

# Office of Refugee Resettlement Sponsor Handbook



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# Definitions

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**Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR):** The Office of Refugee Resettlement is a federal office in the Administration for Children and Families, an operational division of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and oversees care for unaccompanied children in the United States.

**Care Provider:** A care provider is any ORR funded program that is licensed, certified or accredited by an appropriate State agency to provide residential care for children, including shelter, group, foster care, staff-secure, secure, therapeutic or residential treatment care for children.

**Reunification:** Reunification is the process of a child being released from ORR care to a sponsor. A child is reunified only when the sponsor has been approved by the government as a safe caregiver for the child.

**ORR National Call Center (ORRNCC):** The call center is a helpline for unaccompanied children, sponsors, and their families to support them throughout the reunification process, including after the child is released to a sponsor's care.

**Family Reunification:** Family reunification is an older term used in the Flores Settlement Agreement to refer to the process of releasing an unaccompanied child to the care of a parent, relative or other sponsor.

**Sponsor:** A sponsor is an individual (in the majority of cases a parent or other relative) or entity to which ORR releases an unaccompanied child out of Federal custody.

**Post-Release Services:** Post-release services are synonymous with follow-up services. They are services provided to an unaccompanied child based on the child's needs after he/she leaves ORR care. Post-release service providers coordinate referrals to supportive services in the community where the unaccompanied child resides and provide other child welfare services, as needed. Post-release services can occur until the minor attains 18 years of age. Post-release services can occur in combination with a home study or independently. Participation in Post Release Services is a voluntary choice by the sponsor and unaccompanied child.

## Discharge Paperwork

Unaccompanied children are provided with several important documents at the time of their release. It is important to review these documents carefully and to keep them safe. You will receive:

- Verification of Release Form (VOR)
- Immunization records and initial medical screening
- Initial dental exam and any significant dental records
- List of all medications the UC is taking, including dosage and reason plus original prescription
- Name and contact information of medical, mental health, and dental care providers so sponsor and UC may request additional records if needed
- Educational assessments and records
- Sponsor Care Agreement
- Safety Plan

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*Your child will come home with a folder of documents. Keep these papers safe! You will need them for the child's school enrollment, court, and doctor's visits, and more.*

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## Verification of Release Form (VOR)

This form is an official U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) form, issued by HHS's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), and should be considered evidence that the sponsor has custody of the child, the child resides with the sponsor at the address reflected, and the age of the child. Although schools, school districts, and other units of government should not ask for this VRF form and sponsors are not required to submit it to a school or other unit of government, sponsors may choose to voluntarily present this form to a school or other unit of government. If presented, schools and other units of government should accept this form as one appropriate means for establishing proof of identity, residency, and and/or age for purposes of enrolling a child in school. The VRF looks like this:

OMB Control No: 0970-0502  
 Expiration Date: 03/31/2022

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)**  
**OFFICE OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT (ORR)**  
**DIVISION OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN OPERATIONS (DUCO)**  
**VERIFICATION OF RELEASE**

**VERIFICATION OF RELEASE**

Name of Minor:		Aliases (if any):	
Minor's Date of Birth:		Minor's A#:	

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) has released the above named minor from Federal custody pursuant to section 462 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 and section 235 of the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 to the care of:

<p style="font-size: x-small; margin-top: 5px;">Photo of Child</p>	Name of Sponsor:			
	Aliases (if any):			
	Address:			
	City:			
	State:	Zip Code:		
	Telephone#:			
	Relationship to Child:			

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE SPONSOR CARE AGREEMENT**

The above named sponsor has agreed to the provisions set forth in the *Sponsor Care Agreement*, pertaining to the minor's care, safety, and well-being, and the sponsor's responsibility for ensuring the minor's presence at all future proceedings before the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice/Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR).

**FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY**

Name ORR care provider Facility	
Date	

THE PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT OF 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 10 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

## Medical Records

At the time of release, the child will receive copies of his/her medical records, which are very important to the child's safety and access to services after release. Many families do not qualify for health insurance, and costs for medications and treatment can be expensive. If you do not have health insurance or cannot add the child to your insurance plan, look for low-cost community health care clinics in your community. For assistance finding low-cost health care options, call the ORR National Call Center at 1-800-203-7001.



### Prescriptions

The child's medical records will include prescriptions for medicine and instructions for how the child should take the medicine, so this paperwork is very important. If there are any recommendations to keep the child healthy, like taking certain medicines or going to certain appointments, as a sponsor you are required to make sure the child receives that treatment after they are reunified. Review the medical paperwork carefully to make sure you are completely aware of any medicine or treatment the child should be receiving.

### Medical and Mental Health History

The discharge packet may include medical, dental, and mental health examinations, treatment, or tests that were done while the child was in care. When you take the child to the doctor, dentist, counselor, or psychiatrist for check-ups in your community, these records can be helpful to the child's practitioners to understand the child's needs.

### Vaccination Records

Pay extra attention to the vaccination record. The vaccination record shows all of the immunizations the child received while in shelter care to help protect them against diseases like measles, hepatitis, and varicella. When you enroll the child in school, the school will request to see this vaccination record as part of the enrollment process. Common vaccinations children receive in ORR care include inoculations against the following dangerous diseases:

- Polio
- MMR
- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Varicella
- Pneumococcal
- Meningococcal
- Diphtheria
- Tetanus
- Pertussis

Some diseases require a series of vaccinations to prevent, so the child will need to continue receiving vaccinations from a doctor in your community after their release to protect them from those diseases.

## Notice to Appear (NTA)

The child will also receive a document called the Notice to Appear, or NTA. This document demonstrates that the child is required to attend court as part of his/her immigration proceedings.

The NTA has the child's legally filed alien number, date of birth, and name. Even if the information on this form is incorrect, for example, if the child's name is spelled incorrectly, the information on this form is what the government

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*Your child may need to continue a series of vaccinations to keep them safe from certain diseases after they come home. You will need to help the child access medical care to receive those vaccines in your community.*

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officially has on file for the child. So, when you call to get updates on the child’s court status, to ask questions about their case, or to work with an attorney, they will ask for the information as it is written on the NTA, even if the child’s name is incorrectly hyphenated or spelled incorrectly. The NTA looks like this:

**U.S. Department of Homeland Security** **Notice to Appear**

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**In removal proceedings under section 240 of the Immigration and Nationality Act:**

Subject ID: \_\_\_\_\_ FINS: \_\_\_\_\_ File No: \_\_\_\_\_  
 DOB: \_\_\_\_\_ Event No: \_\_\_\_\_

In the Matter of: \_\_\_\_\_

Respondent: \_\_\_\_\_ currently residing at: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Number, street, city and ZIP code) (Area code and phone number)

1. You are an arriving alien.  
 2. You are an alien present in the United States who has not been admitted or paroled.  
 3. You have been admitted to the United States, but are removable for the reasons stated below.

