concerns in babies
- Specific conditions and treatments for medically fragile children

**THEME | Navigating the Foster Care System**

Fourteen percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training about navigating the foster care system. Negative and positive comments were divided about equally (44% indicating satisfaction and 46% saying this area needs work).

**183 (14%) commented on this topic**



**Working within the foster care system can be very complicated, so training that helps foster parents understand the system better is appreciated.**

- Some respondents mentioned the usefulness of handouts that they could refer to later.
- Others mentioned specific areas they would like to see more emphasis on, such as the Washington Administrative Code and reimbursement processes.

**Some respondents mentioned the need to know about more big-picture system issues such as:**

- The primary goal of the state in providing foster care
- What the foster parent’s role is—and isn’t—within the system



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- “During our training, they really emphasized on how transient it could be. You could love and raise this child, but they prepare you that the child could be taken away on a moment’s notice.”
- “The laws are more for the bio parents than the children and there needs to be more training on this.”
- “I found the training really helpful. I liked when they talked about making sure foster care is what we really want to do. They were very clear about the fact that foster care is not for everyone. They went over what we can and cannot do. They stressed that most of the time the child is returned to the bio parents.”
- “The list of questions they give us for the screening process before we get a placement was really helpful.”
- “We need more information on WACs and stuff like that. We need more information on the court hearings and everything legal-related.”
- “Talk more about Relative Guardianship Assistance Program.”
- “I would love, love, love to see a training about mandated reporting. They don’t explain any of that. I think the Core training class needs to be longer. Yes I know it’s long already, but they need to put more useful information into it. Court proceedings, paperwork, things like that.”
- “Need to teach us how to navigate within the system such as who do I call for certain problems. Topics such as: a placement from another county on an emergency basis; how do I get paid for this when the social worker has not entered the information into the computer; who do I call when a child is in respite and is supposed to be picked up for school on Monday morning and no one comes?”
- “Need to cover how the reimbursement works.”

## 2.4 Specific Training Topics



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“The first aid class is very important.”

“CPR class needs to be improved. Insufficient effort was put into the class by the instructor.”

“The training that I found most helpful was the CPR and first aid training.”

“The training was actually good common sense stuff that should happen. For instance, having the first aid and CPR training.”

“The first aid and CPR training were good. And, the trainers are really good and very understandable.”

“The medical training; I do my training differently because I have kids with special needs. They have broadened the training.”

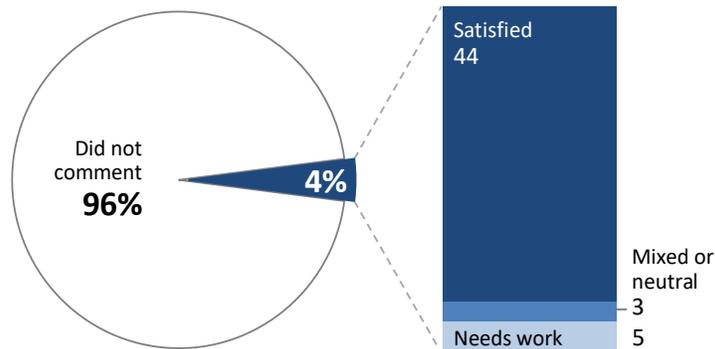
“I finally learned the correct way to put in a car seat by attending a training on this topic. I really appreciate that some of the courses are online.”

“All of the basic training, especially the safety piece of the training.”

### THEME | Health and Safety

Four percent of the 1,344 respondents who offered a response to the open-ended questions commented on health and safety training topics. Most of these comments (44, or 85%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

52 (4%) commented on this topic



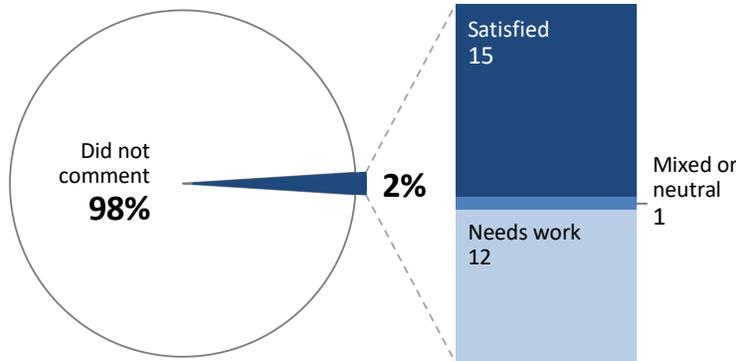
**Most respondents who commented on health and safety training issues mentioned first aid and CPR, but a few remarked on:**

- Car seat safety
- Dealing with prescription medications
- Special training to help them prepare for children with complex medical needs

**THEME | Cultural Awareness and Cultural Issues**

Twenty-eight (2%) of the 1,344 respondents who offered a response to the open-ended questions commented on training regarding cultural awareness and cultural issues. Most of these comments (15, or 54%) were positive or expressed satisfaction. Twelve (43%) suggested ways that this training could be improved.

**28 (2%) commented on this topic**



**Comments about aspects of foster parent training that touched on cultural awareness and cultural issues addressed:**

- The need for foster parents to understand more about their children’s ethnic background, and how that might affect their experience of foster care
- Specific, practical parenting skills, such as learning how to appropriately care for black children’s hair when the parents have not had this experience
- Considerations unique to children covered by the Indian Child Welfare Act



Junko Kinjo, U.S. Air Force

“There needs to be more training on ethnicity. This needs to be across the board with all different cultures.”

“Learning about the different aspects of all the cultures.”

“I think the focus on the multicultural aspects and in how to incorporate child’s culture if it is different than my own.”

“Race and culture: critical for white parents to understand the need to remain connected and to understand the importance of racially and culturally appropriate care.”

“Learning about cultural differences and how this impacts the child.”

“Training around African families. More training about African kids and their culture and how to care for their hair and skin. The online training and the class for it was super outdated and frankly the things said in the training were very racist and a little judgmental. Referring to the hair as being ‘excessively curly’ sounds a bit ridiculous.”

“I went to training for two weeks in the evening and much of the training was cultural. First of all, we decided not to take native kids since the training and scenarios were so bad. And then, we felt that it was interesting that the cultural stuff was related only to ethnicity. It should go much deeper than that.”

“What is the role of a tribal worker? Have training on this.”

“I liked the hands-on training. Actually learning how to do some physical things, such as hair care for black children, was really helpful.”

## 2.4 Specific Training Topics



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“Even the basic training is good; the Caregiver Core training was really helpful. I took the training two years ago and it was a different instructor. I am glad I took it again with this instructor because I feel I got a different perspective.”

“The Caregiver Core training was the best ever. I got so much information and the trainer was really good at answering questions. A lot of the trainings are good.”

“The Core training was wonderful. Learning the mechanics and the rules of foster care was very helpful. Learning what to expect was helpful.”

“I would say definitely the information about trauma. It was Caregiver Core training. It was very thorough and very helpful to us.”

“The Caregiver Core training was great. I think it was very informative. It was an eye opener and the trainer explained it well. I had very good instructors.”

“We loved the Core training; we thought school teachers and everyone should take it.”

“The Core training is a lot to take in. Close the gap between taking this training and actually getting licensed. Do more of a phase-out of the Core training rather than all at once.”

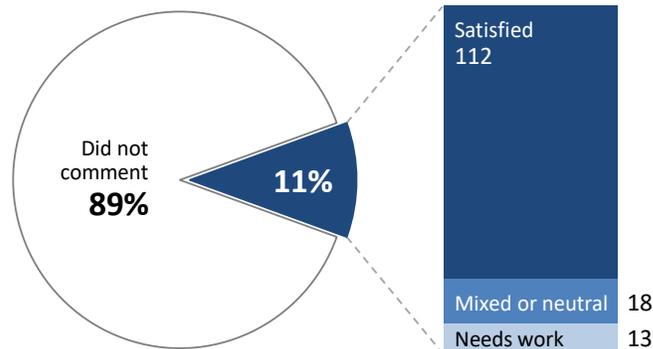
“The Caregiver Core training is too sugar-coated, I feel like they need to be more real. They don't tell you about possibly getting allegations. They don't tell you about how you could have a child since they were born, raise it as your own, and then have the child removed from your home in an instant. If the state senses that you are getting too attached to a child, they remove it.”

“We have only taken the Core training and it was lacking in some areas, such as how to navigate the system, fill out paperwork, etc.”

### THEME | Caregiver Core Training

Eleven percent of the 1,344 respondents who offered a response to the open-ended questions commented on the Caregiver Core class. Most of these comments (112, or 78%) were positive or expressed satisfaction.

143 (11%) commented on this topic



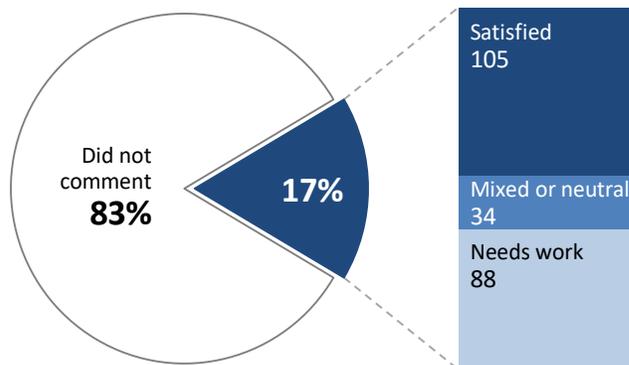
**Although most who commented on the Caregiver Core training were pleased with it, those who were not tended to go into more detail, suggesting that this class could:**

- More realistically reflect the actual experience of being a foster parent
- Be given in stages with smaller chunks of information
- Have more presentations by experienced foster parents

### THEME | Other Specific Topics

Seventeen percent of the 1,344 respondents who offered a response to the open-ended questions commented on or suggested a specific topic not covered in the previous pages. Most of these comments (105, or 46%) were positive or expressed satisfaction. Thirty-four comments (15%) were mixed or neutral, and 88 (39%) suggested additional topics or ways that training could be improved.

