



# Creating a secure base for the child in foster care

## SECURE BASE SCORECARD

FOR FOSTER PARENTS AND THEIR MANAGERS/ SUPERVISORS.

A PRACTICAL TOOL FOR QUALITY CARE DEVELOPMENT

- **THE CHILD'S BACKGROUND**

How difficult can we expect our task to be?

- **IDENTIFYING GOALS**

Mapping your resources and areas of improvement

- **DIALOGUE**

between foster **parents** and supervisor, social worker or other dialogue partners

- **PLANNING YOUR WORK**

focus points for improving your social relations day by day



## Welcome! This scorecard is a tool for your work as foster parents

This Scorecard can assist your great work. As foster parents you are the most important persons in the life of your foster child. Working with the Scorecard can help you and your supervisor or case manager in working together. It is a tool for analysing your network as a foster family, finding areas of improvement and having a good dialogue about them, and finally making a systematic plan for improving what you already do. Small changes can lead to major improvements.

It can also help you decide which sessions of the Fair Start education that are especially important for you to use.

## Your home is your workplace – improve it!

When you become a foster caregiver, your home also becomes your workplace. And you are no longer just a parent, but now you are also a foster parent - an employee working at home and with your home - to provide a secure base for a foster child.

The work of foster parents depends on many social relations: the people who gave you the job, your spouse, your contact with the biological parents. Perhaps you have children yourself, there are neighbours, friends and relatives, and the foster child has relations perhaps with other children in the street or at school.

The quality of all these relations makes the frames and platform for your work:

So to improve your work and decide what you will choose to focus on, you must of course work to improve your workplace. If you feel comfortable and secure and you have good relations with all the people in your social network, this will make you stronger and you will become a better caregiver for your foster child.

## This will help you plan your work and build a good environment for the child

We ask you to give your answer to a number of questions: If you think the relation asked about is very good, not good, or in the middle. When you have finished, you will have a good overview of all your relations.

You can ask your spouse to answer the questions also. Maybe he or she has another view and good suggestions. Or you can ask a good friend who knows you well to answer.

If you have regular meetings or phone calls with a supervisor or the child's social worker, you can use the results of your work with the scorecard for discussing improvements and solutions.



When you have finished scoring, you can use the results for writing a work plan: How you will use this training program to improve your most important relations. If you have visits from your foster family manager or a supervisor, discuss the results and your plans with them and ask for their suggestions.

## How demanding is the foster care task in this case?

**What can you generally expect when receiving a child in foster care, and how can you see your professional task accordingly? This page may help you find answers.**

First, we would like you to look at your foster child to get an idea about whether this is an uncomplicated task or whether the child/ young person in your care has many problems and therefore presents a more difficult task. Your answers to these questions (page 5 and 6) are background information and they are not part of the scorecard.

## About your foster child: age and history – your task and expectations

**Please mark “X” at one of these three options:**

A. The child was between *0 and 3 three* years when we received him/ her.

A \_\_\_\_

Or:

B. The child was between *four and ten* years when we received him/her.

B \_\_\_\_

Or:

C. The child was already a *teenager or almost grown up* when we received him/her.

C \_\_\_\_

### Why is this important?

These are some general results and expectations regarding the age of the child when it was first placed in foster care. They may help you define your professional task as a foster parent. They are general and do not necessarily apply to your specific case:

A:

If you receive a child *before it is three years old*, it will very often recover from problems and attach to foster parents like children do to their own parents. The younger the child is, the greater the chance that you will feel very much attached to it, and that the child will see you as a parent.



Your professional task will be *to raise the child as a parent* would do.

For biological parents, giving a young child away - or have it taken away by court order – is very difficult. You should understand this if the parent feels jealousy or anger.

B:

If you receive *a toddler or older child*, it will already have attached to its biological parents and it will be aware of *having two very different families*. Perhaps the child will attach to you over some years, but it may also have feelings of being rejected, maybe have behaviour problems or other problems from early lack of care. *You should be open to the child about “having two families”, and expect that life may be more difficult* for the child – its development may be more slow, so be patient.