The Department of Homeland Security alleges that you:

This notice is being issued after an asylum officer has found that the respondent has demonstrated a credible fear of persecution or torture.  
 Section 235(b)(1) order was vacated pursuant to:  8CFR 208.30(f)(2)  8CFR 235.3(b)(5)(iv)

**YOU ARE ORDERED to appear before an immigration judge of the United States Department of Justice at:**

\_\_\_\_\_ (Complete Address of Immigration Court, including Room Number, if any)  
 in \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ to show why you should not be removed from the United States based on the  
 (Date) (Time)  
 charge(s) set forth above. \_\_\_\_\_ (Signature and Title of Issuing Officer)  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_ (City and State)

See reverse for Important Information Form I-862 (Rev. 08/01/07)

## Safety Plan

The child will also be released with a document called a “safety plan.” This plan is very important for both you and the child. It provides lists of important numbers to call, actions to take in unsafe situations, and warning signs or risks to look out for. Many ORR care providers will also include directions and maps to important resources in your community, like instructions on how to reach the police station if you are in danger. Keep this document handy and make sure your child has immediate access to it. This is an example of what a safety plan may look like:



**OTHER IMPORTANT RESOURCES:**  
Otros recursos importantes:

**\*If you need further assistance regarding this resource, other resources, or translation, please contact I Office of Refugee and Resettlement National Helpline at 1-800-203-7001.**  
**\*Si necesita más información u asistencia en cuanto a estos recursos o interpretando por favor contacte línea de ayuda de Resasamiento de Refugiados al 1-800-203-7001.**

**Individual Counseling/ Family Counseling:**  
**Consejería Individual/ Consejería Familiar:**

**Catholic Charities**  
20425 Greenbough Dr. # 200  
Stafford, TX 77477  
(281) 207-2350

- Hours of Operation: Monday-Wednesday and Friday 7:30am-5:30pm  
Horas de operación: Lunes-Miércoles y Viernes 7:30am-5:30pm
- Fee: Sliding scale depending on income. Accept Medicaid and medical insurances.  
Tarifa: Escala de tarifas dependiendo de los ingresos. Se aceptan Medicaid y seguros médicos.
- Appointments: Contact the line (713) 874-6590 to schedule an appointment. Appointment available as of 10/01/2015.
- Chia: Llame a la línea (713) 874-6590 para una cita. Cita disponible desde 10/01/2015.
- Language: Spanish available  
Idioma: Español

**Parenting Support:**  
**Ayuda Para Padres:**

**Parenting Classes**  
4950 Memorial Dr.  
Houston, TX 77007  
(713) 730-2335

- Hours of Operation: Monday-Friday: 8am-5:30pm  
Horas de operación: Lunes-Viernes 8:00am-5:30pm
- Fee: \$50 for 6 weeks of parenting classes  
Tarifa: \$50 por 6 semanas de clases para padres
- Appointments: Contact the line (713) 730-2335 to schedule an appointment. Appointment available as of 10/01/2015.
- Chia: Llame a la línea (713) 730-2335 para una cita. Cita disponible desde 10/01/2015.
- Language: Spanish available  
Idioma: Español

NCC Official Use:  
Date Referral Received: \_\_\_\_\_ Date assigned to NCC CM: \_\_\_\_\_

**Nearest Fire Station:**  
Edificio de Bomberos más cercano:

**Nearest Hospital:**  
Hospital más cercano:

**Nearest Fire Station 12**  
8822 Bellvue Blvd  
Houston, TX 77074  
(832) 394-6700

**Nearest Hospital of Houston - Bellaire**  
3304 Southwood Dr  
Houston, TX 77026  
(281) 295-5300

- Hours: 24 hours
- Not required to see regular medical care otherwise agreed
- Cable for dependent of service
- Services: Se habla español

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NCC Official Use:  
Date Referral Received: \_\_\_\_\_ Date assigned to NCC CM: \_\_\_\_\_

## Sponsor Care Agreement

This two-page document details the specific expectations for all sponsors. Make sure to read this document carefully. By moving forward with sponsoring an unaccompanied child, you are agreeing to abide by the expectations outlined in this document.



**Administration for Children & Families**  
Office of Refugee Resettlement

### Sponsor Care Agreement

You have applied to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to sponsor an unaccompanied child in the care and custody of the Federal Government pursuant to 6 U.S.C. §279 and 8 U.S.C. §1232. If your sponsorship application is approved, you will receive an ORR Verification of Release form and enter into a custodial arrangement with the Federal Government in which you agree to comply with the following provisions while the minor is in your care:

- Provide for the physical and mental well-being of the minor, including but not limited to, food, shelter, clothing, education, medical care and other services as needed.
- If you are not the minor's parent or legal guardian, make best efforts to establish legal guardianship with your local court within a reasonable time.
- Attend a legal orientation program provided under the Department of Justice/Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR)'s Legal Orientation Program for Custodians (Sponsors), if available where you reside.
- Depending on where the minor's immigration case is pending, notify the local Immigration Court or the Board of Immigration Appeals within five (5) days of any change of address or phone number of the minor, by using an Alien's Change of Address form (Form EOIR-333). In addition, if necessary, file a Change of Venue motion on the minor's behalf. The Change of Venue motion must contain information specified by the Immigration Court. Please note that a Change of Venue motion may require the assistance of an attorney. For guidance on the "motion to change venue," see the Immigration Court Practice Manual at [http://www.justice.gov/eoir/vll/OCUPPracManual/ocvj\\_page1.htm](http://www.justice.gov/eoir/vll/OCUPPracManual/ocvj_page1.htm). For immigration case information, please contact EOIR's immigration case information system at 1-800-898-7180. Visit EOIR's website for additional information at <http://www.justice.gov/eoir/formslist.htm>.
- Notify the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) within ten (10) days of any change of address, by filing an Alien's Change of Address Card (AR-11) or electronically, at <http://1.usa.gov/AC5MP>.
- Ensure the minor's presence at all future proceedings before the DHS/Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the DOJ/EOIR. For immigration case information, contact EOIR's case information system at 1-800-898-7180.
- Ensure the minor reports to ICE for removal from the United States if an immigration judge issues a removal order or voluntary departure order. The minor is assigned to a Deportation Officer for removal proceedings.

Family Reunification Packet | Version 11  
FRP-4 Sponsor Care Agreement  
Revised 05/20/2022

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### Sponsor Care Agreement

Office of Refugee Resettlement

- Notify local law enforcement or your state or local Child Protective Services if the minor has been or is at risk of being subjected to abuse, abandonment, neglect, or maltreatment or if you learn that the minor has been threatened, has been sexually or physically abused or assaulted, or has disappeared. Notice should be given as soon as it becomes practicable or no later than 24 hours after the event or after becoming aware of the risk or threat.
- Notify the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-843-5678 if the minor disappears, has been kidnapped, or runs away. Notice should be given as soon as it becomes practicable or no later than 24 hours after learning of the minor's disappearance.
- Notify ICE if the minor is contacted in any way by an individual(s) believed to represent a smuggling syndicate, organized crime, or a human trafficking organization. Provide notification as soon as possible or no later than 24 hours after becoming aware of this information. You can contact ICE at 1-866-341-7423.
- In the case of an emergency (serious illness, destruction of home, etc.), you may temporarily transfer physical custody of the minor to another person who will comply with the terms of this Sponsor Care Agreement.
- If you are not the child's parent or legal guardian, in the event you are no longer able and willing to care for the minor and unable to temporarily transfer physical custody, and the minor meets the definition of an unaccompanied child, you should notify the ORR National Call Center at 1-800-203-7001 or [information@ORR.NC.gov](mailto:information@ORR.NC.gov).
- The release of the above-named minor from the Office of Refugee Resettlement to your care does not grant the minor any legal immigration status and the minor must present himself/herself for immigration court proceedings.

