

Health/Mental Health Providers: How do I engage birth parents?

When children enter foster care, the responsibility and authority for obtaining health and mental health services expands to include:

1. Birth/Legal Parents – retain the rights and responsibility for consenting to non-emergency, non-routine care; e.g. elective surgical procedures, psychotropic medications, inpatient psychiatric admission, requesting a vaccine waiver, consenting for release of health/mental health records.
2. Foster Parents – have rights and responsibility for consenting to routine health care, mental health assessment and psychotherapy services.
3. Foster Care Workers – have rights and responsibility to request health/mental health records for case planning.

It is important to engage birth/legal parents so that they build the skills they need to support the health and well-being of their children.

Following are the steps your office can take to engage birth/legal parents:

1. Contact the foster care worker to find out if there are any limits on contact between the child and birth/legal parent; e.g. must visits be supervised.
2. Ask the foster care worker if there are any concerns about health/mental health appointments attended by both foster parent and birth/legal parent.
3. Ask the foster care worker to let your office know if there are any changes to visitation, contact or legal status; e.g. an order terminating birth/legal parental rights.
4. If there are no restrictions/concerns about birth/legal parents at appointments:
 - a. Continue to include birth/legal parents in appointment call/text reminders along with foster parents and foster care worker.
 - b. Include birth/legal parents and foster parents when scheduling appointments.
 - c. Make copies of after visit summaries for birth/legal and foster parents.
5. If birth/legal parents are limited to supervised visitation:
 - a. Determine how to ensure any supervision needs during times when the child is in the waiting area.
 - b. Continue to include birth/legal parents in appointment call/text reminders along with foster parents and foster care worker.
 - c. Include birth/legal parents and foster parents when scheduling appointments.
 - d. Make copies of after visit summaries for birth/legal and foster parents.

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6. If birth/legal parents are restricted from direct contact with child:
 - a. Consider how to build time during appointments to obtain information from birth/legal parent; e.g. phone contact or completing clinical questionnaires.
 - b. Talk with foster care worker about assisting with arranging for consents for treatment needing birth/legal parent approval.