**227 (17%) commented on this topic**



#### Many of the comments included in this section praised specific classes that respondents had attended, including:

- “Initial” training (actual name or topic not given)
- Empower to Connect
- Trust-Based Relational Intervention
- Love and Logic (no longer widely offered)

#### Other respondents suggested topics that they would like to know more about:

- How to handle issues that arise in the relationship with the child’s biological parents, including preparing for reunification
- Additional aspects of the foster child’s experiences, both before entering care and after
- The unique concerns of foster parents who are caring for kin

Additional suggested topics are listed on the next page.



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“Dealing with the Difficult Child was really helpful in giving us strategies for dealing with difficult behaviors.”

“I did a Positive Parenting class that was extremely helpful. The initial training, Caregiver Core training, was wonderful.”

“The Refresh conference has been extremely helpful in a lot of ways, with support and communication with the children and everything.”

“I think there could be a training on how to help foster children when reunification looks like it will happen. We have had to seek outside assistance for that, so I don’t know if there is a training for that, but it is needed to assist the transition for the kids.”

“The Love and Logic class was the only helpful one.”

“Trauma training is optional but I think it should be mandatory. I thought the training called ‘now that you have your first placement, now what should you do?’ was worthless. The trainer read through the manual and that was about it.”

“We went to a Refresh conference and it was the best thing we’ve ever done. We will definitely go next year.”

“Have check-in meetings. Have a three-month follow-up for questions.”

“Here are a couple of suggestions: What happens when my foster child ages out? What are the options for handicapped foster child? The support system for non-handicapped children is minimal, but I don’t know about same for handicapped foster child. What types of facilities are out there, are available, and where are they available?”

## 2.4 Specific Training Topics

### THEME | Other Specific Topics, *continued*

Foster parents obtain training from a wide variety of sources and classes that they said were beneficial. Some also suggested additional training topics that would be helpful.

#### Voices

“Need more information on the schooling needs of the child and how to go about finding this out.”

“We're licensed for kids 6-18. We received no training on how to navigate the public school field. I work in the field and I still have trouble getting everything down. We need more information on all of that. I would like to see more actual training on the visiting aspect. We need more info on the Department's expectations for the 'bio family' visits.”

“More training on how to deal with difficult teens with trauma. And, how to get educational support for foster child who is on IEP.”

“Retreats for training of a foster father.”

“Class for bio kids dealing with foster kids.”

“I believe that it might, especially in my situation, be helpful to have more of a variety in trainings. I don't think the classes are applicable to me, because I took in a relative and I'm related to the bio parents. They should have a separate class for relative-based adoptions/foster parents. The classes I took were literally just me going through the motions.”

“There needs to be more training on what to answer before you get a placement of a child.”

“There should be a follow-up to the initial training that helps you navigate all the technical stuff. Like the different kinds of meetings like FTDM, and what that looks like and what are your expectations for us. Go through filling out a caregiver report together in class. How to interact with bio family members to keep everything positive for the child. Navigating the court system. All of these things would be so helpful once the child is in your care.”

“I would have liked to have more training on how to properly restrain a child. My whole family could use this training as we have kids with special needs who often have to be restrained.”

“More training in behavioral issues, foster children of different backgrounds, more training in anger management issues. Also, more training about the actual process that we go through with our foster child and the legal issues involved. I think I would really appreciate more information about trauma and the efforts on behavior and the brain and how we deal with those issues. And more training on ACEs and the best way to set up our foster child for success.”

“I think the training about the human background/nature and brain studies are good. I like learning about how to deal with tantrums and learning different strategies on approaching them.”

“The follow-up training, where you could pick the subject that you needed more information on, was good.”

“The visitation training was good.”

“I would really like more classes on how to manage my own stress as a foster parent. Also, I would like a class on perhaps some more ways to deal with therapeutic placements. How to troubleshoot and how to calm down a situation when the conventional ways are not working.”

“There needs to be more training on the culture of poverty. We have a set of twin girls who come from a very impoverished setting. We are at a loss sometimes as to how to handle this in the most appropriate way. For all we know, they might be going right back into it and we worry that we are providing an environment that might make it even harder for the bio parents to succeed if the children are returned to them.”

“I have asked over and over (as have some others I know) for you to have a class or make a DVD about how to teach your kids manners. The kids I get don't even have basic manners or social graces sometimes and I don't even know where to start with them. I would like more training in how to transition my older kids for the outside world. I think both the foster parent and the kids need it.”

“They should use the Empowered to Connect. Texas Christian University has a training available; hoping to implement across the nation and in Travis County, Texas it will be mandatory. Excellent three-day training; make it mandatory.”

## Access



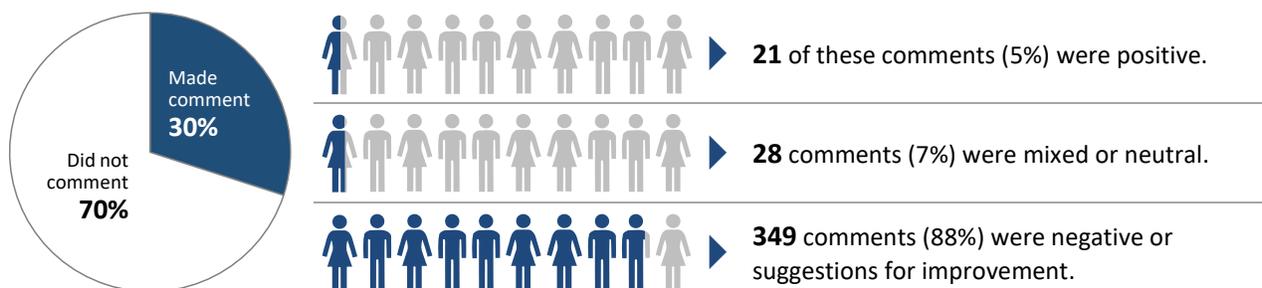
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### For foster parents, access to training can be difficult.

Most foster parents who commented on access to training described problems or suggestions for improvement. For many foster parents, attending training can require a substantial investment of time and financial resources when they must take time off work, travel long distances, and make child care arrangements.

Themes that relate to training access are summarized in this section. Issues that have their own section are location, schedule, and child care availability. At the end of this section are comments about other access issues and more general comments.

#### 398 respondents (30%) commented on access to training



## 2.5 Access



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“They set us up with community resources, met people in our group, so they really did put us on the right path. It would be nice to have training available closer than 26 miles away.”

“More locations. Several classes I want to take are too far away. I can’t travel that distance with all of the kids in tow. There have been classes that I’ve had my eye on, too.”

“Most classes are not close to me, so I don’t choose to go. It is inconvenient.”

“There is not enough training on different topics. Need to have continuing training in all urban areas.”

“I think having so many nice options, and being able to select the trainings that specifically help me with my children. Most are nearby because I am close to the cities.”

“Because I live in a rural area, and I am a people person, I would prefer more trainings be available in my area. I normally drive 45 miles for trainings.”

“Offer more training south of Seattle. Traffic getting into Seattle is horrendous.”

“I live in a small community and it takes an hour or longer to get to training, with no daycare. So if Children’s could do rotational training in smaller communities that would be more useful and easier for those in small towns. Washington has a lot of rural areas, so please make it easy.”

“I think that having more training available in a rural area would be helpful. We’re living on a reservation and it would be great to have training here, or close by. I’ve done very little training, and it was online.”

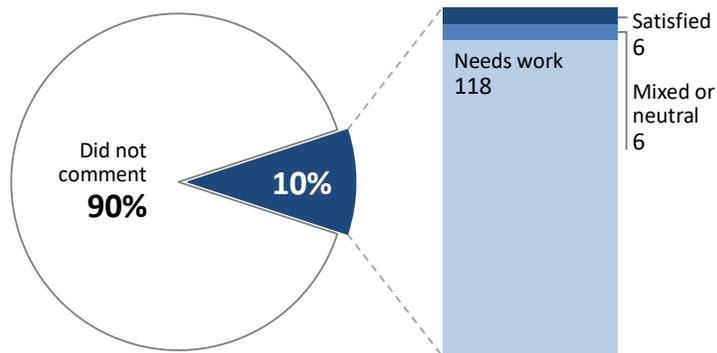
“Offering more frequent training in the rural areas. I can’t leave the children to go to Seattle or Spokane to attend training.”

“Maybe more training in Port Angeles. We currently have to go to Shelton or Tacoma.”

### THEME | Training Location

Ten percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training locations. Most of these comments (118, or 91%) suggested ways that training locations could be improved.