Family Reunification Packet | Version 11  
FRP-4 Sponsor Care Agreement  
Revised 05/20/2022

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Key components of the Sponsor Care Agreement are discussed in greater detail throughout this handbook. For example:

- Providing for the physical and mental well-being of the minor, including, but not limited to, food, shelter, clothing, education, medical care and other services as needed
- Establishing legal guardianship with your local court within a reasonable time
- Attending a legal orientation program
- Notifying the local Immigration Court or the Board of Immigration Appeals and the Department of Homeland Security/USCIS within five (5) days of any change of address or phone number of the minor
- Ensuring the minor's presence at all future proceedings
- Ensuring the minor reports to ICE for removal from the United States if an immigration judge issues a removal order or voluntary departure order
- Notifying authorities if the minor has been or is at risk of being subjected to abuse, abandonment, neglect, or maltreatment or if you learn that the minor has been threatened, has been sexually or physically abused or assaulted, or has disappeared
- Notifying the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-843-5678 if the minor disappears, has been kidnapped, or runs away
- Notifying ICE if the minor is contacted in any way by an individual(s) believed to represent an alien smuggling syndicate, organized crime, or a human trafficking organization
- Contacting ORR at 1-800-203-7001 if you are not the child's parent or legal guardian, in the event you are no longer able and willing to care for the minor

## Post-Release Case Management

For some children, ORR will approve for case management services to continue even after the child has been released to your care. These services are called Post Release Services. If your child has been assigned these services, your agreement to participate in these services can be a requirement for the child to be released. A case manager will visit your home several times to support you and your family, and will meet directly with you and with the child. The case manager will not provide direct monetary support, but they will connect the family with many resources in the community, and will help the family identify solutions if they encounter problems along the way. If you relocate, it is very important to tell your post release case manager, so that they can provide you with direction on filing paperwork, and so that they come to the right address when they come to visit the child.

Children are assigned post release case management services for many reasons, but always because the federal government has determined that these services would be beneficial to help keep the child supported and safe after reunification. Cooperation with post release services will not only help the child, but can be very helpful to the whole family.

## Caution: Fraud and Financial Exploitation

It is important for sponsors and family members to know that there are criminals who target families of children involved in the reunification process. It is unknown how these criminals get information for the children's families, but it is highly suspected that they are associated with smuggling rings or "guides". These criminals commonly ask sponsors/family for money in order to have the children released to family, that say that there is a fee for the reunification process, or say that the money will be used to cover the cost of travel to get the child to the family.

This is called financial exploitation because usually these individuals are acting on their own and the money requested is not being used for what they claim.

There are **NO FEES** associated with the processing or reunification of children in ORR care. No one should contact you and ask you for money, your bank account information, your credit card number, or ask you to send payment or money order to another person or account.

When the time comes to have the child released from a shelter or foster home, you will have to make flight arrangements for the child and possibly an escort if the child is younger than 14 years old. Travel costs should **ONLY** be paid directly to company, an airline, or care provider facility. No one should ask you to pay travel costs to a certain person or personal account.

Furthermore, if you are being requested to make payment for fees or expenses related to the processing, reunification, or travel of a child please contact ORR National Call Center at 1-800-203-7001 for assistance. You should view the request with extreme caution and follow these best practices, as recommended by the Federal Bureau of investigations (FBI):

- Be skeptical of individuals representing themselves as officials and asking for payments or donations door-to-door, via phone, mail, e-mail, or social networking sites.
- Be skeptical of individuals requesting payment or contributions by courier or wire, or those who request your bank account or credit card number.
- Verify the legitimacy of the government agency or non-profit organization by utilizing various Internet-based resources which may confirm the correct phone number, e-mail, and/or the group's existence and its non-profit status rather than following a link to an e-mailed site.
- Call the official telephone number of the government agency seeking money to ensure the request for payment is legitimate.
- Do not respond to any unsolicited (spam) incoming e-mails. Do not click links contained within those messages.
- Be cautious of e-mails that claim to show pictures of intended recipients in attached files which may contain viruses. Only open attachments from known senders.
- Make contributions directly to known organizations rather than having others make the donation on your behalf to ensure contributions are received and used for intended purposes.
- Do not give your personal or financial information to anyone who seeks payment or solicits contributions. Providing such information may compromise your identity and make you vulnerable to identity theft.

## Child Rights in Care vs. After Release

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Just as a child's safety is protected while in ORR care, a child has rights when they are released to you. As the sponsor, you will be legally responsible for ensuring the child's rights are protected when they are released to your care. Some of the most important rights include:

### Right to Education

Children are required to attend school up to a certain age (16, 17, or 18 years old, depending on the state you live in) and generally may attend regular public school until they complete high school or reach the eldest eligible age

(19, 20, or 21 depending on the state you live in). You can find details on compulsory ages where children must be attending school in your state at this website: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/upper-compulsory-school-age.aspx>

You must help the child to enroll in school immediately following family reunification. A good first step to enroll your child is to call or visit your local school to set up an appointment. They will tell you what documents they require for enrollment, and what the process looks like. For assistance enrolling, you can contact the ORR National Call Center at 1-800-203-7001.



Not only is education required for children in the United States, but school attendance can affect an unaccompanied child's case in court. Sponsors are legally responsible for making sure the child is successfully enrolled in school and that the child consistently goes to class. For teenagers and youth who are about to turn 18, they may have the option to enroll in a General Education Diploma (GED) program. This program can help youth receive credit for finishing high school. For teenagers and youth about to turn 18, this may meet their educational requirements.

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*You are required to enroll the child in school immediately after reunification. If the child is of an age where school attendance is required in your state and you do not enroll the child, this can be considered Child Neglect.*

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To enroll in public school, you will likely need to show the child's age, where the child is living in the school district, and records of vaccinations/immunity. Schools typically accept any of a variety of documents to show age, including:

- Religious document, like a baptism certificate
- Hospital paperwork
- Physician's certificate showing date of birth
- An adoption record
- An affidavit from a parent
- A birth certificate
- Previously verified school records

Examples of documents schools typically accept to show residency include:

- Copies of phone and water bills
- Lease agreements
- Affidavits

If the sponsor is unable to produce a document establishing the child's residence, the child still has a right under Federal law to enroll immediately in school.

Schools might ask you for additional information about the child's past educational history, nationality, language(s) spoken at home, and your household income. This additional information is usually collected to help determine what educational assistance and services the child may need. This information may also help the school place the child in appropriate grade and courses. Schools must let children enroll in school, even if you do not, or cannot give any of this additional information. Schools are required to identify children who may not be able to speak, read, write or understand English so that they can teach English as well as other subjects. Schools are also required to identify and evaluate children (ages 3 to 21) who may have mental or physical disabilities in order to provide regular or special education and services to meet their needs. Schools are prohibited from using this additional information to discriminate against you or the child. Schools are prohibited from discriminating against you or the child based on race, color, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, citizenship, or immigration status.

In most states, children can be enrolled in school past the age of 18. You can check to see the oldest age you can enroll a child in public school at this website: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=high-school-dropout-rates>

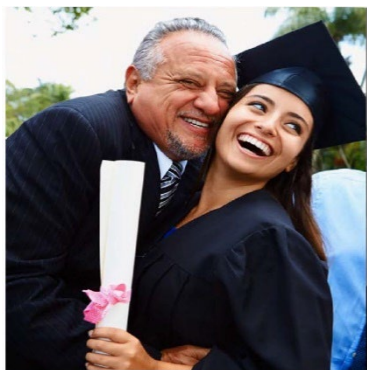
It can also be helpful to ask what social work or counseling staff they have at the school. Ask for your child to have a meeting with the school social worker or counselor. The transition to a new school can be very difficult for a child, so arranging supports early on can help make the child feel more comfortable.

Children have the right to access public school, even if they do not have status yet, but sometimes this gets confusing at enrollment. If you have any difficulty getting the child enrolled, you can call the ORR National Call Center at 1-800-203-7001 and a case manager will help you work with the school to get the child enrolled.

Information about enrolling your child in a GED program can be found here:

[http://study.com/article\\_directory/Articles\\_about\\_the\\_GED\\_\(by\\_State\).html](http://study.com/article_directory/Articles_about_the_GED_(by_State).html)

[http://learningpath.org/article\\_directory/GED\\_Info\\_by\\_State.html](http://learningpath.org/article_directory/GED_Info_by_State.html)



### *Truancy*

When a child refuses to go to school and skips class, this is called "truancy." Because education is a legal requirement, both sponsors and children need to comply with the child's school attendance. If the child misses too many days at school, the child may have to go to truancy court, or the sponsor may have to pay fines.