C:

If you receive a child *just before puberty or later*, you should realize that this child already has a long and maybe disappointing life story with broken relations. It may have more permanent problems that it will have to live with and perhaps it will be provoked by invitations for inclusion and intimacy. You *may think of yourself as a practical parent* who helps the young person function, learn a daily rhythm and learn how to help himself/herself (cooking, cleaning, getting up, doing homework, going to school). Being neutral, kind and firm in limits, and always ready to talk and explain as a life partner may be a good strategy. Focus on helping the young person prepare for the practical tasks necessary for mastering life after the foster care, and explain to the young person that this is your mutual task and the purpose of the placement with you.

### **Other placements before the child was placed in your care**

**Please mark “X” at one of these three options:**

A. Our foster care is the first placement outside its biological family for the child.

A \_\_\_

B. Our foster care is the second placement of the child.

B \_\_\_

C. Our foster care is the third or more placement of the child.

C \_\_\_

### **Why is this important?**

Research and experience shows that the more changes in placement children go through, especially in the first years of life, the more problems they get in trusting caregivers and others, attaching to them and learning from long term relations. So if the placement is the first placement outside the family, you can expect a better development. If the child has experienced frequent changes in caregivers, an early lack of loving care or both, you should be prepared for behaviour and learning problems and understand that you are working with a child or young person who is far behind in development. He/she may need a lot of daily help to function for many years.



## **The biological parents and their attitude towards the foster family**

### **If you know about the child's biological parents:**

- A. The parent(s) loved their child but had to give it away. Something happened that prevented them from caring (death, accidents, poverty, having an illegitimate child outside marriage, etc.)
- B. The parents are drug or alcohol abusers, or have a severe psychiatric disease, or have extremely chaotic lives.
- C. Or: for other reasons the parents have never been able to be responsible adults and care for their child.

### **Why is this important?**

Research shows that the children of normal parents (who were forced by circumstances to let others care for their child) have a better development in foster families. Normal parents are more prone to accept the foster family and cooperate, and the child thrives better in the foster family because it experienced good care from birth.

Children of dysfunctional parents tend to have more problems (some even from pregnancy, like alcohol damage to the brain) from a lack of early care. Dysfunctional families often have much more problems in cooperating and agreeing with the foster family.

How much you can do as foster parents also depends on how well the biological parents were doing in their own lives before the child was placed with you.

Look at your scores. If you have scored three times "A", you will probably be able to include the child in the family and see a normal development. If you scored three times "C", you should realize that this is probably a very challenging task. You should expect a very slow development and if possible you should have a lot of supervision and professional support from authorities. If this is not available, you should try to connect with other foster families, colleagues or friends so that you have someone to talk to about being a foster caregiver. This will help you.



## Your thoughts about the child in foster care and your expectations

Please write what you think after scoring these statements:

My thoughts: is this a foster child with a very stressed background or a more healthy child?

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My thoughts: Should I expect a normal development or should I be very patient?

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After this view of the child's background:

ON THE NEXT PAGES YOU CAN FILL IN THE SCORECARD, REFLECT ABOUT RESULTS AND PLAN YOUR WORK



## Mapping relations in your network as a foster family

After looking at the child in care and reflecting about your basic role as foster caregiver, the next questions will help you make a map of your social relations.

Research shows that the social network of foster families (size and quality) is very important for how well foster parents thrive, and for how well the foster child develops. So when you have answered the questions, you may think of ideas and discuss how to improve your social relations – this learning process will make you more balanced as a foster parent, and make you a more calm and happy caregiver.

**Please use this scale to score the next questions:**

### How to score the card:

When you make your choices, you should be **realistic and honest** – the card is for your own use.

For each statement, you can score from 0 – 6.

