



Away From Home: Caring for Your Child and Yourself During an Out-of-Home Care Placement

Adopting a child can sometimes bring added challenges, which may take you and your family in a direction no parent could ever truly anticipate. It can feel like your world is being turned upside down.

An out-of-home care setting can often provide the best support for children with significant needs. This applies to children in birth, foster, relative, and adoptive families. In this context, an out-of-home care setting refers to a placement such as a residential treatment facility, therapeutic foster home, or group home—a specialized setting designed to provide more intensive clinical support than can be offered in a family home. Such a placement provides your child with more intensive treatment.

Understanding that this doesn't mean your child won't return to your home is crucial. In fact, the expectation or plan is that your child will return home. While your child is in an out-of-home care setting, your active participation is crucial, if for no other reason than to reinforce that your child is not "bad"; they have some needs that require more than what you alone can provide right now.

The following are some tips to consider when a therapist, psychiatrist, treatment team, or your placing or licensing agency recommends that your child be placed temporarily out of your care.

- Analyze the facts. Try to "zoom out" and take emotion out of the equation as much as possible so that you can focus only on the facts.
- Make sure you have exhausted all of your options. Have you reached out to your agency for help? Have you contacted a resource center such as the Wisconsin Family Connections Center? Have you tried therapy?
- Open and honest communication is critical. Take the time to talk with each family member and consider how this decision will affect them. This understanding can help everyone cope better with the situation.
- Reach out to anyone who may add a missing piece to the puzzle. (For example, your agency staff, religious or spiritual leaders, neighbors, and teachers.)
- Building a solid support network is essential, not just for yourself but for everyone the decision may impact. The change will be traumatic for everyone involved, so it's crucial to seek help and explore other avenues for self-care. Remember, you're not alone on this journey.

Seeking Support

If it has become clear that your child needs to go to an out-of-home care placement, you may feel like you haven't succeeded. You may have feelings of grief and loss while your child is away from your home. You may question your parenting ability or even feel guilty about your decision. These are normal feelings to have. It does not mean that you aren't a good and competent parent.

Seeking support for yourself and your family can be helpful. Reaching out to other adoptive parents who have been in similar situations, or even speaking with a counselor, can help you see things from a different perspective.

Away From Home But Still Part of the Family

When your child is away from your home, there are ways to help them continue to feel like part of the family. Your child may feel abandoned; you can give them hope by assuring them that you are committed to what is best for them and keeping them as part of your family. Here are a few ways that may be helpful for your family:

- Be involved with the out-of-home care placement. Take the time to learn about your child and how to intervene best when tough behaviors become difficult to manage.
- Create a book of photos and memories, such as a scrapbook or a life book, and either send it with the child or take it along on visits.
- Visit regularly and supplement with phone calls. Keep your child in the loop and share what is happening at home and with other family members.
- Ask your child's friends to send letters, texts, call, or message them. They can provide support and keep them "in the know" about what is happening at school or with their shared social group.
- Create a book of "Top Ten Lists" and put together your fondest, funniest, silliest, goofiest, etc. memories. Everyone in the family can contribute to group lists, or each person can create their own.
- Use technology, such as Zoom or FaceTime, to see each other "face to face" between visits.

The decision to place a child in out-of-home care will be a hard one to make. Remind yourself that you are doing what is best for your family, and the change is not forever. You have not failed your child or your family; you are taking steps to ensure your child gets the care they need.

Finally, remember that the Wisconsin Family Connections Center is here to support you throughout your journey. Call, email, or drop in to talk with a member of our Resource Team whenever you need help.

Resources

Tip Sheets

- [Partners in Healing: Separating Therapy Myths from Reality](#)
- [The Wider Scope of Therapy](#)
- [Somebody to Lean On: Connecting With a Parent Group](#)

From the [Resource Library](#)

- *Keeping Your Adoptive Family Strong—Strategies for Success*, by Gregory C. Keck and L. Gianforte
- *When Love is Not Enough*, by Nancy Thomas
- Partners Newsletter: [Building Networks of Support](#)

Learn in [the Champion Classrooms](#)

- [Blocked Care: What to Do When You Run Out of Compassion](#)
- [About Wisconsin Wayfinder Children’s Resource Network](#)
- [Healing-Centered Engagement: The Power of Community and Connection](#)
- [Compassion Resilience for Caregivers of Children](#)

Additional Resources

- [Family Support Associations](#)
- [Wisconsin Family Ties](#)
- [Wisconsin Wayfinder](#)