

# SHARED PARENTING STARTS WITH STRONG COMMUNICATION SKILLS

When parents and foster/relative caregiver families work together, it's called "shared parenting" or "co-parenting." Healthy communication can minimize trauma and help families become whole again. Here are some suggestions on how to keep the lines of communication open:

## **BEGIN WITH EMPATHY.**

Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another, brings down walls. We build trust and connection when we hear and acknowledge fear, loss, or hurt.

## **LISTEN DEEPLY TO UNDERSTAND.**

Listen for no purpose but to better understand the parent and their perspective. You can do this by reflecting and rephrasing back to them what you hear them saying.

## **KEEP IT REAL.**

Be honest and genuine in your communication. This will establish your trustworthiness and build a stronger relationship. Honesty doesn't have to be hurtful; it just has to be honest.

## **BE CURIOUS, NOT CRITICAL.**

It's easy to stop listening to someone or even judge them once they've said something we disagree with. Building connection, however, means getting curious instead. Again, we don't have to agree with the "why" behind what someone is communicating; we just have to understand where it's coming from.



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## KEEP AN OPEN MIND AND SET ASIDE JUDGMENT.

A different perspective doesn't mean it's "wrong;" it just may be grounded in different life experiences. Being aware that you don't know the whole story can prevent judgment from getting in the way of good communication.

## PRESENT OPPORTUNITIES TO INVOLVE PARENT(S).

These opportunities may be as simple as texting to ask a question or sharing information about the child's day at school, doctor's appointments, sporting events, or invitations to birthday parties.

## SHARE YOUR OWN PARENTING LESSONS.

No parent is perfect. Where appropriate, sharing examples of parenting challenges or experiences you've had to overcome can be helpful. Acknowledging that we all make mistakes or have experienced struggles can help parents see you as a peer mentor and feel less threatened.