- 0 means*      *“never/ nobody”*
- 1 means*      *“almost never/ very few”*
- 2 means*      *“not often/ a few”*
- 3 means*      *“sometimes/ some”,*
- 4 means*      *“mostly/ most”,*
- 5 means*      *“almost always/ the majority”*
- 6 means*      *“always/ all/ absolutely”*
- X means*      *“I don’t know” or “I don’t have this kind of relation”*

Here are the statements:



## The relations between foster carer and employers.

1. We know the child's social worker and we meet or talk with her or him sometimes about the child.  
We know what is expected of us in our work.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

2. We have a foster family manager or supervisor whom we meet or talk to sometimes. We have useful dialogues about our work.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

3. We have a good relation with professionals with whom we can talk to when we need advice.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

4. The professionals who manage our case agree about how they see us, how they see the foster care task, and how they think we should work.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

5. We sometimes meet with other foster families, talk about our children and support each other.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

## Your thoughts and reflections

Please write what you think after scoring statement 1-5:

**My/Our thoughts about our relations with our employers:**

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**My/Our thoughts about how I/we can improve this if possible:**

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## Relations in the foster family and relations with biological parents

6. My relation with my spouse is good. If we have problems we can talk about them and resolve them. My spouse supports me in my work as foster caregiver.

(Or, as a single foster parent: Being a single foster parent gives me meaning. I have a good network of friends and family whom I can talk to)

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

7. I have experience as a foster parent and I feel confident about the way I work with the child. Even when I am in doubt I trust we will find a way.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

8. Our own children understand our work and accept our foster care child. They treat him or her as a brother or a sister.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points** (*write « 3 » if you don't have children, or they have moved from home*)

9. We talk openly to friends, relatives, neighbours, and school about the child being in foster care. The child therefore knows that being in foster care is not shameful or degrading.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

10. The biological parents accept the need for their child living with us. They are not jealous and they cooperate. We can talk in a good way.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points** (*write « 3 » if you have no contact with any of the biological parents*)



11. We talk positively and respectfully to the child about its parents, even when we can see it is difficult or impossible for the parent to care for it, or if there is no contact at all.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

12. We talk openly to our foster child about the problems of having “two families” – for example if the child longs for its parents or feels abandoned. We have accepted that a foster child is a “shared child”.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

## Your thoughts and reflections

Please write what you think after scoring statements 5-11:

**My/ Our thoughts about supporting each other in our own family to do the fostering job well:**

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**My/ Our thoughts about cooperation with the biological family. Thoughts about being open towards the**

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## The way we care for the foster child

13. My behaviour towards the child is predictable and rhythmic during the day. I act in a *coherent* way towards the child. I do not act impulsively or suddenly change plans without preparing the child for a long time for the change.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

14. I am *sensitive* in the way I cooperate with the child. When I want the child to perform daily tasks I do not scold or demand. I explain and I am flexible in my demands even if the child is unhappy, depressed, angry or aggressive. I balance demands with the emotional state of the child.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

15. I am very *accessible* towards the child when it needs comfort, dialogue or protection. The child does not have to wait long for help, and I tend to put away other things if the child needs help, dialogue or comfort.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

16. If the child is angry, aggressive, depressed or sad, *I do not feel the same way*. I tend to feel *with* the child (empathy, show that I understand and recognize its feelings), but *I don't feel like the child* (for example: I don't scold if the child accuses us or is disobedient, I don't get angry when the child is angry, I stay calm and balanced in most situations).

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

17. I often reflect on and talk about what the child feels and thinks, and I exercise that the child learns to try to understand the feelings and thoughts of others.

F.ex. "*What do you think about living with us?*" "*Why do you think the other child was angry with you?*", "*What is your teddy bear/doll doing today – do you think it is angry, happy, sad? Does it like me?*", etc.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

18. If I have a disagreement with the child, *I never leave the situation unresolved*. I go on working until the balance between us is back again, and we can focus on practical daily life. We may still disagree, but the child knows that people can disagree and still have a harmonious relation.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**



19. If the child behaves in a problematic way, I try to understand the problem in connection with ourselves also. We examine our own caregiver style, and ask ourselves if our own behaviour perhaps made the child do this. When we talk to the child about behaviour, we tend to describe our own responsibility for the situation.