130 (10%) commented on this topic

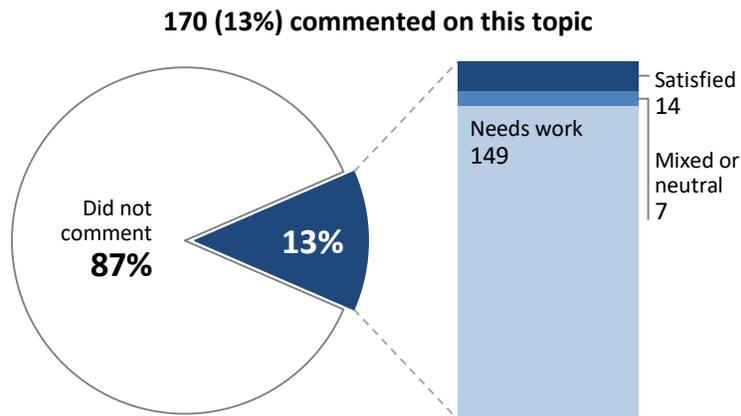


#### Foster parents expressed the wish for a greater variety of classes to be held in more locations.

- Many comments in this category concerned making training more accessible to foster families in rural areas and small towns.
- Among those who live in or near urban areas, some commented on the barrier that traffic in large urban areas can create.

## THEME | Scheduling of Training

Thirteen percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training schedules. Most of these comments (149, or 88%) suggested ways that training schedules could be improved.



**Most of the respondents who wanted to see changes in scheduling expressed a preference for evening or weekend times. Other comments included the following sentiments:**

- Weekend and evening times are difficult because of children’s activities and long work days
- It would be good to see more training with a greater variety of scheduling options
- Too many training hours are required
- In some cases, distance learning options can ease the problem of scheduling (see page 84)



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“Have the sessions more in the evenings or on the weekend. Working foster parents can't go to training during the day.”

“Saturday trainings are a little difficult to attend, as a lot of kids do sports and extra activities during the weekend.”

“I liked that it was held in the evenings so I didn't have to miss work. There is a lot of training to choose from.”

“Have some type of training at least once a month. Need to accommodate the foster parents who work full time.”

“They could provide more training and at different hours. Most of the scheduling is great, but some trainings are difficult to go to for parents who work.”

“More weekend trainings closer to families. The daytime ones don't make any sense to me since they are during a work day. I would rather have a longer training during the weekend than a shorter one during the week when I would have to take time off work to go to it.”

“More time slots for the initial training. We hear that the state is in dire need of foster parents and then there is only one training a month. If you can't make that training, you may have to wait a whole other month before you can get the training. That doesn't make sense if you want to get more parents in the system faster.”

“The Caregiver Core training was too long.”

“My honest opinion is shorten it. There is a lot of repetitive information. I feel a lot of the information was simply to give us hours rather than something we could use. Make it shorter and informative so we can keep our license.”



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“I have a special needs child and feel separated from others in my ability to attend training because of child care restraints. It takes up to two months to get child care approved. Way too long! That is very frustrating.”

“Need more trainings in our area and after work, with child care included.”

“They could provide child care so that we could attend more trainings.”

“As a single parent, the trainings where they provide child care are great. They’re easier for me to attend.”

“It is not always accessible. There is no child care provided which makes it hard for me to go. We need a specific type of person to babysit the foster child or a sitter of a certain age. I have teenage daughters but they are not 18.”

“I have to do the first aid and CPR training, but getting care for seven kids is almost impossible.”

“A couple of them have actually provided child care and I was able to attend. If they provide child care for bio children and foster children, that makes a difference for me to be able to attend. I understand why training is important and I do like attending, but child care is essential.”

“We used to be able to take our children to the foster parent meetings because there was babysitting for all age ranges. Recently we were told there would be no day care for children above the age of 12 at the meetings. We have infants, toddlers and teenagers in the house. One of our 14-year-olds is autistic and we cannot leave him alone. We are worried we will not be able to go to future meetings if we continue to foster older kids.”

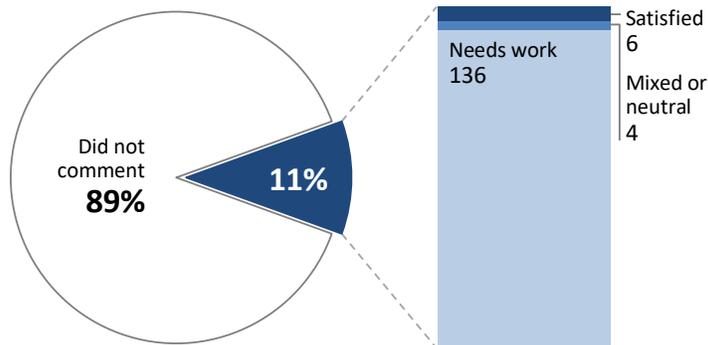
“I think caregivers miss a lot of training because they do not have child care options. Which can happen often when a house has six or seven little children.”

“Since they require you to go, they should have child care.”

### THEME | Child Care During Training

Eleven percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions addressed child care during training. Most of these comments (136, or 93%) were negative or suggested improvements.

146 (11%) commented on this topic



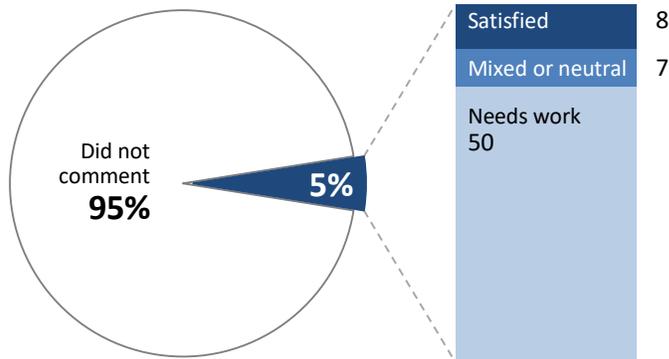
**Again this year, foster parents pointed out that attending training can be difficult if no child care is offered. This is especially true when:**

- Foster families have many children in their household, including biological and foster children
- The children in their care are very young, are teenagers who cannot be left alone, or have special needs or behavioral issues
- The foster parent is single, or both parents would like to attend the same training

**THEME | Other Comments About Access**

Five percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions addressed other training access issues. Most of these comments (50, or 77%) were negative or suggested improvements.

**65 (5%) commented on this topic**



**Comments in this theme included those who mentioned that they needed to find training outside of what is offered by the state, as well as those who commented on issues such as:**

- Needing to use their own resources to pay for training expenses
- Requests for items such as food and family activities along with classes



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“Back in the day, we would have training with child care, and a dinner. You got your training, food, and the kids got to play with one another and it all worked out.”

“Do the trainings more often and easily accessible by parents. And provide snacks, water, coffee, mileage for the parents, child care all included.”

“The yearly training at Great Wolf has been great because they have accommodations for us and the kids.”

“They could provide donuts! They are wonderful.”

“Reimburse the foster parents for lunch or some type of stipend when we have to miss work to take the training.”

“FPAWS does most of our trainings and not all foster families can afford that.”

“When I can find some training that relates to the children we take care of, it is good. Classes fill up really fast and we can't always get in.”

“Allow me to go outside the recommended sources, like a week-long conference about children with attachment disorders and trauma (on my own dime of course).”

“I had to go out and pay for more training, out of my own pocket. I think the training needs to be based more on individual circumstance. We need better training for everyone.”

“I get my own training, really nothing from the state.”

“Transportation is definitely an issue with the classes.”

“Use volunteer time at the state facilities that treat children with problems count as training toward our license.”



## Alternative Training Formats



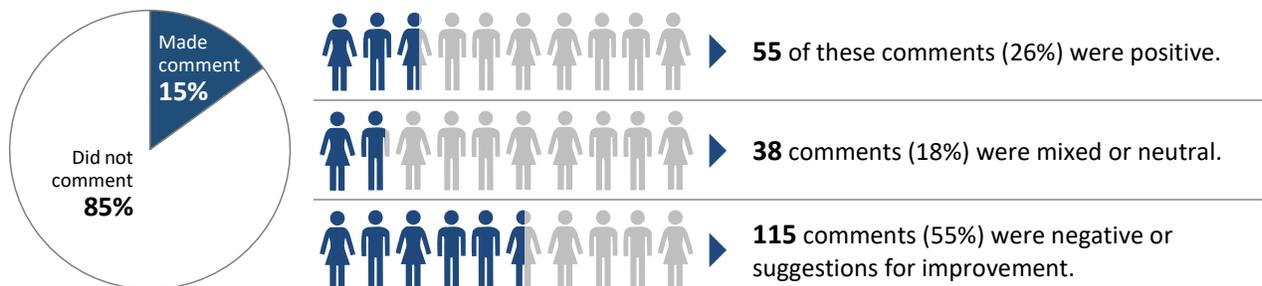
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### Some foster parents would like to have more options for training over the internet.

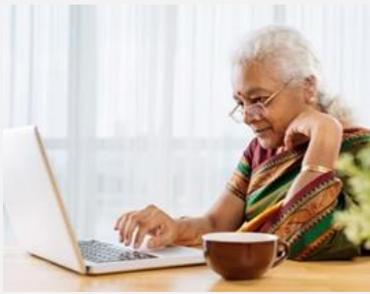
As in past years, views of online training options are mixed, but most who commented on it were either pleased with the convenience or requesting that there be more available. Likewise, most who commented on the training they receive in support group-like settings have favorable opinions and/or would like to see more.

