



PARTNERSHIP FOR  
**STRONG**  
FAMILIES

**CHILD AND  
FAMILY  
HANDBOOK**

## Let's Get Started

We are the Partnership for Strong Families (the Partnership) and look forward to working with you and your family. We are here to help you and your family in meeting your goals and solving problems. Our goal is to help you family function better so that you can remain together or be reunited if separation was necessary. The reason for this handbook is to give you information on the Partnership, services we will offer, and how the Partnership will work with you and your family. Your Family Care Counselor will go over this handbook with you and will make sure any questions you have are answered. They will ask you to sign a paper that says you received this handbook and understand your rights and responsibilities while working with the Partnership for Strong Families. This handbook is separated into sections. These sections are listed in the Table of Contents on page 4.

# **Our Mission, Vision and Principles**

## **Mission**

PSF's Mission is to enhance the community's ability to protect and nurture children by building, maintaining and constantly improving a network of family support services.

## **Vision**

PSF's Vision is to be a recognized leader in protecting children and strengthening families through innovative, evidence-based practices and highly effective, engaged employees and community partners.

## **PSF's Core Principles of Practice**

- Provide a safe environment for all children
- Make prevention of child abuse and neglect a community priority
- Safely maintain children in their own homes whenever possible
- Maintain children in the least restrictive appropriate setting possible
- Individualize services to meet the needs of children and families
- Respect the inherent dignity of children and their families
- Make all decisions regarding children and families with permanency in mind
- Recognize that more can be done with communities and families as partners
- Respect the diversity of all children and families in the community
- Commit to accountability using outcomes to measure performance and improve practice

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# How the Process Works

## Your Family Care Counselor

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am your Partnership for Strong Families Family Care Counselor.

My Phone number is \_\_\_\_\_  
(8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Monday-Friday)

For EMERGENCIES after 5:00 p.m. and on weekends, call: \_\_\_\_\_

My address is \_\_\_\_\_

My Supervisor's Name and Phone Number is

\_\_\_\_\_

My Program Directors Name and Phone Number is

\_\_\_\_\_

### **I will help you and your family by:**

- \*Inviting you to meetings called Family Team Conferences where you can share your opinions and speak and be involved in making decisions.
- \*Helping you decide what your goals are and who can help you meet these goals.
- \* Helping you solve problems that come up before they become emergencies.
- \*Connecting you with services that you or your child(ren) may need to be safe and happy.
- \*Letting you know what is happening with your case.
- \*Setting up visits for you and your child(ren).
- \*Completing case plans and updates for the court when the case has judicial involvement.
- \*Meeting with you and your child(ren) face to face to check on how things are going.
- \*Getting back to you quickly when you have questions, needs and/or concerns.
- \*Helping you and your family use your strengths to do everything needed to keep your family together.

# Family Team Conferencing

## What is a Family Team Conference?

When you meet your Family Care Counselor for the first time, he/she will talk with you about scheduling a special kind of meeting called a Family Team Conference. We feel that you and your family have a lot of strengths and should help decide how to make sure that your children stay safe and happy. This is a voluntary meeting and is designed to allow you, your family and the people you invite will be able to talk about your plans and goals with your Family Care Counselor and others.

The Family Care Counselor will ask you to think of others in your life that you think can help you in meeting your goals. The Family Care Counselor will invite these people to your Family Team Conference. Who do you call on when things are not going well? Who do you consider to be on your side and on the side of your children? These are the people who should be invited and anyone else that you would normally call on for help or support. Others attending the meeting may be Guardian ad Litem, lawyers and others identified by you and your team as important to attend. Many people invite friends, relatives, therapists, foster parents and/or child caregivers, case managers, school teachers, guidance counselors, ministers, coaches, or anyone else they believe should be there. You help decide who should be there and these people will become part of your team. Your Family Care Counselor can even help invite and arrange transportation for everyone. Take a moment and write down as many people as you can think of who you would like to be on your team.

