

Section 8.6: Counselling for Foster Families

8.0 PAYMENTS FOR FOSTER HOME SUPPORT

8.6 Counselling for Foster Families

Policy

Where it is determined that a foster family is experiencing trauma as the result of a serious event directly related to providing foster care, the Ministry will help foster families access counselling services as required.

Rates: Pre-approved actual costs up to a maximum of five sessions

Approval: Service Area Program Manager or Service Centre Manager

Procedures

- The resources worker will debrief the foster family following a serious event. The worker will assess whether members of the family appear to be experiencing trauma as a result of the event. Where a family is experiencing trauma the worker will discuss the family's support needs, including counselling from another agency or individual.
- If it is determined that counselling is required it should be provided through public funded agencies wherever possible. Where a foster family has access to employee assistance programs through their place of employment or access to other support services, they should be encouraged to explore such services as they may apply to the situation.
- The Ministry will only pay for counselling where counselling is not available within a reasonable distance from the foster family's home through publicly funded agencies or where such agencies cannot meet with the foster family within a reasonable period of time. Prior approval for the services must be received.
- Where the Ministry determines that counselling services need to be obtained from a private counsellor or agency:
 - The counsellor and agency must be recognized by the Ministry as qualified.
 - Rates charged must be within the range of a reasonable community standard.
 - The Ministry will pay for a maximum of five sessions. Time per session should be limited to 2 hours or less.
 - A formal service contract must be entered into with the counsellor or agency with a clear statement of purpose and cost.

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SERVICE	EXPENDITURE	APPROVAL
Counselling for Foster Families (Non-case related)	Actual to a maximum of 10 hours	Manager, Out of Home Care

Practice Guidelines

Providing foster care is generally very demanding on foster families. Ministry managers, supervisors and workers are expected to be aware of the impact of the normal demands of foster care and provide foster families with appropriate support. Such support may include formal or informal debriefing, respite, increased worker contacts, access to support from the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association.

However, some events that foster families experience as the direct result of providing foster care are so severe and intense that they can have a traumatic effect on the foster parents, their children and the children placed in their care. Trauma must be recognized as a very serious condition that could lead to chronic emotional and psychological harm if not responded to effectively. It should not be confused with normal reaction to grief, loss or crisis which initially may be intense. Traumatic effect may include a deep and pervasive sense of grief, loss, poor self-image, thought disorder, psychosomatic illness, or impaired social functioning.

While not all serious events will lead to trauma it should be recognized that events such as the following may trigger a traumatic response:

- Death of a child while in the care of the foster family.
- Death of a child who is no longer in the care of the foster family but where there has been a significant and strong attachment to the child.
- Loss of a child through family reunification, adoption or removal from the foster family home where there has been a long-term, significant and strong attachment to the child.
- Serious physical or emotional harm to an immediate family member by a child placed in the home or as the result of a child being placed in their care.

Where it is determined that a family or some of its members are exhibiting traumatic reactions, the family wishes to seek formal counselling and it is determined by the Ministry that formal counselling is required, managers, supervisors and staff are expected to help foster families access counselling. Counselling should be sought through public funded agencies, employee assistance programs or other support services that may be available to the foster family. It is important that the foster family is provided help to assure that the counselling services available are able to address their needs. With permission of the foster

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family it may be appropriate for the worker to contact the counsellor/agency in advance of the sessions to provide an understanding of the demands of foster care generally and the impact similar events have had on other families who have experienced them. Where such services are not available or are not easily accessible due to distance or length of waiting time the Ministry can consider whether it is appropriate to purchase services from a private counsellor or agency as a means to assure the family's needs are met in a timely fashion. The counsellor should be chosen in consultation with the foster family and the counsellor must be recognized by the Ministry as having the training, skills and ability to provide counselling appropriate to the needs of the family. The contract needs to be written in clear terms that indicate the nature and purpose of the counselling, the number of sessions paid for by the Ministry, the total hours to be paid for by the Ministry, the rate to be paid. It should clearly state that any additional hours will be the responsibility of the foster family.