Other comments about alternative training formats requested more options for reading relevant books for training credit, or being able to join a class in real time through commonly-available videoconferencing services. Some also mentioned the desire to view recorded classroom trainings when it's convenient for them.

#### 208 respondents (15%) commented on alternative training formats



## 2.6 Alternative Training Formats



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“Sometimes the online trainings get boring; they’re helpful though. I prefer to go sit in the class, but with my schedule I can’t always do that.”

“In the beginning, in the very beginning when we were getting our license. We would prefer having classes with a live person, not on the Internet.”

“More training that is in person and not so much online. More training with family support.”

“They are improving now by sending me online training.”

“I like the online training where I can choose the topics that are pertinent to my children.”

“Ongoing training would be helpful rather than just the initial training. Do more web-based training on the nuts and bolts of the process. Offer more of what is in the Core training online as a review when we have questions.”

“When I think of the training I’ve done, I think of the online classes, and the videos are very old. They need to be updated.”

“It’s the same classes and trainings, over and over again. The only difference is that they offer some of them online, and they didn’t do that before.”

“I have been really impressed with all of the resources provided. The online trainings are really nice to draw from. And they’re very convenient.”

“Maybe more trainings at night that you can just remote into from home.”

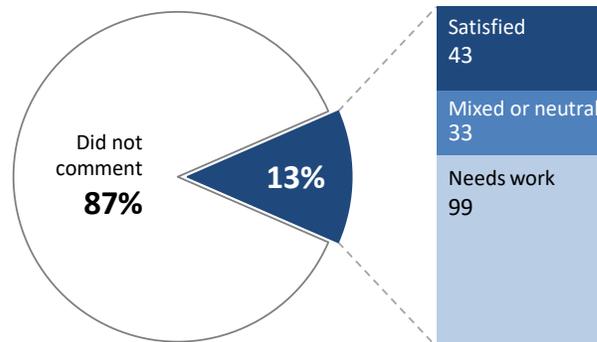
“I wish there was a way to log in and go to video chats or participate in a live class remotely. That would be a good thing, don’t you think?”

“Training credits that are easier to access, for example online classes, hybrid classes.”

### THEME | Online Training

Thirteen percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on online training. Most of these comments (99, or 57%) were negative or suggested improvements – including increasing the availability of online training.\*

175 (13%) commented on this topic



**Some respondents appreciate the flexibility of being able to complete training online, but others noted that online training is not appropriate for all topics and situations. They also said that:**

- Easy access to online content allows foster parents the flexibility of starting and stopping the course at their convenience
- Online training eliminates potentially long commutes and costs associated with in-person training
- Online training does not provide the same level of interaction as in-person training, leaving foster parents with less opportunity to ask questions and build community

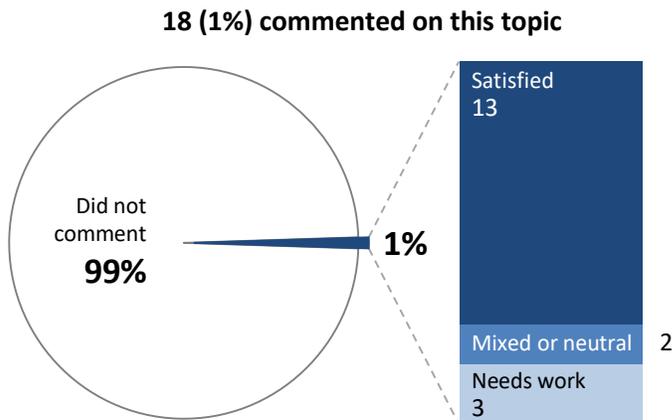
**Foster parents offered suggestions for improvement, such as:**

- Provide better communication about online training: what courses are offered, when they are available, who is providing them, and how to access them
- Update materials online regularly, including videos and information

\* Requests for more online training were coded as suggestions for improvement (i.e. as negative comments). Thus, both the positive comments and some of the “needs work” comments reflect support for online training.

**THEME | Support Groups**

One percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on training in support groups. Most of these comments (13) indicated that they were satisfied with training received in support groups.



**Comments about training received in support groups were almost entirely positive. Some foster parents commented that:**

- Support groups provide a flexible, supportive environment for foster parents to ask questions about their unique situations
- Foster parents seek out and value experienced foster parents in these groups for both advice and emotional support
- Support groups, especially those organized by other foster parents in their communities, can provide training and guest speakers who address concerns relevant to the group
- Combined training and meals, such as offered by some community advocacy groups, are helpful
- They'd like to get credit for training received in support groups



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- “I get all of my training within support groups, and the support from other parents is what is most important to me.”
- “The support group meetings that provide training are excellent.”
- “We have a group that meets locally once a month. We have guest speakers and trainers, and they are scheduled out for the whole year.”
- “Most of my training has been through the support group. The camaraderie of that group is awesome. There are other people in the trenches that know how to help us.”
- “Provide more in-person training, so all the training is not online; or offer training with other foster parents, such as a support training group.”
- “The monthly support dinners where we are able to hear from experts about different areas of caring for foster children and also hearing from other foster parents with experience. We are part of the Mockingbird Family model. The trainings through that group have been very helpful.”
- “We would like to get credit for attending the Mockingbird group. We like it better than the DSHS Foster Parent meetings but we do attend both kinds. I think the state should support these neighborhood groups more.”
- “More Mockingbird group training.”
- “The weekly and monthly evening support groups have been extremely valuable. We are able to discuss everything and I appreciate that it counts as training.”
- “The 40 hours you need of training to get licensed should be spent on what or who you're getting or doing, and not like a 'support group' atmosphere. It turns into a support group instead of an actual class where you can learn the things you need to learn.”

## 2.6 Alternative Training Formats



Thomas Spangler, U.S. Air Force

“Bring the library back, we really enjoyed it, and other parents miss it too.”

“Because we are rural, have more online trainings available via Skype™ so that it is interactive. If all of the trainings had a camera present, it would help provide more variety of trainings since I live in a rural area.”

“I've mainly just done the videos and support group hours. Some of them answer our questions; some of them don't.”

“I've already used all of my trainings and skills. I need some new material. I refer back to notes that I took years ago. I like that they offer the videos. It's great that I can watch the videos. The Tulalip trainings are great, I would appreciate more. Foster parents need to not go into this blind. When I first started that was the case for me. I felt like I was entering this strange world blind.”

“I have taken ‘bookoo’ training and it's all been helpful to me; the training on special needs kids has been wonderful and you can get it from the library.”

“The ability to re-take trainings, or maybe a training where we could listen in and just follow along at our convenience. Even if we didn't get credit for it, I still think it could be beneficial to have a specific training playing in the background, kind of like a 'book on tape.'”

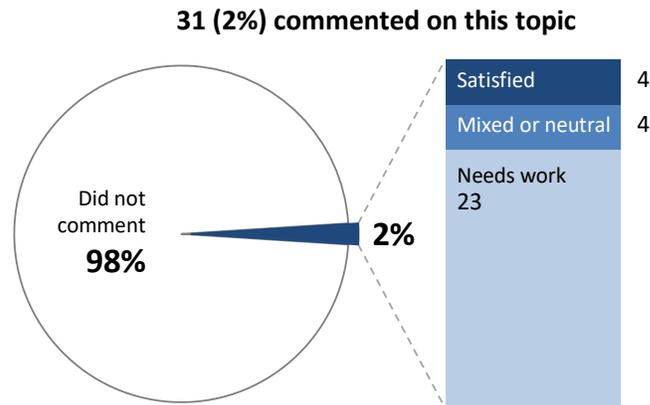
“More updated video trainings. They are very convenient to have around.”

“Different training with more personal interaction for special needs children. One-on-one advice and suggestions.”

“They need to have training in which a foster parent can have one-on-one training.”

### THEME | Other Alternative Training Formats

Two percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on other alternative training formats. Most of these comments (23, or 74%) were negative or suggested improvements.



### Foster parents offered several suggestions for ways that training could be made more convenient or useful for them, such as:

- “Live” video participation with regular training classes
- Recommendations of books and videos available through libraries
- Recorded versions of in-person classroom training
- One-on-one training for special situations

## Voice and Choice



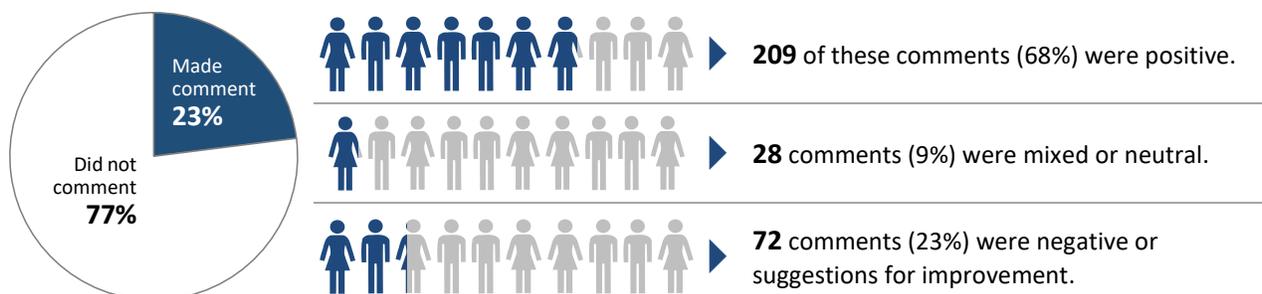
Sabrina Moore, U.S. Air Force

### Foster parents wish for a foster parent voice in their training, and they appreciate choices.

Many of the comments in this section focused on the value of foster parent participation in training. As in prior years, many respondents talked about how valuable it has been for them to hear from people who have been in their shoes. Others also mentioned hearing from children and biological parents who have been through the foster care system. They observed that training can help to build a sense of community.

