



## *“What is”* MULTIDIMENSIONAL TREATMENT FOSTER CARE? (MTFC)

Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) is a program for children and youth who require out-of-home foster placement for the purpose of meeting treatment goals associated with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The Oregon Social Learning Center (OSLC) began to develop the MTFC model in 1983. OSLC directs MTFC programs worldwide. They have conducted research on the model for over 2 decades. Through ongoing research of the model, OSLC is dedicated to supporting the Treatment Foster Care program at Algoma Family Services.

One of the tools that MTFC uses is a daily behaviour management system that is structured and consistent: this system is known as the **“point and level”** system (see below). MTFC is child-centered, family-focused and community-based. Services are goal-oriented, with an emphasis on helping children and youth gain skills required to improve social adjustment.

MTFC is a program that is designed as an alternative to group home placement, institutional care or hospitalization, and, in some cases, custody. **Multidimensional** means that the various treatment pieces are simultaneous and well coordinated: they occur in multiple settings, including: the treatment foster home; the natural family’s home; school; community and peer groups.

After referral and consent, children and youth are placed one per treatment foster home with treatment foster parents who are trained to implement the program’s daily behaviour management system. This is done through pre-service training provided by the MTFC Recruiter/Trainer, then implemented with close supervision and guidance from the MTFC program coordinator.

### **Goals of the MTFC program**

There are 4 main objectives of the MTFC program. For every child or youth in care the aim is to:

- Provide the child or youth with close supervision
- Provide fair and consistent limits and consequences
- Provide a supportive relationship with at least one mentoring adult
- Minimize association with negative peer influences



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## Goals of the MTFC program (continued)

One strategy that helps insure that treatment foster parents are the main support and a mentoring adult for the child is to share the parenting role with the program coordinator.

The coordinator will assume the responsibility of setting certain limits that the foster child may become upset over. Although the coordinator will set those limits in a supportive manner, the foster child has their treatment foster parents to seek out for support when they are angry or disappointed about a decision that the coordinator has made, i.e. not allowing unsupervised time in the community such as going to a concert that won't get out until very late into the night. The treatment foster parent can now provide statements of understanding about the child's disappointment: *“I know you're disappointed and I'm sorry that things didn't work out for you, some of your friends are going and you feel left out.”*

Treatment foster parents receive training about how to become a child's advocate as well as their support in situations such as that noted above. Acting as the child's support helps build a relationship of trust where the treatment foster parent is better able to elicit the child's cooperation when dealing with other issues that create feelings that are difficult for the foster child to regulate. Foster parents lean on the program to shape positive behaviours and to set certain limits. *“I'd like to give you bonus points, you handled that very well.”* or *“The program only allows me to give you points when your chore is done.”* Leaning on the program's structure helps depersonalize the child's feelings about expectations that are placed on him. Treatment foster parents then give the child space and time to consider their options and may encourage the child by helping get the sink ready for the child to do the supper dishes if that is the child's daily chore.

## Point and Level System

Studies show that youngsters with emotional difficulties are less responsive to social approval and disapproval than youngsters without problems. The studies also show that they seem to learn as well as their well-adjusted counterparts when tangible rewards such as points earned for privileges and other incentives are used. That is why the MTFC model uses a well thought out and designed point and level system to encourage growth in the child.



**Algoma Family Services**  
SERVICES AUX FAMILLES D'ALGOMA

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The point and level system is an intensive intervention that takes place daily. It is a behaviour management program designed to teach pro-social skills, reinforce appropriate behaviour and discourage any inappropriate behaviour. The program specifies expectations and assigns point values that can be earned for meeting those expectations. Treatment foster parents keep track of points and report these to the program coordinator.

The points give foster parents a way to provide frequent positive reinforcement for appropriate and desirable behaviour, as well as a way to provide sanctions for any undesirable behaviour. Although the program is highly structured, it is flexible enough to allow foster parents and the program coordinator to individualize the program according to each youngster's needs. It is intended to provide general guidelines for developing a unique individual program rather than a rigid set of rules to be applied routinely for all youth.

Each day, the child or youth earn points for adaptive and pro-social behaviours across home, school, and community settings. Points are earned for pro-social behaviour or are lost for negative or undesirable behaviours. Daily points are then used to "purchase" short- and long-term privileges. As children and youth progress through the program, the level of responsibility and privilege increases.

Treatment foster parents are trained and guided along the way in using the point and level system. Once you get the hang of it, it becomes somewhat natural to give tangible rewards that shape pro-social behaviour.

### **Encouragement**

Waiting for a child to mess up in order to teach through a system of consequences is one way of shaping behaviour. Using a system that balances encouragement and praise with fair consistent limits is more effective with children in treatment. Cooperation is a skill that can be taught, and encouragement and praise is a very powerful way to teach it. It's easy to get caught up in dealing with problems and we forget one of the most important parts of being a parent – supporting your child and encouraging positive behaviour. Treatment Foster Parents are taught how to shape pro-social behaviour through the use of encouragement along with using fair and consistent limits.