If a child is refusing to go to school, there may be many reasons why. Unaccompanied children sometimes are bullied by other children at school, they may get frustrated with trying to study in English, or they may feel overwhelmed.

If your child is refusing to go to school, try to figure out why, and talk to the school to help support the child to attend. Children have the right to go to school, and as a sponsor, you have the right to advocate for your child. If you or your child want to talk about challenges at school and think about ideas to increase school attendance, you can call the ORR National Call Center for support.

## **Right to Physical Well-Being**

Child abuse and neglect laws differ between every state, but no matter where you are in the United States, as the child's sponsor, you are held legally responsible for protecting the child's physical and emotional well-being. Children are considered "children" until they turn 18.

Physical harm to a child is never permitted in the United States, even as a form of discipline. Adults may never hit, kick or otherwise harm the children in their care. All caregivers, including sponsors, must also take precautions to ensure other people do not harm the children in their care.

### *Provision of Basic Needs*

The sponsor must provide the children in their care with adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical care, and supervision. Caregivers are never permitted to deny a child basic food and water as punishment, and they may never force the child to leave their home. The sponsor must also ensure the child has adequate clothing to keep them safe and healthy, including sweaters and coats for cold weather. Sponsors are never permitted to force a child to work for these basic needs.

Sponsors are required to ensure the children in their care receive medical care. This ranges from basic check-ups and regular vaccinations to medical attention for an injury or illness as needed. This also applies to psychiatric medications. If a child is prescribed necessary medications to keep him safe, sponsors are required to make sure the child gets the medicine he/she needs. Medical care can get expensive, and there are often supports in many locations that can help with medical costs. To identify low-cost medical services in your area, call the ORR National Call Center at 1-800-203-7001.

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*You may never threaten or harm the child in your care, including withholding food or water as a form of punishment.*

*Children may not be forced to pay for their food, their room, or rent in your home. Children may never be forced to leave the home to make it on their own.*

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### *Adequate Adult Supervision*

Sponsors must also keep children safe by making sure they have adequate adult supervision. States have different rules about this, but overall, children may not be left at home unattended, and should not be left alone caring for other children. In the states that allow teenagers to be at home without an adult, they still require that the child is prepared to protect himself. So, if your state allows you to leave the child at home, the child needs to know important information, like how to escape if there is a fire, what to do if a stranger knocks on the door, or who to call in an emergency.

For example, you can put together a plan with your child in writing and keep the plan on your refrigerator for easy access. The plan could include:

**My sponsor's phone number: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Neighbor/nearby family's phone number: \_\_\_\_\_**

**If I am in immediate danger, I can call 911.**

**If there is a fire, I can get outside by \_\_\_\_\_ and going to \_\_\_\_\_ to call 911.**

**If someone comes to the door, I will not let them in.**

**If I get injured, I can call 911.**

**I will not use the stove when I am home alone.**

Part of supervision requirements include knowing where the child is when they are not at home. If the child runs away, this must be reported to police. Police will come to your home to interview you and get information to try to find the child to make sure he/she is safe. As a sponsor, failure to report a runaway is in some states a criminal act. For help reporting that a child has left your care, or if you are afraid that the child might run away, you can call the ORR National Call Center for support at 1-800-203-7001.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) is a great resource for reporting your child missing, and NCMEC will keep this information in a centralized database to communicate with law enforcement nationally. To report your child missing to NCMEC, call 1-800-843-5678.

## Right to Emotional Well-Being

Sponsors are also required to protect a child’s emotional well-being. In the United States, adults may not threaten a child with harm. Sponsors also may not insult or emotionally reject children. An example of this could include a sponsor telling a child he is unwanted or unwelcome in his home. These kinds of behaviors are considered emotional abuse, and there are state regulations that prohibit it.

### *Protecting Children from Themselves*

Sponsors must provide a safe and supportive home, where the child is included in family activities. If a child is struggling with an emotional problem and might hurt himself, sponsors are also required to make sure the child gets help from a professional to keep him safe. This could include taking the child to the Emergency Room at your local hospital.



Specific self-harming behaviors to look out for include a child cutting, scraping, burning, or otherwise intentionally hurting himself. Children may try to hide this behavior, and may try to cover arms and legs or lock themselves in rooms while they are self-harming.

### *Protecting Children from Inappropriate Romantic Relationships*

*As a general rule, adults (over 18) may not engage in romantic or sexual relationships with children (under 18). Every state has specific laws about these relationships.*

One very common and dangerous threat to a child’s physical AND emotional well-being is an unsafe romantic relationship. In the United States, children cannot be in a romantic relationship with an adult. Each state has very specific laws preventing these relationships, but the general rules are that children (under 18) may not be in romantic relationships with adults (18 years old or more). Even if the child is not having sex with their adult partner, if there is any sort of sexual touching, sexual communication, or sexual photographs, this is a crime in the United States. It is still a crime even if the interactions occur on social media, like Facebook. The adult

partner in the relationship may face very serious legal consequences for being part of any kind of sexual activity with a child, including fines, jail time, and a permanent, publicly visible criminal record that may make it difficult to secure employment.

## Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

The failure to protect a child's physical or emotional well-being is called child abuse and neglect. As a sponsor, you are not only required to follow the rules outlined above, but you are also required to protect the child from any other person who might cause physical or emotional harm to the child. If a sponsor knows that a child in his care is being harmed and does not report it to authorities, the sponsor's failure to report may also be considered neglect. To report abuse or neglect, you can call your local Child Protective Services number or your local police. These numbers are available at [www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org).

If you need help reporting abuse, identifying the best local phone numbers to call, or finding solutions, you can call the ORR National Call Center for support at 1-800-203-7001.

You may also call Childhelp to report child abuse and neglect at 1-800-422-4453.

To report human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHRTC) at 1-888-373-7888.



### Right to Go to Court

Sponsors must take the search for an attorney for their child very seriously, and ensure that the child has every opportunity to meet with the attorney in preparation for court. Thousands of unaccompanied children every year are determined by the court to be legally allowed to stay in the United States, which allows children to grow up under U.S. protections, without the constant fear of being deported. You can get legal assistance, or help finding local, low-cost attorneys, by calling the Legal Orientation Program for

Custodians (LOPC) hotline at 1-888-996-3848.

As a sponsor, one of the most important requirements of sponsorship is to make sure the child gets to court for their court date. Sponsors do not have to personally take the child to court, but they must make dependable arrangements to ensure the child attends his/her hearing. If a child does not attend, in many cases, courts will automatically issue a deportation order, so it is very, very important that the child attends. If the court issues the child a deportation order, sponsors are responsible for ensuring the child reports to ICE for removal from the United States.

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*You are required to make arrangements to ensure an adult takes the child to court when the court date is scheduled. An attorney can help your child's case.*

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As a sponsor you are required to keep the courts updated on the child's location, so that the child can attend court in the area where they reside. A child's relocation must be reported. To update the courts on a child's changed address, you will need to complete a Change of Address (COA) form and a Change of Venue (COV) form. The ORR National Call Center can help you complete these forms and determine where to mail them. To check on your child's court date, you can call the Immigration Hotline at 1-800-898-7180 to get regular updates.

## *Working and Human Trafficking*

Unaccompanied children are not authorized to work while they wait for their court date. Since unaccompanied children are not legally able to work, if they choose to work, the jobs available to them may be low-paying or dangerous. There are very strict rules in the United States about any child working in certain low-wage or dangerous jobs. If a child works in conditions that the Department of Labor says are unsafe or exploitative, this may be considered human trafficking, even if the child appears to agree to work. This includes any kind of work that is sexual

in nature, like prostitution, stripping, escorting, or posing for photographs nude or in underwear. An adult who is part of trafficking a child can be prosecuted in federal court, with very severe consequences if found guilty. More information about children, youth, and work regulations in the United States can be explored at <https://www.osha.gov/youngworkers/employers.html>.