Most foster parents who commented on the training choices available to them were pleased with these choices. Some would like to have more input into what training is available, or to receive credit for classes taken outside of the DSHS offerings.

#### 309 respondents (23%) commented on voice or choice in training



## 2.7 Voice and Choice



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“In the initial training, I liked when the foster parents were doing the training. They were able to speak from their experience. This was very beneficial.”

“They need more input from the actual foster parents. They need to listen to our input, take our advice and apply it towards what we actually need.”

“It is helpful to hear from real foster parents about how things actually are. I liked the preparation for the system.”

“More input from previous foster children.”

“The Caregiver Core training when we had foster parents that came and spoke with us. We also had children that had been in the foster system that came.”

“The certification trainings were very helpful. Very enlightening. Good curriculum. I liked hearing from the bio parents who had gotten their kids back.”

“The panels are very helpful. I like when the parents come in and talk with the classes. They should keep that up.”

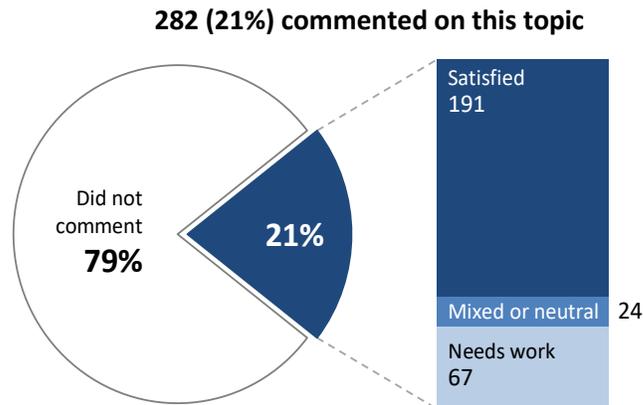
“Our trainer had a ton of experience, so she was an excellent teacher with a lot of insight into behaviors of troubled children. She was also a prior foster parent which was helpful.”

“It could be improved by bringing people in that have been through the topics at hand, a panel of foster parents or even parents in general would be great. They've already 'walked the walk' and I think hearing stories from the actual source would be easier than trying to learn from a textbook.”

“If we could get more communication between existing foster parents instead of book training and services. I would like to get feedback from other experienced foster parents. It would be nice to blend it with the book knowledge of the staff.”

### THEME | Voice and Community in Training

Twenty-one percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on participation and community voices in training. Most of these comments (191, or 68%) were satisfied with these aspects of training.



**Most comments on this topic praised training that promotes discussion and interaction with other foster parents, because they feel that it:**

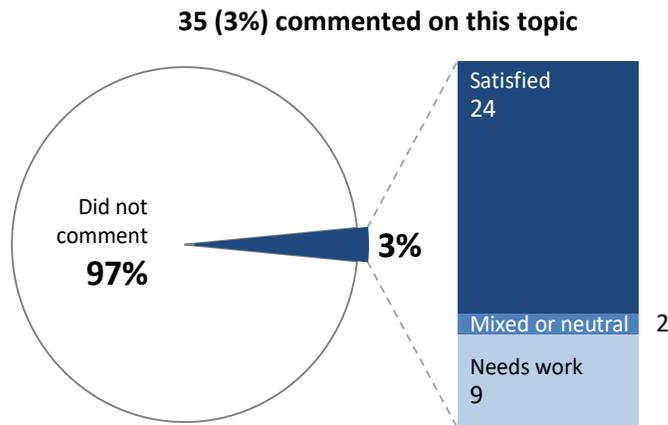
- Promotes camaraderie among the foster care community
- Provides more realistic and practical advice for difficult fostering situations
- Allows experienced foster parents to help new foster parents make sense of the sometimes difficult processes or paperwork without relying only on their social worker

**Foster parents would also like to hear from:**

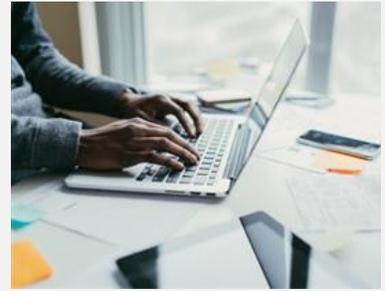
- Biological parents whose children have been in the foster care system
- Former foster children
- Trainers who have also been foster parents

**THEME | Choice of Training**

Three percent of the 1,344 respondents who offered a response to the open-ended questions commented on the availability of training choices. Most of these comments (24, or 69%) expressed satisfaction with this aspect of training.

**Comments in this theme suggested that Washington foster parents appreciate:**

- Enough variety in course offerings that they can choose options that most closely fit their current needs
- Being able to get continuing education credit for classes taken outside of DSHS/Alliance for Child Welfare
- Having input into the types of training topics that get developed into classes or online offerings



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“I used the Alliance online training and it is helpful, because I can choose the topics that I need.”

“I think the training is amazing. After the initial training, there is so much training to choose from.”

“I can choose the ones that I want. And if there is not a live session available, I enjoy that there is an online session that I can choose from to take.”

“They give us a number of hours to take in a three year period but they leave it up to us to choose the classes. It would be helpful if social work staff helped us pick valuable classes.”

“I appreciated that I could pick the training that was most applicable to my situation.”

“The fact that the department allows Refresh to count towards training. I have had 300 hours of education, and Refresh is by far the best and most quality and practical class out there. I am very thankful that the state allows those hours to count towards our training hours.”

“I had two little boys that were having a hard time bonding with people. Through their therapist, I was able to go to ‘Attachment Vitamins.’ That was just wonderful. The state allowed me to go to that and counted it as my training hours. I really learned a lot.”

“Listen to the foster parents and develop trainings based on the questions being asked that require more in-depth conversation.”

“The trainings could be improved by offering a survey to foster parents asking us about the classes. They need to ask us what classes and topics we are interested in. If we could go to a specific class that has to do with us, I feel like we would take more from it.”



## Training Information

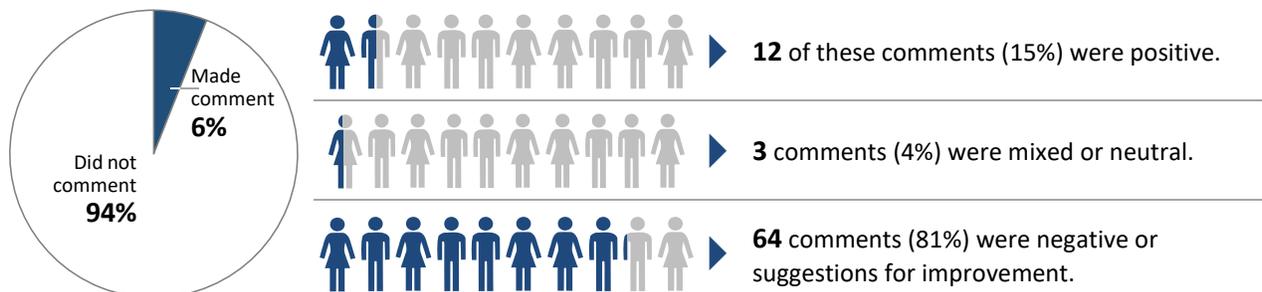


Aaron Oelrich, U.S. Air Force

### Foster parents who commented on the information they receive about training often mentioned the need for more.

For the most part, comments in this section expressed the need to know more about training opportunities. Some were also frustrated with getting notices of training that do not give them enough time to fit it into their busy lives. Several expressed the need for a centralized source of information for everything related to foster parent training in Washington.

#### 79 (6%) respondents commented on Information about training



## 2.8 Training Information



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"There's training?! The one class I've taken was helpful, but that was at the beginning. I was unaware that there were more I could be taking."

"Communication. I will find out after the class that it was available to me. There is not necessarily one source to find all the information. It is spread out on several sites and mediums, which is inconvenient."

"We only had the Caregiver Core training needed to get licensed. No one has told us what other trainings are available."

"More local training pertaining to where the DSHS offices are at. Most of the training information we get is for Seattle or Bellevue locations, which is an hour from my home."

"Provide more training in our area. Continue to let us know what training is coming up."

"The manual we got had tons of websites and places to go to continue education."

"I honestly think as a foster parent the hardest thing is finding access to training that I need. Many times we have to find it for ourselves. Make the access and knowledge to such training more visible and accessible."

"I do most of my training online, I like that there are so many topics, and they are very good about sending e-mails and putting notifications on the Facebook page about the trainings in the area."