Name	Number

## **What happens at a Family Team Conference?**

During the first conference, you and your Team will decide on a plan that will help your family reach their goals and get the help that your family needs. Together with you, the Family Team will come up with a written plan with agreed upon goals and tasks, and will talk to you about services that can help you reach these goals. This Family Plan will have tasks for you and your child(ren) to complete, along with tasks for other Team members. These tasks will help you provide a safe home for your children and yourself. The members of your team will help you find the right services and determine how the services will be paid for, so that you and your family can get started on completing the tasks of your Family Plan.

At every meeting, everyone will review the Family Plan and progress made toward meeting the tasks and goals. It should be easy to see how well you are doing on meeting your goals. You should always let the team know how you feel about the help you and your family are getting. Remember that your goals or needs may change and new services or ways to pay for services may be identified. If this happens, the Family Plan can also change. You will be supported by your Team in your efforts to complete your tasks.

Please remember that your team, and especially your Family Care Counselor, is here to help you when needed. Please call on them for help.

## **How often do we have a Family Team Conference?**

Family Team Conferences will occur within 14 days of your case being transferred to the services unit, and will be held at least every three months. Your Family Care Counselor is in charge of making sure that these meetings happen and that your family and other members of the team know when and where they are. We understand that what your family needs may change as time goes on, so you or another Team member may request a special meeting at any time. For example, you may want to request a Family Team Conference any time your child's living situation changes.

## **When do we say Goodbye?**

When you have met your goals and the Team agrees that you do not need support from the Partnership any longer to help in keeping your family safe, it will be time to close the case. Your Team will work together to make recommendations to the court for case closure. It is the goal of the Family Team to develop a support system that is on-going and will continue to support you and your family after the Partnership is no longer involved. We believe that by getting you and your children the services and supports that all of you need, your family can stay together or reunite and your children can be safely cared for.

# Services

Here are examples of the different types of services that you and your Team may decide will be helpful in meeting your family's needs. Please remember that these services are flexible and can change over time, if needed. You will need to talk with your Family Care Counselor about how the services you and your child(ren) have are working and what other services or support your family needs.

- Independent Living
- Educational Assistance
- Employment
- Child Care
- Housing
- Transportation
- Homemaker
- Budgeting
- Recreation (sports teams, classes)
- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Domestic Violence
- Parenting Skill Development
- Support Groups
- Medical
- Psychological
- Substance Abuse (residential and out-patient)
- Mental Health (case management, specialized therapy, crisis intervention/services)
- Medications

## **Emergency Services and Phone Numbers:**

- Police/Fire/Ambulance – 911
- Meridian Behavioral Healthcare's Crisis Stabilization Unit–352.374.5600 or 1.800.330.5615
- Alachua County Crisis Center – 352.264.6789

# Rights and Responsibilities

## Rights for you and your children:

Please ask your Family Care Counselor to explain these rights to you if you have any questions. It is important that you understand them and are satisfied with how your family is being treated. Please be aware you have the right to refuse any treatment, medication or services, unless those rights have been limited by law or court order. PSF will provide services to minor children without the consent of a parent only when a court order authorizes such. If you refuse to participate in the agency programs, your Family Care Counselor will inform you of potential consequences of such a refusal.

- To be heard.
- To attend meetings.
- To have a say in what happens to you and your family.
- To invite others to participate in your Family Team.
- To have a safe and secure environment.
- To receive services regardless of religion, ethnic or cultural background, race, or sexual preference in a non-discriminatory manner.
- To receive services in your community.
- To receive services that are the least restrictive to meet your needs.
- To receive cost information prior to the provision of services.
- To be treated with respect and to have your family's culture considered in all decision making.
- To have your information treated in a confidential manner.
- To receive copies of team minutes, Family Plans, and court documents.
- To visit with one another unless otherwise ordered by the court.
- To provide relevant information and help in making decisions for you and your family regarding types of services and the person/agency who will provide the service.
- To submit a complaint/concern to the Partnership if you are unhappy with services and expect an answer back in a reasonable amount of time.
- To have legal representation.
- Children and Families are never restricted from calling their Family Care Counselor, Guardian ad Litem, or the Florida Abuse Hotline to report allegations of neglect or abuse.
- You have the right to request an in-house review of care, treatment, and service plan.
- You have the right to request your case be transferred to another program or caseworker within the Partnership. You may also request your case be transferred to a program or caseworker outside of the Partnership, if the program provides the requested service.

