

3. Keeping the Relationship Strong while Working with the System and Planning for Reunification

Birth Parent	Foster Parent/Kinship Caregiver
Suggested ways for keeping your relationship strong with the foster parent/kinship caregiver while working with the system and planning for reunification.	Suggested ways for keeping your relationship strong with the birth parents while working with the system and planning for reunification.
Ways for you to work in a team approach with the foster parent/kinship caregiver: ☐ Talk with the foster parent/kinship caregiver about how the two of you can jointly approach the social worker to request: ☐ Access to resources from the department and other service providers to help you move toward reunification ☐ More frequent visits with the children ☐ Visits occurring in the most natural setting ☐ Talk with the foster parent/kinship caregiver about holding regular family meetings to discuss ways to move forward with reunification or alternative living arrangements. ☐ Talk with the foster parent/kinship caregiver about working together on a journal to help you see your child's progress and help you see your own growth in your parenting skills and also in your personal life. ☐ Talk with the foster parent about preparing for the Citizen Review Board hearings. This hearing may result in recommendations to the judge and findings that support additional services to help achieve reunification. ☐ Ask the foster parent to work with you to help your child feel prepared when it is time to leave the foster home to return to your home or to another placement. ☐ Talk with the foster parent about how you would like to maintain contact with them after reunification or a change in your child's placement. ☐ Talk with the foster parent about any broader policy changes you hope the two of you might recommend to the child welfare agency, the courts or other systems involved in your family's life.	Ways for you to work in a team approach with the birth parent: ☐ Assist the birth parent in understanding the roles and responsibilities of the various service providers and systems who are involved with the child. ☐ Advocate together with the birth parent to access all the services and resources needed to help the family reunify. ☐ Work with the birth parent to meet jointly with the social worker to discuss visitation plans such as increased frequency and length of visits and for family visits to occur in the most natural setting possible. ☐ Support the birth family in meeting together regularly as a family unit to discuss plans for working toward reunification or alternative living arrangements. ☐ Work with the birth parent to create a journal that can help them see their child's progress and also their own personal growth and progress in developing their parenting skills. ☐ Talk with the birth parent about ways to help the child prepare for leaving the foster home and returning back home to the family or to another placement. ☐ Provide opportunities to celebrate successes of both the child or youth and the birth family. ☐ Ask how you can continue to support the birth parent and the foster parent connections for the child after reunification or change in placement. ☐ Be open to talking with the birth parent about common interests in making some policy change recommendations to the child welfare agency or to the courts.

"My mom had worked on preparing to be the best mom she could be to get us back. I didn't have the opportunity to work on anything that would help me grow and change. When we went home I was not prepared to be her child again. I was not ready for my mom to take on a parenting role. She had changed the way she was doing things to alleviate concerns from the system. I had always been just fine taking care of myself. This created a lot of growing pains and struggles in what should have been a happy and smooth transition back into the care of our mom."

Kodi Baughman, former foster youth (Iowa)

