Working Together for Youth in Care: Tips for Foster Parents, Families, and Workers

Children and youth in care do best when the adults in their lives work together. Foster parents, the child's parents and extended family, and social workers each bring something no one else can. In the simplest terms, foster parents know the child's day-to-day needs. Parents know their child's history, routines, and culture. Workers connect the team to services and keep the case plan moving. When these adults communicate openly and treat one another with respect, children feel safer, important information is less likely to fall through the cracks, and the whole team can better support positive outcomes for the child and family.

The tips below offer practical ways to build that kind of team: what to do, and why it matters.

Build trust and respect with each other

Why it matters: Trust doesn't come automatically with a role. It's built over time. Children notice when the adults around them get along, and when they don't.

Things to keep in mind:

- **Assume good intent.** Everyone on the team is often juggling a lot. A missed call usually isn't personal.
- **Get to know one another early.** Start with a comfort call. A first meeting or call with the child's parents soon after placement sets the tone.
- **Recognize each person's role and expertise.** Each person sees a different part of the child's life.
- **Talk through disagreements** directly and respectfully.

Communicate as a team

Why it matters: When information flows freely, a child's needs are noticed and met sooner, and misunderstandings are less likely.

Things to keep in mind:

- **Agree early on how and how often you'll check in:** text, email, or a regular call.
- **Be responsive.** Return calls and messages within a day or two. If you don't have an answer yet, say when you will.
- **Keep appointments and visits,** and let others know as early as possible if plans change.
- **Ask questions** when something is unclear instead of assuming.
- **Listen to understand,** especially when you see things differently.

WISCONSIN FAMILY CONNECTIONS CENTER
1-800-762-8063
info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org
© 2008; 2012; 2018; 2022; 2024; 2026

- **Keep good notes** on appointments, school and health updates, behaviors, and conversations, and share what's relevant.
- **Share information as it becomes available.** In emergency placements, workers may not have the full picture right away, so follow up as you learn more. Foster parents, your daily observations are valuable to everyone on the team.

Partner with the child's family

Why it matters: The goal of foster care is to provide a safe, loving environment for the children in your care until they can be reunited with their parents or family when appropriate. That safe and loving environment includes honoring and protecting the relationship with the child's family.

Things to keep in mind:

- **Ask parents about their child:** routines, favorite foods, comfort items, health needs, and family traditions.
- **Share updates,** photos, schoolwork, and milestones.
- **Invite parents to take part** in medical appointments, school conferences, and activities when appropriate and approved.
- **Be supportive, consistent, and flexible around family time.** Family time is a priority unless the court decides otherwise.
- **Speak respectfully** about the child's parents, especially in front of the child.
- **Remember the wider family:** siblings, grandparents, and other people who are important to the child.

Work toward the case plan together

Why it matters: The case plan is the team's shared road map. When everyone understands the goals and has a voice, the plan is more likely to lead to positive outcomes for the child and family.

Things to keep in mind:

- **Make sure everyone understands** the goals, including foster parents and the child's parents. Ask the worker to explain anything that's unclear.
- **Advocate for the child.** Share your observations, ideas, and concerns with the worker.
- **Workers:** when plans change, explain what's changing and why whenever you can.
- **Protect confidentiality.**
- **Connect with community resources**. Community groups and local and state organizations can support you, the child, and the child's family. The child's worker can help identify options.
- **Seek training and support.** Local and state foster and adoption support groups, associations, and resource centers offer training, mentoring, and peer support. You don't have to do this alone. And always keep in mind the free training resources designed specifically for caregivers of children at www.championclassrooms.org.

© 2008; 2012; 2018; 2022; 2024; 2026

Resources

From the Resource Library

- The Foster Parenting Toolbox: A Practical, Hands-On Approach to Parenting Children in Foster Care, edited by Kim Phagan-Hansel

Learn in the Champion Classrooms

- Foster Parents Supporting Birth Parents: Considerations for Success
- Seasons Change: Understanding Transition & Change for Foster Parents

Additional Resources

- Family Resources and Support Information
- A Social Worker's Heartfelt Tips for Foster Parents
- Foster & Adoptive Support & Preservation Program (FAASP)
- Surviving Allegations of Abuse and Neglect (SAAN)

1-800-762-8063
info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org
© 2008; 2012; 2018; 2022; 2024; 2026