

EXPLAINING A PARENT'S ABSENCE AS A RELATIVE CAREGIVER

Many complex issues create circumstances that lead to a child being separated from their parents. Those circumstances can be difficult to talk about. The child in your care will likely have many questions, and answering them may be one of the most challenging tasks you face as a relative caregiver. Remember that shame or blame does not serve anyone well in the long run. Instead, focus on compassion. Listed below are three key points to remember when such conversations occur.

1. Validate the child's feelings while not assigning blame to the parent.

A simple phrase such as ***"I know how much you were looking forward to this, and I know it feels bad when your mom can't make it"*** will address the hurt in a neutral manner.

2. Explain that the same situations that made it hard for their parent to take care of them also make it hard to follow through on plans that they made.

For example, ***"Dad is having a hard time taking care of himself right now, which can make it difficult to remember visits. That doesn't mean that he doesn't miss you."***

3. Reaffirm your love for the child. If appropriate, reaffirm the parent's love, too.

"You are a great kid, and I love you [and they love you]. I'm sorry they are missing this time with you."

In addition to the points above, take opportunities to connect a parent's positive attributes with characteristics you see in the child. For example, when you notice that they love drawing or have the same favorite food as their parent, comment on this shared interest. This will enhance feelings of connection and demonstrate to the child that they are loved and cared for by many. For more information on this topic, visit the [Grandfamilies and Kinship Support Network](#).