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*The child may never be forced to work or be threatened in order to work. The child may not be forced to repay his or his family's debts. This could be considered human trafficking, which is a very serious crime in the United States.*

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No one is permitted to force an unaccompanied child to work in the United States, even if there is a debt. No sponsor is permitted to require a child to work to repay his or his family's debt or pay for room and board. Forcing, scaring, threatening, or tricking a child to work is also human trafficking. This means physically forcing a child to work is never permitted, but that also it is a federal crime to convince a child to work by threatening to kick him out of the home, report him to immigration or police, take revenge on the child's family in home country, or other threats. Each of these actions could be considered human trafficking, which is a very serious crime in the United States.

Unaccompanied children may be vulnerable to trafficking. Sometimes children or their families may owe funds for travel. Paying back those funds may not always be easy, and the child or their families may feel threatened or coerced into working to pay back the money owed. For an underage child in the U.S. who cannot work legally, being forced to work, not attending school in order to work, and working for no pay (working for a place to sleep or food) could all be considered human trafficking. Unaccompanied children may have made the trip to the U.S. to support their families in home country, or to help their families in the U.S., and may feel they need to work to provide for those family members. The need to make monies quickly may make them susceptible to traffickers, who are very good at convincing them it is necessary.

Unaccompanied children may be exposed to sex trafficking due to an attempt to develop a sense of belonging, perhaps seeking affection from older parental figures, or due to emotional issues related to attachment. In the U.S. it is illegal for underage children and adults to have relationships, which may be different from what is accepted in their home country.

This cultural difference may make children think initially that it is okay, when it is not. Sponsors who encourage or allow trafficking events to occur while they are responsible for the care of the child may be engaging in illegal activity.

If a sponsor or child receives contact from any individual(s) believed to represent an alien smuggling syndicate, organized crime, or a human trafficking organization, sponsors should report this to ICE immediately. For assistance reporting, you can contact the ORR National Call Center at 1-800-203-7001.

## Right to Equal Protection

Around the world, there are millions of people who identify as LGBTQI: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Questioning, or Intersex. There are many unaccompanied children who identify this way, and they are protected in the United States in the same way every child is protected. This means the child's physical and emotional well-being must be protected in your care. Talking about sexuality and gender identity can be very difficult for children and needs to be a safe conversation in your home. Take care not to share your child's sexuality or gender identity without his/her permission. That is his/her information to share. If you are uncomfortable or unsure about discussing gender identity with the child and supporting him/her, call the ORR National Call Center for local resources to help you best support the child.

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*Children who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, or intersex are provided equal protection as all other children in the United States.*

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A LGBTQI child has the same equally protected rights as child who is not. Public schools are legally required to protect all students from harassment. Under the U.S. Constitution, these schools must address any harassment against LGBTQI children the same way they would address harassment against any other student. Public schools cannot ignore harassment or bullying based on appearance or behavior that does not "match" a child's gender: boys who wear makeup, girls who dress "like a boy," or students who are transgender. School officials cannot tell a child that they have to change who they are or that they brought the harassment on to themselves by dressing or behaving "inappropriately." If your child is being harassed or bullied in school, you should report it immediately to a school official. They have a legal responsibility to respond.

If your child identifies as LGBTQI, these resources may be helpful:

- [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)
- [www.ambientejuven.org](http://www.ambientejuven.org)
- Trevor Helpline Crisis Intervention for LGBT Youth  
1-800-850-8078 – 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- GLNH: Gay & Lesbian National Hotline  
1-888-843-4564 (THE GLNH) – Monday - Friday, 6:00 PM-11:00 PM Eastern Time
- The ORR National Call Center is also available to help you identify resources in your community at 1-800-203-7001.



## Domestic Violence

You or someone in your home may already be experiencing a domestically violent relationship. This kind of relationship could be between spouses, siblings, or anyone who harms or threatens one another in the home. Domestic violence includes physical harm, emotional degradation, and the threat of harm. If you are experiencing domestic violence, there are a few things you may want to consider:

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*If someone in your home is harming you, there are safe places you can go. If you are in immediate danger, call 911. Police will come to help protect you, even if you don't have status.*

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Domestic violence, even if the child is never physically harmed, can have an enormous impact on a child's development, their sense of safety, and their well-being. Children may try to stop violence in the home, putting themselves in harm's way. If you are considering sponsoring a child and there is already violence in your home, think carefully about the child's safety.

Domestic violence does not tend to just go away. Abusers often need very comprehensive counseling support before their behaviors change permanently, if they ever do, and this can take a very long time.

Bringing a child into the home is increased responsibility and can be added stress for all members in the home. If the home already has violence, the reunification of a child into the home may make the violence worse.

You have options. If there is violence in your home, when you are ready to leave, there are safe places you can go. Call the **National Domestic Violence Hotline** at 1-800-799-7233 to talk through your options and plan for your safety. You can also visit their website at [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org). If you are ever in immediate danger, you can call 911, and police will help you even if you do not have status.

## Pursuing Legal Guardianship

Sponsors who are not the child's mother or father may want to consider pursuing legal guardianship of the child. Legal guardianship gives sponsors many of the same rights that a biological parent has to the child. For example, legal guardianship allows the sponsor to make important decisions on behalf of the child, such as agreeing to medical care or allowing marriage. Legal guardians can also claim children on their tax forms as a deduction. A family law attorney can help you pursue legal guardianship of the child in your care, and this attorney is often different from the attorney who may help the child with his/her immigration case. You can call the ORR National Call Center to help you locate family attorneys in your area.

### *Resources for Individuals Pursuing Guardianship*

BRYCS - Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
3211 Fourth Street NE – Washington, DC 20017  
<http://www.brycs.org/guardianship/guardianship-information-by-state.cfm>



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## When a Child Comes Home

Every child and every family is different. Sponsorship can be a very rewarding experience, and many families report feeling fulfilled and relieved to be surrounded by their loved ones. There are some trends that many families experience, which may help to prepare you prior to your child's reunification.

## “Honeymoon” Period

When an unaccompanied child first arrives at his sponsor’s home, sometimes they might experience a “honeymoon” period. This refers to a period of time, which may be days, weeks, or months, when the child is new to the home and is on his/her best behavior. The child may be excited to be in a new place, not sure what the rules are, and eager to make a good impression. After a while, the child’s behavior may begin to change as he/she gets more comfortable, and may begin to test the rules as any teenager does. It can be distressing for a sponsor to see the child’s behavior change, but this is a normal experience for children after reunification.

## Financial Challenges

Caring for another person can be very expensive, especially teenagers. Many families feel the financial impact when a child reunifies to their home, and it can be difficult to manage expenses, especially for the first few months. As soon as you can, plan out your budget, including expenditures and savings, and stick to it. Most communities have many resources that can relieve some of your expenses, like food banks, low-cost clothing stores, and free medical clinics. If you need help strategizing on your budget or finding resources in your community, you can contact the ORR National Call Center for support at 1-800-203-7001.



## Difficulty Adapting

By the time a child gets to your home, they have been through a lot of changes very quickly. They may have experienced difficult things in their home country, they may have had a dangerous and frightening journey, they may have been detained suddenly by U.S. authorities, and then had to get used to living with many other children they have never met before in a shelter setting. Starting over in your home is one change in a series of many, life-changing events, and it can be a lot to take in for a child.

Once a child is in your home, the child has many new things to learn: house rules, new people, new customs, new culture, and a new language. One of the hardest things for a child to learn is how exactly they fit into a family. Especially for children reunifying with a parent, sibling rivalry can be extremely challenging for an unaccompanied child. Children may compete for their parents’ love or attention, or they may feel unclear whether they are loved at all.