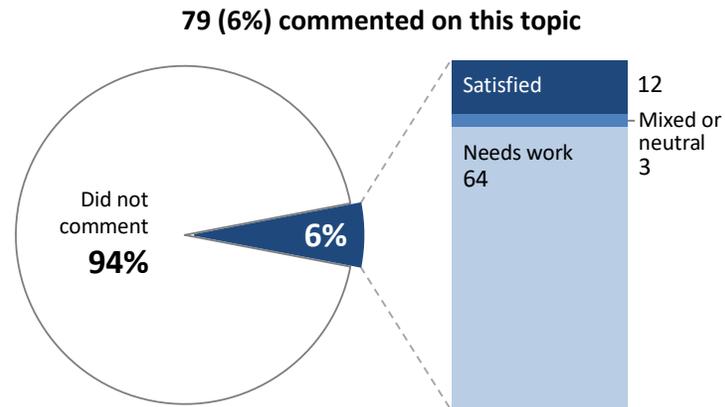
"Broadcast trainings more on social media. We need reminders of the classes and when they are."

"We used to get notices about classes and what not, and we don't get any of that anymore."

"More online training. Maybe have live feeds that people could Skype into. That would really be good for us."

### THEME | Information About Training

Six percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on information about training. Most of these comments (64, or 81%) were negative or suggested improvements.



**Most foster parents who commented on information received about training said that it has not been sufficient. Some also noted that:**

- They are not aware of a centralized source of information about all of the training they could take
- There may be a need for more approaches to communicating training opportunities
- Messaging about training opportunities is inconsistent

## Support Beyond Training



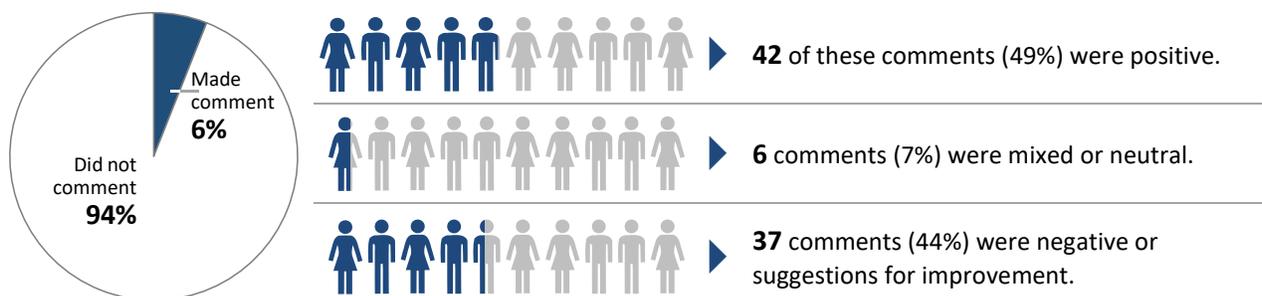
Erin Smith, U.S. Air Force

### Learning that is important to foster parents does not always take place in a classroom or as part of a designated online course.

The comments in this section address ways that respondents have experienced, or would like to experience, training along with supportive and personal interaction. Some described support group get-togethers with dinner and a speaker, while others found both valuable information and personal advice in online social media settings.

Quite a few comments in this section requested some type of one-on-one mentoring program that would allow foster parents to get immediate guidance during difficult situations.

#### 85 respondents (6%) commented on support beyond training



## 2.9 Support Beyond Training



Erin R. Babis, U.S. Air Force

“We’ve just learned from experience. There are state workers that I’ve been able to go to for advice. It’s nice to speak to the instructors.”

“When we’re new, the mentor in the mentor program should have lots of contact with us. We don’t know the ins-and-outs yet, and to have more communication with the mentor would make our jobs much easier.”

“The private agency does monthly dinners and holiday activities and that is amazing. The state needs to jump on board with more foster-parent-oriented outings. The support is nice, and it really makes a difference.”

“I joined a support group that’s not led by DSHS. The group is phenomenal.”

“They need to have some sort of team. I can’t stress this enough for the state. No one is able to support the foster parents and it is very unsettling. That was very hard for us and on the girls.”

“We have a program called Foster Champs of Maple Valley. They are there to provide training, answer questions, help with clothing and so forth. They are incredibly responsive and help you right away. Even if one of our foster kids wants to attend a friend’s birthday party, Foster Champs will help us get a gift so that our foster child can attend.”

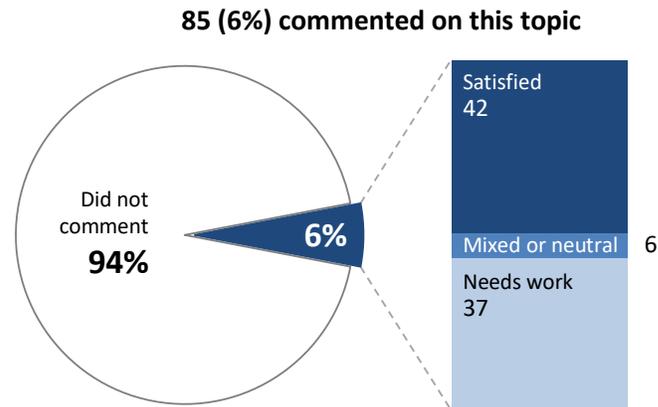
“I would like to see more support groups with more one-on-one interactions. I am a person who responds better in that environment.”

“You need a help line that is manned by current or former foster parents. If we could have called and talked to someone when our social worker did not get back to us, that would have been so great.”

“Meeting all the other families and interacting with them always helps. The Foster Together Facebook page has been very helpful. We are able to get answers to questions quickly from other foster parents.”

### THEME | Additional Support for Foster Parents

Six percent of the 1,344 respondents who answered the open-ended questions commented on sources of education and support beyond training. Most of these comments (42, or 49%) were positive.



**Comments in this theme pointed out the benefits of having training that is continuous and available when they encounter puzzling situations. This could include:**

- Designated mentors with experience as foster parents
- Hotline support
- Support groups
- Social media with both training materials and support
- Training that takes place informally, in the context of other supportive activities



# 2017 Appendix



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## Foster Parent Support 2017 – 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
<b>QUALITY/ HELPFULNESS</b>	
<b>QS</b> – 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.
<b>QP</b> – Specific Agency/Office Support	Named specific CA program/location/office that was supportive/not supportive; mentioned support/non-support of “private agency” (named or not).
<b>QN</b> – Nothing	“Nothing,” “Can’t think of anything,” etc. (Negative, if about what has been supportive; Positive, if about what needs to be done better.)
<b>SOCIAL WORKERS</b>	
<b>SS</b> – 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.
<b>SC</b> – Social Worker Courtesy/Respect	Compliments/complaints regarding social worker courtesy, respect, helpful attitude ( <i>tries</i> to help), sensitivity, kindness, friendliness, niceness, caring (about both foster children and parents), compassion.
<b>SL</b> – 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.
<b>SI</b> – Social Workers Inclusiveness	Social worker gets input from foster parents; lets them help make decisions and plans; collaborates with them; invites them to participate in meetings (or fails to do these things). Use this code along with IN if a comment addresses a need for inclusion <u>and</u> information.
<b>SO</b> – 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).
<b>SF</b> – Foster Care Licensor Support	Compliments/complaints about foster parents’ experience with foster care licensors. (Comments specific to the licensing <i>process</i> are coded PS.)
<b>SW</b> – Specific Social Worker	Named specific social worker.
<b>SN</b> – 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.
<b>ACCESS</b>	
<b>AP</b> – Phone/Staff Access	Able/unable to reach social workers by phone/voicemail/e-mail/website. Social workers do/don’t return calls and messages (or if they do/don’t <u>return</u> calls and messages in a timely manner); social workers are available/unavailable; it’s easy/hard to reach social workers.
<b>AR</b> – Consistency of Contact	Social workers are/aren’t <u>initiating</u> regular or sufficient contact via home visits, phone calls, etc., or if contact is limited (i.e. “regular” doesn’t mean consistently poor).

Response Category	Description
<b>PROCESSES</b>	
<b>PR – General Processes</b>	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. “Better funding” only if context indicates it’s for systems rather than foster parents.
<b>PS – Specific Processes</b>	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.
<b>PP – Paperwork Processes</b>	Likes or dislikes/wants paperwork processes (general or specific). Paperwork lost.
<b>COORDINATION</b>	
<b>CO – Coordination</b>	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.
<b>INFORMATION</b>	
<b>IN – Information</b>	Get/don’t get useful information from social workers about foster child; foster system; available resources; meeting times/court dates; training. Social workers do/don’t answer questions; give clear explanations; give consistent responses, provide feedback/advice; provide referrals/grateful for referrals. Get/don’t get useful information online. Likes or dislikes/wants access to interpreters, bilingual staff, native English speakers on staff.
<b>RESOURCES</b>	
<b>RR – Respite</b>	Likes or dislikes/wants respite services. Doesn’t get paid for respite.
<b>RF – Financial Matters</b>	Likes or dislikes/wants financial payments (ongoing or one time) to foster parents.
<b>RM – Medical, Dental, Mental Health</b>	Likes or dislikes/wants medical/dental/mental health services (includes speech and occupational therapy), medical supplies. Likes/grateful for medical care in general.
<b>RT – Transportation</b>	Likes or dislikes/wants transportation services (includes mileage reimbursement). Difficulty getting payment for transportation.
<b>RC – Childcare</b>	Likes or dislikes/wants childcare services.
<b>RO – Other Resources</b>	Likes or dislikes/wants other resources (or just says “resources,” not specified).
<b>OTHER</b>	
<b>OS – Other Sources of Foster Parent Support</b>	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.”
<b>O – Not about Support</b>	Other miscellaneous comments that don’t fit elsewhere. Comments about good/bad support that occurred in the past; comments about future support. Comments about <u>training</u> should be moved and coded as such.
<b>DK – Don’t Know</b>	Don’t know. Have no answer. Unsure. Too new to foster parenting to answer. No contact with CA/DSHS; no need for support.