## **Responsibilities of you and your family:**

We want you to understand what is expected of you while working with the Partnership, so please ask your Family Care Counselor to answer any questions you may have about your responsibilities.

- To be honest and share information with us.
- To participate in the Family Team Conference process.
- To work on Plan tasks and goals.
- To keep appointments.
- To identify other people and services that will help you in being successful.
- To treat others with respect.
- To remain in contact with your Team and the Family Care Counselor.
- To remain in contact with your family through mail, visitation and phone calls unless restricted by the court.
- To protect the safety of yourself and your children, to include pool and water safety.

***NOTE: A swimming pool or other body of water, in the yard can present a very dangerous area for children. Drowning is the number one cause of death for children under five in Florida, Arizona, and California with a ranking of number two for over a dozen other states. For every drowning, there are eleven near drowning incidents, according to government statistics; many of which result in totally disabling brain damage.***

To protect your family from a potentially fatal accident, the following is recommended:

- Never leave your children alone in or near the pool or water, even for a moment. Do not be distracted by doorbells, phone calls, chores or conversations. If you must leave the pool or water area, take the children with you, making sure the pool or area gate latches securely when it closes. During social gatherings at or near water, appoint a "designated watcher" to protect children from water accidents. Adults may take turns being the "watcher." When adults become preoccupied, children are at risk.
- Post rules such as: No running," "No pushing," "No dunking" and "Never swim alone." Enforce the rules.
- Instruct baby sitters about potential water hazards to children and about the use of protective devices, such as door alarms and latches. Emphasize the need for constant supervision. Be sure the person watching your children knows how to swim, to get emergency help and to perform CPR.

- If a child is missing, check the pool or water area first. Seconds count in preventing death or disability. Go to the edge of the pool or water area and scan the entire area, bottom of pool and surface of pool or water area.
- Install a fence to separate your house from the water area. Most children who drown in water wander out of the house and fall into the water. The fence should be 5-feet high and completely surround the water area. The fence must completely separate the water area from the house and the play area of the yard.
- Use self-closing gates that self-latch, with latches higher than your children's reach. Never prop open the gate to a water area. After the children are done swimming, secure the water area so they can't get back into it.
- Never use a pool with its pool cover partially in place, since children may become entrapped under it. Remove the cover completely.
- Place tables, chairs and other objects well away from the water area fence to prevent children from using them to climb into the water area.
- Keep rescue equipment (such as a shepherd's crook or rescue tube) and a telephone with emergency numbers noted by the water.
- Avoid air-filled "swimming aids" because they are not a substitute for approved life vests and can be dangerous should they deflate.
- Keep toys out of and away from the water area when not in use. Children playing with or reaching for toys could accidentally fall in the water.
- Remember, teaching your children how to swim DOES NOT mean your children are safe in the water.
- Don't assume that drowning or a drowning incident couldn't happen to you or your family.

## **Hours of Operation:**

You have the rights to contact your Family Care Counselor between the regular hours of 8:00 to 5:00 Monday through Friday at the number they have provided to you. After-hours access is also available and contact information will be given to you from your Family Care Counselor and/or your individual programs. On call information is also available by calling the service center after hours and following the voice prompts.

# Complaints and Grievances

The Partnership understands that there may be times in which you, your child or another family member may disagree with the Family Plan, treatment, services, or other issues during your participation in the program. We welcome your thoughts, concerns and any suggestions you may have. The Partnership's complaint process is designed to help you in finding solutions to your concerns/complaints in a timely manner.