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*If someone in your home is harming you, there are safe places you can go. If you are in immediate danger, call 911. Police will come to help protect you, even if you don't have status.*

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## *Take Deliberate Action to Help the Child Feel Like They “Belong”*

One of the most common experiences unaccompanied children have after reunification is the feeling that they do not “belong.” Children often report that they feel like a burden on their sponsors, that they are not really part of the family, or that their sponsors do not care about them. Often, these are the same children who eventually run away or run into behavioral problems. As a sponsor, plan to be very clear and verbal about wanting the child in your home and being glad that they are there. The child needs to hear it, repeatedly, consistently, even if their behavior

is becoming a challenge. Never talk about sending a child back to their home country as a form of punishment or indicate that you wish they had not made the journey. This is deeply hurtful for the child, and it may be very hard for you to regain the child's trust after saying something like that.

Pay extra attention to making sure the child is included in family activities, and that they are treated with equal affection and attention as any other children in the home. It might not seem like a big deal to you, but they will be very, very aware of how they are treated compared to others. Set aside quality time to spend with the child, just you two, to keep building on your relationship and help the child to feel special. Quality time doesn't have to be anything well-planned or expensive, it could be something as simple as grocery shopping or going for a walk around the neighborhood. When a child is struggling to adapt to a new environment, these moments with you can be very meaningful and important for the child.



### *Pay Attention to the Child's Friends and Romantic Relationships*

Also pay attention to who the child builds friendships and relationships with. Unaccompanied children will be very eager to find a place to belong, so they feel like they are wanted in this new, overwhelming environment. The child may get a group of friends or a romantic partner very quickly, to have stability and feel better about all of the changes. This can be a good thing, but it can also be dangerous.

### *Talk to Your Teen About Making Safe Sexual Decisions*

For older children and teens, boyfriends and girlfriends are especially important for the sponsor to monitor. When they first arrive, children do not yet have large social networks (groups of friends or peers) to protect them, they may be unsure of themselves, and they may be eager to fit in – this makes them more susceptible to an abusive or unsafe relationship, or to having sex in a relationship before they are ready. It might also make them more likely to send text messages or online messages with inappropriate photographs of themselves. Talk to your child about making safe sexual decisions, like never taking nude photos, never texting sexual content, abstaining from sex, waiting to have sex until they are ready, and using protection when they do eventually have sex. It is also important to talk to the child about the importance of setting boundaries with their partners to avoid violence in relationships. Reassure them it is never acceptable for their partner to intentionally hurt their feelings, or to hurt them physically. If you open the door early on for the child to talk to you about relationships and sex, it will make the conversation much easier for the child when they want your guidance down the line.

## *Your Child's Use of the Internet and Social Media*

*Monitor your child's use of the internet and social media. Children may meet strangers this way, and this can be dangerous.*

Many unaccompanied children find romantic partners online, through Facebook or other social media. The danger with these relationships is that it's hard to know who the child is really talking to, or whether you can trust their online boyfriend or girlfriend is who they say they are. It is not uncommon for children to fall into trafficking or abusive relationships online. Chatting online can lead to

children being convinced by their online partner to run away or get into trouble, or could even put your family in danger.

One of the best ways to monitor your child's use of the internet is to join social media yourself. If you join too, it gives you the chance to "friend" your child and see their profile, who their friends are, and what kind of communication they may be have publicly. If you have a computer at home, make sure it is set up in a public area of the house, so that you can see how it is being used. Set up rules about how frequently you will check their accounts online, or how often you will check their cell phone.

Common social media outlets include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp, Tumblr, Snapchat, Vine, Tinder and many others. Be aware of what social media tools your child is using, and be proactive about monitoring your child's use of these tools. Make sure they do not indicate their location on social media websites or "check in" to specific addresses, so that it is not easy for a dangerous person to find them.



## Trends Based on a Sponsor's Relationship with the Child

Some of the trends we see are specific to the type of relationship the child has to their sponsor. Whether a child is reunifying with a mother, a brother, a cousin, or a family friend can impact what some of the challenges might look like once the child comes home.

### For Sponsors who are Parents

For sponsors who are the mother or father of the unaccompanied child, you might experience that the child is really upset about you leaving to the U.S., even though you left to help the family. It's a confusing emotion – the child may understand logically why you left, but the heart doesn't always think logically. It might also be hard for you – leaving wasn't easy, and it's hard as a parent to see your child push you away. As the adult, you need to do everything you can to communicate to the child that they are loved. You need to make sure any fears you have of rejection don't get in the way of consistent, loving attention, even if you keep getting pushed away. The more consistently loving you can be, the easier it will be for the child to trust that you still love him.

This is especially relevant if you have had other children since you came to the United States, or if you have spent more time in recent years with other children in the home. Your child will have a lot of adapting to do, and it might hurt him to see the other children in the home already comfortable with you. He/she might feel jealous of them, or worry that you love them less, and the other kids might feel territorial or jealous too. Be very sensitive to this fear,

and do everything you can to show that you love your child just as much as any other kids in the home. Make sure you talk to your family to prepare them before he comes to your home, and make clear that you expect all household members to warmly invite the child into the family.

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*For parents, you and your child will need to learn how to be together again as a family. The love is there, it just takes time and communication to get comfortable.*

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It also might be hard because you have a certain memory of what the child was like back in home country, and the child has a memory of you too. People change over time, and their personalities get shaped by their experiences. You'll see behaviors you don't recognize in your child, and your child might feel overwhelmed when the dream he has had about what the U.S. will be like isn't very accurate. Be supportive and consistent, and remember that the child is a product of his past

and didn't become a "bad" kid. You can help change problem behaviors by giving him the new experiences he needs to change over time. The ORR National Call Center is available to support you with parenting challenges and to link you with local resources if you run into problems.

## For Sponsors who are Family Members

For family members who are not the mother or father of the child, it can be difficult to care for a family member's child, because the way their mom or dad parents might be different from the way that you do. If it's safe, it can be helpful to facilitate communication between the child and his parents. Reach out to the child's parents for their advice on how to handle certain behaviors, what they see as working best with the child, and their thoughts on how you can be most supportive for him. The bottom line is that while the child is in the U.S., he/she is under your care, so you ultimately need to make the parenting decisions for the child. Relatives often see just the favorable, well-behaved side of children, and might not see the deep-down behaviors that parents see. You will see a wide range of behaviors, including negative behaviors, once the child comes home and gets comfortable, and you'll need to be consistent, kind, and responsible with the child no matter what new or challenging traits they demonstrate. The ORR National Call Center is available to support you with parenting challenges and to link you with local resources if you run into problems.

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*For family members and family friends, it can be hard to learn how to parent a new child. Remember, as a sponsor, you have agreed to care for this child as a parent would.*

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## For Sponsors who are Family Friends

As a family friend, parenting another person's child can be very difficult. It can be hard to take ownership over such a responsibility. This is what you have agreed to, which means you are far more than just a place for the child to sleep and eat. If it's safe, involve the child's family where you can to help you strategize on parenting, but no matter what, don't take a back seat on parenting the child. He/she is reunifying with you as a child with a caregiver, not as a friend or a roommate. Ultimately, if things go wrong, you are held as accountable for the child as a parent would, because you are his primary caregiver. Your support and commitment to strong parenting will have a drastic effect on the child's success here in the U.S., so taking ownership of the parenting role right away will only help you. The ORR National Call Center is available to support you with parenting challenges and to link you with local resources if you run into problems.

# Trauma and Behaviors

Many unaccompanied children have experienced very difficult, sad, or scary things while they were in home country, or on the journey to the United States. These kinds of experiences are described as “traumatic,” when the experience overwhelmed the child’s ability to cope. This does not mean the child has done anything wrong, or that there is anything weak about the child, but that their body is having long-term physical responses to the bad experiences they had before. Common traumatic experiences that unaccompanied children report include gang violence, sexual abuse, domestic violence, physical abuse, being separated for a long time from parents, and witnessing the death or suffering of people they love.



