



Key Concept: Confirming Safe Environments

After a child is placed in foster or relative care, it is the Department's responsibility to assure their safety and well being, and the placement setting is held to a higher safety standard than the child's own home. Because of this increased responsibility and higher safety standard, it is critical for the Department to continuously **confirm safe environments** for the children we have placed in substitute care.

It's important for us to understand that the quality of a safe environment can change over time as families themselves experience changes, stress, crisis and the pressures of daily life. The challenge for us as child welfare professionals is to be aware of these changes in a timely way. For that reason, safety assessment for children in out of home care must exist within a process rather than being an event-oriented/time-specific task such as through licensing or re-certification studies.

Observable characteristics and attributes in four areas of the foster family system contribute to the overall safety of the child's environment. The four areas are as follows:

- **The Child**: In safe environments, children are assertive, feel free to speak their minds, are self-protective, as appropriate and per age and developmental level allows; if there is more than one child, there are supportive relationships among the children.
- **The Caregiver**: In safe environments, foster parents are open people, usually show empathy to each other and to children, are closely bonded to bio children or those children with them for a time, demonstrate protective behaviors, are typically products of nurturing environments themselves, acknowledge and take responsibility for all aspects of family life including family home management and roles – in particular those related to parenting.
- **The Family**: In safe environments, families have good to excellent physical, emotional and cognitive capacity, are reality oriented, have positive relationships and clear roles for caregivers and children, have good coping behaviors, are open and honest, are effective at coping and generally experience low stress, assure that the living environment is safe.



- **The Community:** Family members that support safe environments are integrated into their community, have weekly contact with and receive support from others in the community such as friends, neighbors, relatives, organizations or churches, and community members provide support and assistance to the family.

For more information on Confirming Safe Environments, you are encouraged to reference the Child Welfare Procedure Manual, Chapter 3, Section 9F. The Procedure Manual can be found at http://www.dhs.state.or.us/caf/safety_model/index.html#pm

Definitions from Oregon Child Welfare Administrative Rule that support these concepts are as follows:

Foster Parent(s) means a person who operates a home that has been approved by the Department to provide care for unrelated children or young adults who are placed in the home by the Department.

Relative Caregiver means a person who operates a home that has been approved by the Department to provide care for a related child or young adult who is placed in the home by the Department.