F.ex.:

*“I’m sorry I got so angry with you – it was I who should not have left you alone with the matches – you are not old enough to manage fire yourself, I should have known that. Let me tell you about matches, they can be dangerous and you must be very careful”.*

We act like this instead of just scolding the child or get angry.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

20. The child has a clear relation to one or both foster parents: it knows who is responsible for what, and how it can get help from either foster parent.

**Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points**

## Your thoughts and reflections

Please write what you think after scoring statement 1-4:

**My/Our thoughts about the way we act towards the foster child and relate with it:**

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**My/Our thoughts about how I/we can improve this if possible:**

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## The child's social network and our professional network

21. The child has social relations such as friendships or daily playmates, or it is included in another group of peers (for example a sports group). The child feels included in a group of peers, and the foster parents support the child's social relations building.

**Score:** \_\_\_\_\_ **points** (if the child is younger than two, please score "3")

22. The child is not very withdrawn or lonely. The child is not very aggressive or disturbed in the way it behaves towards others. Other children tend to accept it, and it has learned how to contact other children in a sensible way.

**Score:** \_\_\_\_\_ **points** (if the child is younger than two, please score "3")

23. The foster parents have good relations and cooperation with the child's day care, or kindergarten, school, spare time activity managers or any other daily partners. We have informed them about the child's eventual problems, and they tend to support our work as foster caregivers.

**Score:** \_\_\_\_\_ **points** (if child has no such relations, please score "3")

## Your thoughts and reflections

Please write what you think after scoring these statements:

**My/ Our thoughts about the child being included in a group of peers:**

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**My/ Our thoughts about our cooperation with kindergarten/ school/ other professional contacts:**

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PLEASE INSERT AND ADD UP ALL YOUR SCORES ON THE NEXT PAGE.

If you answered "X" for any question, just write an X in the score of the question.



**Question**      **Score**

- |     |              |     |              |
|-----|--------------|-----|--------------|
| 1:  | _____ points | 13: | _____ points |
| 2:  | _____ points | 14: | _____ points |
| 3:  | _____ points | 15: | _____ points |
| 4:  | _____ points | 16: | _____ points |
| 5:  | _____ points | 17: | _____ points |
| 6:  | _____ points | 18: | _____ points |
| 7:  | _____ points | 19: | _____ points |
| 8:  | _____ points | 20: | _____ points |
| 9:  | _____ points | 21: | _____ points |
| 10: | _____ points | 22: | _____ points |
| 11: | _____ points | 23: | _____ points |
| 12: | _____ points |     |              |

**Total score:** \_\_\_\_\_ **points**

Please divide your total (all points added) with 23.

*NB: If you used the answer "X" for any questions, please divide the total with the **number of questions you scored**.*

*For example if you have two times an "X", divide the total only with 21 and not with 23.*

**Average score:** (all points added and divided with the number of questions answered)

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ **points**





## Giving the foster child a secure base

The average score does *not* say anything about your work being “good” or “bad”. It only tells you if you have a *good social platform* that gives you good working conditions as foster caregivers.

If you have some low scores or a low score in general, you can work to improve this platform

- **If your average score is 5.0 or more:**

This foster family has the necessary platform for providing a secure base for the foster child.

In general you have a very good base for your work as a professional caregiver. This means that the child will probably learn over time to feel secure, and start exploring, playing and learning. You can look through the Scorecard and think about what you can develop further. You can be inspired by the sessions in the FAIRstart internet based training program.

**Social worker or supervisor:** Your task in this family will be to support the foster parents in what they already do. Look through the Scorecard and have a dialogue about what you think. Give suggestions, inspiration and ideas.

- **If your score is from 3,0 to 4,9:**

The foster family organization is OK, but you should look through the Scorecard and decide what areas you want to improve. Perhaps you are putting too strong demands on yourself and have too high expectations for the child’s speed of development. Or perhaps your social network is limited or there may be some conflicts. In this case, start talking to others, show your interest and try to be more open about having a child in foster care.

**Social worker or supervisor:** Look through the Scorecard, find positive answers and present these as areas of resource. Discuss and suggest practical solutions for those areas where there are low scores. You should listen and be prepared for some dissatisfaction. Be balanced and practical, and keep focus on the realistic tasks and goals.