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*Even if your child has told you, it's possible that he has experienced very difficult things before he arrived into your care. Previous traumatic experiences can have a big, long-term impact on a child's behavior, and counseling services can help.*

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These kinds of experiences are very hard to talk about, especially for children. Many children have not yet told their sponsors about some of the things that have happened to them. This can be a challenge as a sponsor, because hardship in a child’s past can have big, every day effects on the child’s behavior. When the child comes home, keep any eye out for these behaviors, as they are important signals for you to seek professional help to support the child.

## Self-Harming

Self-harming means a child is purposefully hurting himself, often with repeated injuries that are small and easy to hide. Behaviors may include cutting, burning, head banging, wound picking, hair pulling, severe scratching, deep biting, and bruising. Children may use razor blades, scissors, paper clips, staples, broken glass, erasers, cigarettes, lighters, matches, or other objects to hurt themselves. When children self-harm, they are often doing it as a way to cope with difficult experiences. Cutting is an expression of something much bigger going on inside, and stressful life changes, like reunification, can make the behavior worse.

Self-harming is not uncommon, and it is a difficult habit to break. It is harmful and can lead to much bigger problems down the road, and the eventual risk for serious injury or possible suicide is higher than other children who do not self-harm.

Do not fly off the handle if the child discloses to you that he is hurting himself, or if you find out in another way. Use your judgment – if the injuries are superficial, treat them immediately, and call your supports and your mental health referrals. If the injuries are significant and they might need professional medical treatment, go to the emergency room right away or call 911 for help.

The reasons behind self-harming are very complex and differ for everybody. As a sponsor, you need to be supportive, open, and empathic if the child opens up to you about it, and you need to arrange professional help immediately. The issue is so complex that it needs to be addressed by professionals for the safety of the child.

## Thinking About Suicide

The child in your care may tell you that he/she is thinking about dying, or even killing himself. That can be a scary message to hear. If you think the child in your care is about to hurt himself, call 911. Protective authorities will come to your home to help the child regardless of your or your child's immigration status – they respond to 911 calls only to keep people safe. You can also take the child to the closest Emergency Room at your local hospital. Every Emergency Room has staff available to assess people in crisis, and to assess whether your child is an immediate risk to himself.

If a child brings up suicidal thoughts to you, consider the following responses, suggested by the Suicide Prevention Lifeline ([www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)):

- Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- Be willing to listen. Allow expressions of feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether feelings are good or bad. Don't lecture on the value of life.
- Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
- Don't dare him or her to do it.
- Don't act shocked. This will put distance between you.
- Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
- Offer hope that alternatives are available but do not offer glib reassurance.
- Take action. Remove dangerous objects from your home, like guns or stockpiled pills.
- Get help from persons or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.



## Bedtime Troubles

Children who have a history of traumatic experiences often have nightmares, reliving the terrible things that happened to them. Some children refuse to go to bed and fight bedtime, some struggle to sleep because they are too afraid, and others may wet the bed.

These kinds of problems affect a child's entire day, not just the night. They may struggle to think clearly, have poor school performance, or may be grumpy during the day, since they are never really getting a good night's sleep. It will be hard to help the child adjust to your home when the child's basic need – sleep – is not being met. If you see a child having difficulty with bedtime, professional support can be an enormous help to get rid of nightmares, help the child feel secure enough to sleep, and stop the bed-wetting. Once these stressful and exhausting behaviors go away, the child is likely to do better in school and adapt better to the home.

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*Nightmares and sleeping problems can be an important sign that your child is struggling and needs help.*

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## Isolation

We often hear about unaccompanied children getting to their sponsor's home, but then wanting to stay alone in their bedroom or refusing to socialize with the family. There may be a lot of reasons for why the child acts this way. A new environment, especially for a traumatized child, can be a very overwhelming experience for a child, even if

they already know everyone who lives in the house. Some children may want to stay alone because they feel sad about something that has happened, others may be very frightened to leave their room or the house. Still others may feel stuck, like they are not yet a part of your family. If you know the reason why the child is isolating himself, this can help you better understand ways to help him feel better. Seeking professional help for the child can help both you and the child better understand what is going on, and can help you come up with really good ideas to support the child and your family.

## Eating or Not Eating

Some children, in response to changes, have disruptions in their eating habits. This could mean that they over-eat (feeling hungry and unsatisfied all the time) or under-eat (not want the meals or snacks offered). Typically this will get better within a few days. You can reach out to the ORR National Call Center for additional information if this does not get better. The call center can assist with tips and tricks to encourage healthy eating. You can also have them see your local doctor just to determine they are healthy.

## Emotional Outbursts

A child's body experiences big changes after something traumatic happens. In response to that traumatic experience, the body, outside of the child's control, can change the way the muscles move, the heart beats, and the lungs breathe, and this can last for many years or more. The body can react very strongly to something that seems to you like it is very little, or not a big deal.

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*Big, frequent emotional outbursts may be the child's body's response to trauma and stress. It can be helped.*

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If a child in your care seems to have really strong emotional outbursts, it is possible they have had a really difficult past, and their bodies are reacting. The outbursts might look like extreme anger that cannot calm down, or extreme sadness that seems impossible to make better. It can be hard as a sponsor to see your child acting this way, but it is very important that you do not let yourself overreact, too. If a child is having

big emotional outbursts, remember that it is the child's body acting that way, and that no one likes to feel that upset all the time. The good news is that these kinds of outbursts can be helped by a professional, who is trained to help the child regain control of their body. If you need help identifying a professional in your community to help the child control these outbursts, you can call the ORR National Call Center for support at 1-800-203-7001.

## Defiance

Sometimes we hear about unaccompanied children refusing to follow the sponsor's rules or listen to what the sponsor has to say. Like emotional outbursts, there are a lot of reasons why a child might act this way. Sometimes, children have had to "act tough" for a long time in their home country to prevent others from harming them. That kind of behavior is hard to change overnight, even if the child is safe in your home.

A child might also break your rules because they know they can make you mad. Children who have experienced a lot of chaos at home, like lots of arguing or fighting between parents or other kids, sometimes try to re-create that chaos wherever they go, because that is what is predictable to them. They may push you, because they can count on you getting mad, and that certainty feels good to them, not the anger itself.

You can probably guess that no matter the reason behind defiance, it can get kids in a lot of trouble. When you remain calm and consistent it can help, but sometimes that's not enough. If you see this happening, it may be

helpful to bring in a professional to help the child feel safe enough to lose the tough-guy act, or to learn how to feel normal even when there isn't chaos.

## Sexualized Behaviors

Some sexual behaviors in children may be normal for their developmental stage. It becomes a problem when these behaviors impact their everyday lives, hurt the quality of their social relationships, or impact other people. When this happens, usually it means that the child again has had a very difficult past, and this is their body's reaction to it.

If a child in your home is engaging in any level of sexual behavior with others in your home, this can be a big problem. It can be scary for sponsors to see this behavior in the children they care for. It is important to remember that sexualized behavior in children is often a response to what the child has experienced in the past, and does not mean that the child is "bad" or cannot be helped. If you see problematic sexualized behaviors in the child in your care, make sure you have a plan in place to keep each person in the home safe and supervised, and reach out for support for the child to help them overcome the past experiences that are causing them to behave this way. You can reach out to the ORR National Call Center at 1-800-203-7001 to identify local resources to help you support the child.