Complaints and Grievances should be handled in the steps below:

1. When you have a complaint or concern, please first talk about it with your Family Care Counselor (name and phone number on page 5 of this handbook). It does not matter what or who your concern is about, your Family Care Counselor should work hard to find a solution.
2. If talking with your Family Care Counselor does not help, please call your Family Care Counselor's Supervisor (name and phone number on page 5 of this handbook). At this time, you may request a new Family Care Counselor be assigned to your case.
3. If you are still not satisfied, the next step is to contact the Program Director (name and phone number on page 5 of this handbook).
4. If the issues still remain unresolved or before you become overwhelmed, you can always contact Partnership's Quality and Administration Department at 1.352.244.1500 or 1.866.394.8935. You can also submit any concerns you may have at the Partnership's website [www.pfsf.org](http://www.pfsf.org). The Quality and Administration staff will work with you to resolve your concerns and find a solution that you feel satisfied with.
5. If the issues still remain unresolved, the complaint will be forwarded to the Director of Quality Operations who, with the CEO, will make the final decision in resolving the complaint.

# Your Satisfaction

You and your family's opinions are important to us. At times, the Partnership will ask you to "score" our services by answering some questions on a written or telephone survey. The survey and your answers will remain confidential so you can feel free to be completely honest with us. A person that is not related directly to your Family Team will collect the information and share it with us without revealing your name or your specific answers. You will be asked to give us your opinions at different points during the time you are working with us.

We will use the survey feedback to improve our services and process. You can ask your Family Care Counselor about the results of our evaluations and any plans to change the way we do business as a result. We thank you ahead of time for your honesty and feedback.

## **Partnership Contact Information**

### **Main Office:**

**Partnership for Strong Families  
5950 NW 1st Place, Suite A,  
515 N Main Street  
Gainesville, Florida 32607  
Phone: (352) 244-1500  
Toll-free Number: (866) 394-8935  
Fax: (352) 244.1647**

[www.pfsf.org](http://www.pfsf.org)

# CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES OFFICES

## **Gainesville**

Partnership for Strong Families  
5950 NW 1<sup>st</sup> Place. Gainesville, FL 32607  
352.244.1500  
Fax 352.244.1647

## **Lake City**

Partnership for Strong Families  
1389 West US Highway 90  
Suite 100  
Lake City, FL 32055  
386.758.5757  
Fax 386.758.0485

## **Live Oak**

Partnership for Strong Families  
501 SE Demorest Street  
Live Oak, FL 32064  
386.364.7774  
Fax 386.362.3436

## **Starke**

Partnership for Strong Families  
405 West Georgia Street  
Starke, FL 32094  
904.964.1540  
Fax 904.964.1550

## **Trenton**

Partnership for Strong Families  
PO Box 1199  
SR 26 CR 319  
Trenton, FL 32693  
352.463.3110  
Fax 352.463.4419

# **HIPPA Privacy Notice**

The federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 provides privacy protection of an individual's verbal, written and electronic health information. The Partnership for Strong Families will comply with all HIPAA requirements in order to protect your health information. The information that pertains to this privacy policy can be found at our website [www.pfsf.org](http://www.pfsf.org).

## **Confidentiality and Privacy Protections**

PSF adheres to all applicable confidentiality laws and regulations including, but not limited to, laws and regulations governing information about youth involved with the juvenile justice system, mental health consumers, victims of domestic violence, drug and alcohol treatment, and HIV/AIDS.

PSF may release confidential or private information in circumstances when the staff and/or organization is legally or ethically permitted or required to release such information without the client's consent.

# Sign off Sheet

Please read this page closely, ask your Family Care Counselor to answer any questions you may have about this Handbook or the Partnership, and then sign and date on the line at the bottom of this page. We need to make sure that you have been given this handbook, and that you understand all of your rights and responsibilities before you and the Partnership begin working to achieve stability for you and your children.

I have received the Partnership for Strong Families Child and Family Handbook. I have had a chance to go over it with my Family Care Counselor and have received answers to any questions that I had. I understand how the Partnership will be working to help my family and me; how Family Team Conferences work; what my Family Team is all about; and how to make a complaint and how it will be handled.

If you have any questions after reading this information, please ask your Family Care Counselor or call (352) 244-1500.

Family Signatures:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Care Counselor Signature:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_