## Foster Parent Training 2017 – Response Glossary

**Question 1:** What about foster parent training has been helpful?

**Question 2:** How could foster parent training be improved?

Response Category	Description
<b>QUALITY/HELPFULNESS</b>	
<b>TH – Overall Training</b>	Training is helpful/not helpful; training was good (great)/not good (great); did/didn't like training (without further clarification).
<b>TP – Specific Agency/Program Training</b>	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.
<b>TN – Nothing</b>	"Nothing," "Can't think of anything," "No suggestions" etc. (Negative, if about what has been helpful; positive, if about what needs improving.)
<b>TRAINERS</b>	
<b>TR – Trainers</b>	Trainers are good/bad; specific trainer qualities; want more/less of specific categories of trainers (including foster parents/foster children/biological parents as trainers—use both TR and TV); includes comments about guest speakers/presenters at training.
<b>TT – Specific Trainer</b>	Named specific trainer. Also always coded as TR
<b>GENERAL TRAINING</b>	<b>Comments on aspects of training foster parents like/want or don't like/don't want</b>
<b>TG-C – Caring for Foster Children</b>	Dealing with/caring for foster children. Includes communicating with children; identifying/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.
<b>TG-A – Approaches to Training</b>	Approaches used in training. Includes small groups; roundtable discussions; brainstorming; using case scenarios, real life examples.
<b>TG-R – Resources</b>	Information about resources (what/where they are); contact information.
<b>TG-M – Training Materials</b>	Quality/usefulness of materials used in training (including need to update written materials, videos, etc.); specific topics to add/delete.
<b>TG-O – Other Training Comments</b>	Other comments about training. Includes more/less training; variety in training; repetitious training; updated training; training pace too fast/too slow; tell it like it is; limit socializing during training; general parenting information; information for FP who haven't parented; refresher courses for long-term FP. Complaints about training requirements. Training that addresses general issues of children in my care (only if a general observation, not a request for a specific type of training). Requests for training in languages other than English. Comments about wanting to include foster parent's biological children in training. "Every child is different."
<b>SPECIFIC TRAINING TOPICS</b>	<b>Comments on specific training/training types foster parents like/want or don't like/don't want</b>
<b>TS-D – Disorders/Issues</b>	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. "Medically fragile" if infants/toddlers not specified.
<b>TS-S – Substance Abuse</b>	Training focused on substance-abuse issues. Includes fetal alcohol syndrome, drug-exposed infants, and effects of bio-parents' drug use on children.
<b>TS-Y – Sexually Inappropriate Behavior</b>	Training focused on youthful sex offenders, sexually aggressive or inappropriate behavior.
<b>TS-B – Child Behavior</b>	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.

Response Category	Description
TS-I – Infants and Toddlers	Training on infants and toddlers. Includes infant care, medically fragile infant/toddler care. Not for fetal alcohol syndrome or infants exposed to drugs (TS-S). “Medically fragile” with no mention of infants or toddlers is TS-D.
TS-F – Navigating the Foster Care System	Training on how to navigate the foster care system. Includes how to interact with social workers; paperwork issues; rules and regulations; court procedures; other processes/procedures; what to expect from the system.
TS-P – Caregiver Core Training	Like/don’t like CCT/PRIDE training (PRIDE is now Caregiver Core Training). Any mention of “Core” training should use this code.
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 training.
TS-O – Other Specific Training Topics	Other training. Includes dealing with biological parents; advocating for youth; children’s rights; grief/loss/stress experienced by foster care <i>providers</i> ; other specific training liked or disliked/wanted. Mentions taking specific classes/training/workshops, without identifying them. Mentions “first placement training” or “initial training” but NOT “Core Training” (TS-P).
<b>ACCESS</b>	<b>Comments about what made it easier/harder for foster parents to attend training</b>
TA-L – Location	Location of training. Includes having training in more places; having training closer to foster parents’ homes; making it easier to get to training.
TA-S – Scheduling	Scheduling of training. 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 training.
TA-O – Other Access Comments	Other likes/dislikes, or wants/don’t wants, regarding access to training (e.g. “We had to seek training ourselves.” without indication of reason/other reason than above). Includes comments about transportation to training.
<b>ALTERNATIVE TRAINING FORMATS</b>	<b>Comments about training formats (other than standard classroom training)</b>
TF-N – Online Training	Like/dislike online training, including online videos.
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, etc.); comments about resource libraries or training DVDs; like/want wider variety of formats.

Response Category	Description
<b>VOICE AND CHOICE</b>	<b>Comments that indicate foster parents felt/didn't feel included, involved, empowered by training</b>
<b>TV</b> – Voice – and Community – in Training	Foster parent involvement in training (including foster parents/foster children/biological parents as trainers–use both TR and TV); interactions between foster parents and trainers, or among foster parents during training; interactions between new and experienced foster parents; sense of community/support in training; networking.
<b>TC</b> – Choice in Training	Foster parents do/don't choose which training to attend, what is addressed in training. Only use if respondent specifically likes / wants more choice in which training to take, or if they request specific subjects to be addressed.
<b>TRAINING INFORMATION</b>	
<b>TI</b> – Information about Training	Like/want information about upcoming training; mailings; training calendars. Don't like/don't want such information in the form it is currently provided. This includes comments about wanting social workers to make foster parents aware of training. Comments about training certificates.
<b>OTHER</b>	
<b>TOS</b> –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 biological or foster families); general comments about training in the community.
<b>TO</b> – Response <i>not</i> about Training	Other miscellaneous comments that don't fit elsewhere. <i>"Experience as a foster parent is the best teacher."</i> Comments about <i>support</i> should be moved and coded as such.
<b>TDK</b> – Don't Know	Don't know, not sure, can't answer, haven't attended training.

**Notes:**

- "No comment," "No response," "Don't want to answer," and N/A are not coded.
- Most of these codes can be coded in three different ways: positive (P), needs work (N), or neutral/mixed (E). For example, comments that fall under Social Worker Courtesy (SC) can be coded SC-P (positive comments about social worker courtesy), SC-N (negative comments or suggestions for change about social worker courtesy) or SC-E (neutral or mixed comments about social worker courtesy, like "Social workers are friendly sometimes" or "Some social workers are respectful to foster parents, and some aren't"). Comments that fall under Information about Training (TI) can be coded TI-P (positive comments about training information), TI-N (negative comments or suggestions for change about training information) or TI-E (neutral comments about training information), for example, "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, including Nothing (QN or TN), Specific Social Worker (SW), Need More Social Workers (SN) and Don't Know (DK or TDK), 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. Likewise, 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 2017 – Narrative Comments Summary Data

1,348 Respondents (1,344 made comments)

MAJOR THEMES AND SUBTHEMES <sup>1</sup>		Total		Satisfied		Mixed or Neutral		Needs Work	
		# <sup>2</sup>	% of All <sup>3</sup>	# <sup>2</sup>	% <sup>4</sup>	# <sup>2</sup>	% <sup>4</sup>	# <sup>2</sup>	% <sup>4</sup>
<b>Quality/Support</b>		452	33.6%	303	67.0%	53	11.7%	96	21.2%
CA Support	QS	98	7.3%	57	58.2%	5	5.1%	36	36.7%
Specific Agency/Area/Office Support	QP	272	20.2%	206	75.7%	31	11.4%	35	12.9%
Nothing	QN	162	12.1%	109	67.3%	1	0.6%	52	32.1%
<b>Social Workers</b>		1,163	86.5%	320	27.5%	569	48.9%	274	23.6%
Social Worker Support	SS	415	30.9%	254	61.2%	67	16.1%	94	22.7%
Social Worker Courtesy	SC	185	13.8%	79	42.7%	13	7.0%	93	50.3%
Social Workers Listen/Understand	SL	255	19.0%	139	54.5%	17	6.7%	99	38.8%
Social Workers are Inclusive	SI	157	11.7%	50	31.8%	14	8.9%	93	59.2%
Other Social Worker Comments	SO	966	71.9%	297	30.7%	328	34.0%	341	35.3%
Foster Care Licenser Support	SF	19	1.4%	8	42.1%	0	0.0%	11	57.9%
Specific Social Worker	SW	7	0.5%						
Need More Social Workers	SN	151	11.2%					151	100.0%
<b>Access</b>		556	41.4%	317	57.0%	102	18.3%	137	24.6%
Phone/Staff Access	AP	397	29.5%	222	55.9%	55	13.9%	120	30.2%
Consistency of Contact	AR	225	16.7%	146	64.9%	21	9.3%	58	25.8%
<b>Process</b>		378	28.1%	21	5.6%	20	5.3%	337	89.2%
General Processes	PR	197	14.7%	5	2.5%	6	3.0%	186	94.4%
Specific Processes	PS	211	15.7%	8	3.8%	4	1.9%	199	94.3%
Paperwork Processes	PP	54	4.0%	16	29.6%	3	5.6%	35	64.8%
<b>Coordination</b>		66	4.9%	14	21.2%	2	3.0%	50	75.8%
Coordination	CO	66	4.9%	14	21.2%	2	3.0%	50	75.8%
<b>Information</b>		768	57.1%	222	28.9%	171	22.3%	375	48.8%
Information	IN	768	57.1%	222	28.9%	171	22.3%	375	48.8%
<b>Resources</b>		305	22.7%	114	37.4%	29	9.5%	162	53.1%
Medical, Dental, Mental Health	RM	83	6.2%	33	39.8%	3	3.6%	47	56.6%
Respite	RR	68	5.1%	17	25.0%	5	7.4%	46	67.6%
Transportation	RT	49	3.6%	20	40.8%	1	2.0%	28	57.1%
Child Care	RC	24	1.8%	4	16.7%	0	0.0%	20	83.3%
Financial Matters	RF	47	3.5%	10	21.3%	2	4.3%	35	74.5%
Other Resources (includes training)	RO	118	8.8%	58	49.2%	4	3.4%	56	47.5%
<b>Other</b>		180	13.4%	49	27.2%	88	48.9%	43	23.9%
Other Sources of Support	OS	66	4.9%	35	53.0%	11	16.7%	20	30.3%
Not about support	O	73	5.4%	17	23.3%	29	39.7%	27	37.0%
Don't know	DK	50	3.7%			50	100.0%		

<sup>1</sup> 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 "Child Care" 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" response in the "Resources" row.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Respondents who commented on this theme as a percentage of the total number of respondents.