## Substance Abuse

Sometimes we hear about unaccompanied children using drugs or alcohol. There are many reasons for why a child might be using. Some children might use because it helps them cope with something bad that happened to them in the past. Some children use because they are in a brand new place, are desperate to be accepted and feel like they belong, and they feel more socially accepted when they use substances. Some children may have had to use for various reasons in home country, and have now developed an addiction that is hard to break. Whatever the reason, substance use can be dangerous for children, can cause long term damage to their bodies, or could even result in death. In almost all states in the U.S., the legal drinking age is 21, so if a child gets caught with alcohol, both the child and you can get in a lot of trouble. You can get in even more trouble if you purchase alcohol or drugs for the child to use. Most drugs in most states are also illegal.



Although there are legal and health problems related to substance use, if your child is using, it is your job as a sponsor to make sure the child has access to help. Be careful not to accuse or blame the child when talking with him about drugs or alcohol. Instead, talk to the child about what your worries are, and try to get an understanding for what specific substances the child is using, when, and with whom. If the child is addicted to a substance, you will need to look for help to support him to stop using. If the use is related to a certain group of friends, rethink your supervision plan with the child, and strategize with the child about ways he can avoid using. A drug and alcohol counselor can help you think of ways to have this discussion, things you can do to protect the child, and places you can take the child to help him stop using. To find a drug and alcohol counselor in your area, contact the ORR National Call Center at 1-800-203-7001.

## Bullying

Many unaccompanied children report getting bullied by other children, especially when they first join school. Children tend to pick on children who seem different, and unaccompanied children may dress differently, speak a different language, look different, or have different customs. Bullying can take many forms, from actual physical fighting or harming someone else, to intentionally making someone feel excluded, bad, or ashamed. Sometimes

bullying is face to face in or after school, but it could also be by phone, text message, or online. Be careful not to underestimate how upsetting bullying can be for a child. Bullying can cause extreme distress and interfere with a child's daily living, in and out of school. Because it is so harmful for kids, there are laws about bullying and most schools have policies about how they will address it.

If your child is getting bullied, it is very common and encouraged for sponsors to contact the school or even go to the school in person to talk to the principal, teachers, or social workers. They will be required to take steps to protect the child. It might also be helpful for the child to join other positive activities outside of school, including sports, mentoring programs, or counseling. If you need help communicating with the school, advocating for the child, or thinking about ways to help keep the child safe, call the ORR National Call Center for support at 1-800-203-7001.

For more information about bullying, visit [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov) or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

## Parenting

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ORR works with many children and families, before and after reunification. Along the way, we have heard the following parenting tips, which can help make the child's transition easier once he gets home.

### Rules and Consistency

Set rules and boundaries from the very beginning, and be very clear about what the expectations are in your house. It can be helpful to set the rules with the child, so that you are setting and agreeing to the expectations together. This sends the message to the child that you respect him, and it gives him the opportunity to discuss with you the reasoning behind the rules. The child is also more likely to follow the rules if he helped come up with them. Stick to your rules, and be as predictable as you can. Kids, especially unaccompanied children, often feel calmer and more under control when they know what behavior you expect from them.

Unaccompanied children have often had a lot of surprises and frightening changes over the last few years. They may get very upset, scared, or feel like they don't belong when routine changes, or when something catches them off guard. Do your best to set a daily routine that you stick to, so that the child can get comfortable with a daily schedule. For example, you might schedule dinner to be every night at 6:00, you might go grocery shopping every Sunday, or the kids might all floss, brush their teeth, and shower every night before bed. These kinds of routines can be very comforting to a child, and can create a sense of calm and belonging in world that is otherwise all brand new and full of surprises.

### Encourage the Behaviors You Want to See

Catch the child doing something right. When you see the child behaving well, provide them specific praise for the action they are doing, in the moment. This can help encourage the child to keep repeating those behaviors, and sets the stage for you to give feedback if the child is breaking the rules. The child is much more likely to listen to the negative feedback if they trust that you also notice all the good things they do. Respect the child's ideas and thoughts. Remember, "I don't agree with you," is very different from "You're wrong."

## When Your Child Breaks the Rules

Expect that the child will not always follow your rules, and will probably break them pretty often. Think about what you will do in response to problem behaviors.

One technique is to focus on responding to the child, not reacting. This means taking time to think through what is really happening before you address a behavior or problem. It also means making sure your response fits the situation, and isn't too casual or too overblown. Always ask yourself, "What message do I need to send to the child?" "Are my emotions getting in the way of sending the message I want to send?" and "Do I really understand the reasons behind the child's behavior?" Take the time you need to gather your thoughts, and to respond to the child in the way you really want to. Wasting an opportunity for kind, thoughtful feedback by yelling or saying something you don't mean can set you back a few steps in parenting, and make it harder to enforce rules with the child in the future.

Another technique is to carefully think about whether a child's behavior is actually harming anyone. If the answer is "no," you may want to think about how you respond, and give the child some leeway where it is safe. Do your best to set boundaries on the things that are most important, so that you are picking the battles that are the most meaningful.

Have a plan for appropriate discipline with the child. In the United States, caregivers are never permitted to physically harm the child as a form of punishment, so hurting the child cannot be an option. Think about what kind of limits or restrictions you can set without harming the child, so that when the child misbehaves, you are prepared. Sometimes, all of the good parenting in the world just doesn't seem to be enough. Recognize when a problem is bigger than you can handle. There is nothing shameful in being smart enough to reach out for help when the child needs it. That's good parenting.

## Key Contacts

<b>Emergencies</b>	<b>911</b>
<b>ORR National Call Center</b>	1-800-203-7001
<b>LOPC Hotline</b>	1-888-996-3848
<b>Immigration Hotline</b>	1-800-898-7180
<b>Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline</b>	1-800-422-4453
<b>National Domestic Violence Hotline</b>	1-800-799-7233
<b>National Center for Missing and Exploited Children</b>	1-800-843-5678
<b>Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transsexual (GLBT) Hotline</b>	1-888-843-4564
<b>National Human Trafficking Resource Center</b>	1-888-373-7888
<b>Stopbullying.gov</b>	1-800-273-8255

# Important Websites

For anti-trafficking resources	<a href="http://traffickingresourcecenter.org">http://traffickingresourcecenter.org</a>
For information about youth work	<a href="https://www.osha.gov/youngworkers/workers.html">https://www.osha.gov/youngworkers/workers.html</a>
For information about mandatory school attendance requirements per state	<a href="http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/upper-compulsory-school-age.aspx">http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/upper-compulsory-school-age.aspx</a>
For many resources specific to immigrant children and families	<a href="http://www.brycs.org">http://www.brycs.org</a>
For information on child welfare	<a href="http://www.brycs.org/child_welfare.cfm">http://www.brycs.org/child_welfare.cfm</a>
For information on family strengthening	<a href="http://www.brycs.org/family_strengthening.cfm">http://www.brycs.org/family_strengthening.cfm</a>
For information on schools	<a href="http://www.brycs.org/schools.cfm">http://www.brycs.org/schools.cfm</a>
For information on youth development	<a href="http://www.brycs.org/youth_development.cfm">http://www.brycs.org/youth_development.cfm</a>
For information on youth arts	<a href="http://www.brycs.org/youtharts/youth_arts.htm">http://www.brycs.org/youtharts/youth_arts.htm</a>
For information on anti-trafficking	<a href="http://www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/anti-trafficking-resources.cfm">http://www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/anti-trafficking-resources.cfm</a>
For information on early education (head start) programs for young children	<a href="http://www.brycs.org/head-start-collaboration.cfm">http://www.brycs.org/head-start-collaboration.cfm</a>
For information about bullying	<a href="http://www.stopbullying.gov">http://www.stopbullying.gov</a>
For information about domestic violence	<a href="http://www.thehotline.org">http://www.thehotline.org</a>
For information about suicide prevention	<a href="http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org">www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org</a>
For information about supporting LGBTQI youth	<a href="http://www.glbthotline.org">http://www.glbthotline.org</a>