

## DOCUMENTATION CHECKLIST

An important tool for resource families is keeping a journal to chronicle a child's stay in your home; a DYFS licensing requirement. Keep in mind that, if the journal ever goes into a court of law, *facts* are what count. Your personal opinion (positive or negative) of your caseworker, the birth parents, etc., are irrelevant, and can be used to document an individual bias, casting doubt over the accuracy of your factual information.

*Be sure to document FACTS.*

- **All scheduled visits.** Be sure to include when, duration, location, and who attended. If a visit is cancelled, document who cancelled it and why. Document any behavior or mood changes of children before and after the visit.
- **New case information.** Whenever you learn something new about a child's case, write down the information and its source. You may learn information from the birth family at a visit. The caseworker may give you information, relatives being searched, etc.. Document it all. Be sure to share all information with the caseworker, and don't assume that the birth family gave them the same information they gave you.
- **Medical visits, therapy visits, and sibling visits.** Document when, where, what happened, the name of the provider (doctor/therapist), diagnosis, and next scheduled visit. Document weight, height, and milestones (first words, first tooth, first steps, etc.). The birth parents will want to know this information, which you should also include in the child's Lifebook.
- **Record the happy times and the sad times.** *Document big events in little lives.* Note the child's likes and dislikes, wants and needs, social issues, school progress, and possible neglect and/or abuse (physical, sexual, emotional).
- **Anything you think is important or you might want to remember later.** Any behaviors exhibited by a difficult child, such as bedwetting, acting out, aggression, may entitle you to an increase (step) in the child's board rate. Write everything down. Sometimes, looking back over your journal can reveal a pattern.
- **Your efforts on behalf of the child.** When you request medical, dental, or educational records, write down when you requested them and from whom. If you don't get them, you can accurately state how long you've been waiting. Sometimes you think you've been waiting patiently, but a check of your journal may show that you've either been TOO patient, or not patient enough.
- **The child's interactions with others.** Is the child shy or outgoing? Does the child get along well with peers? Is the child aggressive or passive?
- **ALL accidents, cuts, and bruises.** Any injuries, no matter how minor, should be documented in your journal. Serious injuries must also be reported immediately to DYFS. Document the circumstances that led to the injury, the injury itself, and the treatment.
- **Documentation doesn't have to be lengthy, and "spelling doesn't count."** Just be consistent in your journal and as complete as possible. Make entries at least weekly; daily if you can.