

# CareCertify LLC

## Foster Care Training Series

FC-04

# Professional Boundaries & Healthy Relationships

*Participant Guide*

Foster Care Training Series · Audience: Foster Parents · Agency Staff · Treatment Foster Care Providers · CE Hours: 1.0

## Close and Caring — and Safe

Foster care asks for something unusual: love and nurture a child as your own, while also keeping a professional role, respecting their birth family, and protecting their safety. Children in care need warmth and closeness — and they need the safety that clear boundaries provide, especially having been harmed by adults before.

This guide covers how to build close, healing relationships within appropriate boundaries: affection, privacy, confidentiality, social media, birth families, and protecting all children in your home. Boundaries aren't the opposite of love — they're part of keeping it safe.

### Learning Objectives — by the end of this module you will be able to:

- Build warm relationships with appropriate boundaries
- Maintain physical boundaries and privacy
- Protect confidentiality and use social media safely
- Set healthy boundaries with birth families
- Recognize and address when boundaries slip

## Section 1: Healthy Attachment and Appropriate Affection

Children in foster care need warmth, nurture, and the chance to form healthy attachments — that's part of what heals them. Offer appropriate affection that the child welcomes, and respect their cues, especially around touch. Many children have been physically or sexually harmed, so follow the child's comfort and never force closeness or touch. Safe, close, child-led relationships are deeply healing.

## Section 2: Physical Boundaries and Privacy

Respect each child's physical boundaries and privacy — their body, bedroom, and bathroom. Knock before entering, and support age-appropriate privacy in dressing and bathing. Maintain clear physical and sexual boundaries at all times; any sexual contact or boundary violation is abuse. Follow agency rules on sleeping arrangements, supervision, and who is allowed in the home, which exist to keep children safe.

## Section 3: Confidentiality and Social Media

A foster child's information — their history, case, and identity — is confidential. Share only with the team as needed for care, and never post photos, names, or stories of foster children on social media, which can endanger them and violate the case plan and the law. Don't discuss a child's history with friends, neighbors, or others. Confidentiality protects a vulnerable child's safety, privacy, and dignity.

#### **Foster children aren't social media content**

No matter how proud or loving the intent, don't post about foster children. Their privacy and safety come first.

### **Section 4: Boundaries With Birth Families**

Birth families are partners in a child's case, and reunification is often the goal. Treat them with respect and support visits and connection per the case plan. At the same time, keep your role professional: follow agency rules about contact, information sharing, and safety, and don't share your home address or personal details unless authorized. Never disparage a child's birth family — it harms the child, who loves them.

### **Section 5: The Foster Parent's Professional Role**

Foster parenting is unique: you provide a loving home while also fulfilling a professional role within a child-welfare system. Work within the case plan and agency rules, communicate openly with the team, document as required, and report concerns. Holding both — genuine love for the child and a professional partnership with the system — is what foster parenting asks, and what serves the child best.

### **Section 6: Protecting All Children in the Home**

Boundaries also protect every child in the home. Supervise appropriately and be alert to peer dynamics and safety, especially when children have histories that affect their or others' safety. Avoid favoritism and treat all children — foster, biological, adopted — fairly. Work with the agency to understand needs and histories that affect supervision and safety, so every child is protected.

### **Section 7: Recognizing When Boundaries Slip**

Boundary problems usually start small: keeping secrets with a child, favoritism, oversharing your own problems, or blurred roles. Notice these early and talk with your licensing worker or supervisor. Foster parenting is hard, and asking for support is a strength, not a failure. Addressing a slip early keeps relationships healthy and children safe.

#### **When unsure, ask**

If you're not sure whether something is an appropriate boundary, ask your worker. Foster parenting comes with support — use it.

### **Section 8: Boundaries and Self-Care**

Healthy boundaries depend on a healthy caregiver. Foster parenting is demanding, and exhaustion or isolation can blur boundaries and judgment. Use respite, support groups, and your agency's resources, and keep your

own life and relationships healthy. A cared-for foster parent provides safer, steadier, more consistent care — which is exactly what a child in care needs.

## Key Terms

Term	What it means
Appropriate affection	Warmth and closeness the child welcomes, following their cues.
Physical boundary	Respecting a child's body, privacy, and personal space.
Confidentiality	Keeping a foster child's information private and protected.
Professional role	The foster parent's partnership within the child-welfare system.
Favoritism	Unfair preference among children — to be avoided.
Respite	Temporary relief care that supports foster parents.

## Check Your Understanding

1. How do you offer affection appropriately to a child who may have been harmed?
2. Why shouldn't you post about foster children on social media?
3. How do you set boundaries with birth families while staying respectful?
4. What does it mean that foster parenting is a professional role?
5. Name two warning signs that a boundary is slipping.

## What's Next

### Looking ahead

Next, FC-05: Safety & the Foster Home Environment covers keeping the home safe for children of all needs.