<sup>4</sup> Percentage of comments in this theme that were categorized as "Satisfied," "Needs Work," or "Mixed or Neutral," respectively.

## Foster Parent Training 2017 – Narrative Comments Summary Data

1,348 Respondents (1,344 made comments)

MAJOR THEMES AND SUBTHEMES <sup>1</sup>	Total		Satisfied		Mixed or Neutral		Needs Work		
	# <sup>2</sup>	% of All <sup>3</sup>	# <sup>2</sup>	% <sup>4</sup>	# <sup>2</sup>	% <sup>4</sup>	# <sup>2</sup>	% <sup>4</sup>	
<b>Quality/Help</b>	429	31.9%	341	79.5%	38	8.9%	50	11.7%	
Helpfulness of training	TH	221	16.4%	169	76.5%	22	10.0%	30	13.6%
Specific Program or Agency	TP	97	7.2%	88	90.7%	6	6.2%	3	3.1%
Nothing	TN	187	13.9%	160	85.6%	5	2.7%	22	11.8%
<b>Trainers</b>		154	11.5%	87	56.5%	14	9.1%	53	34.4%
Trainers	TR	154	11.5%	87	56.5%	14	9.1%	53	34.4%
Specific Trainer	TT	4	0.3%						
<b>General Training</b>		747	55.6%	306	41.0%	160	21.4%	281	37.6%
Taking Care of Foster Children	TG-C	156	11.6%	105	67.3%	8	5.1%	43	27.6%
Approaches to Training	TG-A	124	9.2%	71	57.3%	3	2.4%	50	40.3%
Accessing Resources	TG-R	104	7.7%	55	52.9%	1	1.0%	48	46.2%
Training Materials	TG-M	35	2.6%	10	28.6%	2	5.7%	23	65.7%
Other General Training Comments	TG-O	518	38.5%	173	33.4%	97	18.7%	248	47.9%
<b>Specific Trainings</b>		817	60.8%	432	52.9%	219	26.8%	166	20.3%
Disorders/Issues	TS-D	236	17.6%	142	60.2%	22	9.3%	72	30.5%
Substance Abuse	TS-S	59	4.4%	35	59.3%	3	5.1%	21	35.6%
Sexual Behavior Concerns	TS-Y	9	0.7%	3	33.3%	2	22.2%	4	44.4%
Child Behavior and Development	TS-B	206	15.3%	121	58.7%	14	6.8%	71	34.5%
Infants and Toddlers	TS-I	12	0.9%	2	16.7%	1	8.3%	9	75.0%
Navigating Foster Care System	TS-F	183	13.6%	80	43.7%	19	10.4%	84	45.9%
Health and Safety	TS-H	52	3.9%	44	84.6%	3	5.8%	5	9.6%
Cultural Awareness/Issues	TS-C	28	2.1%	15	53.6%	1	3.6%	12	42.9%
Caregiver Core Training/PRIDE	TS-P	143	10.6%	112	78.3%	18	12.6%	13	9.1%
Other Specific Topics	TS-O	227	16.9%	105	46.3%	34	15.0%	88	38.8%
<b>Access</b>		398	29.6%	21	5.3%	28	7.0%	349	87.7%
Location	TA-L	130	9.7%	6	4.6%	6	4.6%	118	90.8%
Scheduling	TA-S	170	12.6%	14	8.2%	7	4.1%	149	87.6%
Child Care	TA-C	146	10.9%	6	4.1%	4	2.7%	136	93.2%
Other Accessibility Comments	TA-O	65	4.8%	8	12.3%	7	10.8%	50	76.9%
<b>Alternative Training Formats</b>		208	15.5%	55	26.4%	38	18.3%	115	55.3%
Online Training	TF-N	175	13.0%	43	24.6%	33	18.9%	99	56.6%
Support Groups	TF-S	18	1.3%	13	72.2%	2	11.1%	3	16.7%
Other Formats	TF-O	31	2.3%	4	12.9%	4	12.9%	23	74.2%
<b>Voice and Choice</b>		309	23.0%	209	67.6%	28	9.1%	72	23.3%
Voice and Community in Training	TV	282	21.0%	191	67.7%	24	8.5%	67	23.8%
Choice of Training	TC	35	2.6%	24	68.6%	2	5.7%	9	25.7%
<b>Training Information</b>		79	5.9%	12	15.2%	3	3.8%	64	81.0%
Information about Training	TI	79	5.9%	12	15.2%	3	3.8%	64	81.0%
<b>Other</b>		239	17.8%	61	25.5%	102	42.7%	76	31.8%
Support Beyond Training	TOS	85	6.3%	42	49.4%	6	7.1%	37	43.5%
Response not about training	TO	101	7.5%	26	25.7%	30	29.7%	45	44.6%
Don't know	TDK	67	4.9%			67	100.0%		

<sup>1</sup>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 "Child Care" and "Location" is counted only once in the "Access" row. A person who has a "Satisfied" comment in the "Child Care" row and "Needs Work" in the "Location" row would be counted as a "Mixed" response in the "Access" row.

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup> Respondents who commented on this theme as a percentage of the total number of respondents.

<sup>4</sup> Percentage of comments in this theme that were categorized as "Satisfied," "Needs Work," or "Mixed or Neutral," respectively.

# 2017 Foster Parent Survey: Survey Script and Survey Questions

## INTRODUCTION

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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

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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. Are you treated like part of the team?**
- B. Can you get help when you ask for it?**
- C. Do the social workers listen to your input?**
- D. Are you included in meetings about the child in your care?**
- 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**

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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
- Otherwise 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?**

## 2017 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 2016, November 2016, February 2017, or May 2017, or within the five months preceding the interview date. In each of these quarters, 361-375 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 2016 survey year were not eligible to participate and were removed from the sample. In total, 1,471 eligible foster homes were selected to complete the survey. Of these, 1,350 completed the interview (92%). As of 6/30/2017, there were 4,945 foster homes in the state of Washington.

The 95% sampling error for the survey sample is  $\pm 2.3$  percentage points for a 50% proportion.

### Statistical Significance Testing: Comparisons by Survey Year and Regional Differences

For the seven standardized questions, statistical significance tests were calculated to assess differences in the percent of positive responses (More than/Somewhat Adequate or Always/Usually) among regions, and between the 2016 and 2017 survey years. The criterion for statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$ .

Differences between 2016 and 2017 were assessed using a 2-sample test for equality of proportions without continuity correction. Differences among the three regions were first evaluated with the chi-square test of independence; questions with a  $p$  value of  $< 0.05$  were then evaluated with a 2-sample chi-square test. Questions with responses that had statistically significant differences are shown in bold type in the table below.

### Percent Positive Responses by Year and Region

Question	YEAR		REGION		
	2017	2016	1	2	3
In the past year, did you get adequate support for your roles and responsibilities as a foster parent?	78	79	80	74	79
Do the social workers listen to your input?	<b>78<sup>1</sup></b>	81	<b>82<sup>2</sup></b>	74	77
Are you treated like a part of the team?	73	74	<b>74<sup>2</sup></b>	68	<b>75<sup>3</sup></b>
Are you included in meetings about the child in your care?	72	72	76	68	72
Can you get help when you ask for it?	79	80	<b>83<sup>4</sup></b>	76	79
Do you get adequate information about the needs of the children placed with you, such as medical, behavioral, developmental and educational needs?	69	70	<b>73<sup>4</sup></b>	64	<b>70<sup>3</sup></b>
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?	87	87	87	83	88

### Rounding

Results described in the narrative report are rounded to the nearest whole number. Due to the effects of rounding, some percentages reported as whole numbers may not add to 100%.

<sup>1</sup> 2016 > 2017;  $p < .05$

<sup>2</sup> Region 1 > Region 2;  $p < .05$

<sup>3</sup> Region 3 > Region 2;  $p < .05$

<sup>4</sup> Region 1 > Region 2;  $p < .01$





2017 Foster Parent Survey  
**DSHS Foster Parents Speak**



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*Transforming lives*

Research & Data Analysis Division