- **If your score is from 0 – 2,9:**

It seems that the social network for doing your work is not very strong. You may experience stress or feel burned out. There may be many alert situations. You should seek support and tell your supervisor and others about this. Perhaps your expectations are too high, or perhaps your work relations are not sufficient, and your life as a foster caregiver may be too isolated. This, the foster child will sense and may respond to this insecurity by showing problematic behaviour. Good foster care is difficult to practice if you are much





stressed, so ask yourself how you can relieve yourself of stress, improve your social relations as a foster parent, and seek help and dialogue from others.

**Social worker or supervisor:**

This foster placement seems to need active dialogue and support. You should be very supportive towards the foster parents, define small step by step goals for improvement, encourage them and talk to them often. You should help them improve their social network, and help resolve eventual conflicts such as disagreements between foster home and school or other relations.

Or, you should consider another placement for the child – there is a risk that both foster parents and child do not thrive under the present conditions.

Make a written plan with the foster family for resolving specific problems or improving the placement step by step, and follow up and support frequently.



## Dialogue and planning using scorecard results

Your average score may give you an idea about the quality of your platform as a foster parent. But what is much more important are your thoughts, reflections and your decisions for improving your foster care.

Research shows that if you have someone to talk to about being a foster parent, foster children thrive much better and feel more secure. If a foster parent is isolated, the child tends to have more problems, and more foster care placements are broken because of problems.

***The best way to improve your work is to talk to others about your thoughts, your problems and challenges and your plans. Problems that seem hopeless right now are often resolved gradually if you have partners for coaching and dialogue.***

The following concept you can use for yourself, with your spouse, in dialogue with your case manager or supervisor, or with a trusted friend.

You will need a room where you are not disturbed for one hour (and perhaps tea or coffee).

Tell the other person that you want him or her to listen first without interrupting, and then tell you afterwards what he or she thinks about what you said. Maybe the person has suggestions for actions also.

1. Present your thoughts about **your relations with authorities** (scores 1-4).  
What is good, what needs improvement, how you think you can work with this and where you need the other person's suggestions, advice or ideas for action.  
Write down short notes while you talk about the most important thoughts and ideas.
2. Present your thoughts about **relations in the foster family and relations with biological parents** (scores 5-11).  
Use the dialogue, "what is good, needs improvement", etc. as before.
3. Present your thoughts about **The way we care for the foster child** (scores 12-19).
4. Present your thoughts about **The child's social network and our professional network** (scores 20-22)



## Making a plan and a time schedule for your work

You have probably talked about a lot of things - foster care is a complex organization! It may be a little confusing to decide where to start making improvements or development.

What is important is that you now take a “helicopter look” at the four areas you have discussed and select **only one** area where you will **focus for a month to improve your work**.

You should choose something which has a chance of success, and where you have found a good suggestion for what you can do. And you should describe clearly what you will do.

For example writing “I want to be a better foster parent!” or “I want to improve the network” is not a very good idea. Improvements come with small changes in what you do.

Writing for example “I will start by talking tomorrow to the school teacher about his problems with homework, and ask what I can do to support it. Perhaps I can also find a way to discuss the child’s fear of failure. This I will do tomorrow and see if this helps my child’s negative attitude towards homework”.

Or:

“I will talk to my spouse about that I think we sometimes quarrel too much during the day. This makes the foster child feel insecure, so perhaps we should quarrel in the evening when she is sleeping and resolve our problems there. I will serve a nice dinner for my spouse to make a good frame for my suggestion”

Or

“As a foster father I think this child is sometimes hyperactive. He needs to do a lot of exercise every day, so I will take him to the football team manager or start running with him every afternoon”

Or:

“Maybe I am sometimes too harsh with the child because I am frightened of what he may do. I will try to be more sensitive when I talk to him and invite him to help me cook instead of just being irritated”.

Or:

“It seems that I am too much alone and try to resolve all problems by myself. This has made me feel a little depressed.

In fact I need to talk to the supervisor about what I do, so I will call her and be more insisting in that there are things I need to discuss. I will start by commending her work so she doesn’t feel offended”.