

Licensed foster parents can read the following article and earn foster parent training credit by filling out the questionnaire and returning it to the Alaska Center for Resource Families, 815 Second AVE STE 202, Fairbanks AK, 99701, submit online, or FAX to 1-907-479-9666.

Supporting Reunification: What Foster Parents Can Do

1.0 Hour Training Credit Course

Almost half the children in foster care reunify with the family they were removed from and many more are placed with relatives for permanency. A good foster family and birth family relationship is ideal when it can be safely done and can be a contributor to successful reunification. We encourage you to think about what you can do from the start to increase the chances of successful reunification. When it works, it is great. But often it can be complicated, and that's okay too. If the relationship becomes difficult, talk to your team members about the situation and share documentation of your concerns.

To support reunification from the beginning, try these tips.

- Try to build a relationship with the birth parent from the beginning. Introduce yourself. Allow communication through phone or email. Ask the parent about the child's likes and preferences.
- Support communication between children, siblings, and parents, including supervised visits, emails, facetime, and texts.
- Look for ways to involve parents in decision-making. Ask for input about child interests. Ask about traditions and routines, food preferences, and appearance. Invite to medical appointments and school activities.
- Create a Life Book with the child to remember moments from before they were in care and document memorable times while in foster care.
- Get a copy of the family contact plan. Foster parents may need caseworker assistance to develop contact, so keep communication open with the team including GALs or CASAs.
- Ask to be involved with the transition to the birth family home. Help by providing a child's clothes, toys, and transportation. Show your support of the transition to both parent and child.
- Sometimes the birth parent may not want a relationship with the foster family. In these cases, focus on supporting the child and preparing for the transition.

The 5 Protective Factors are part of the Strengthening Families Framework that builds those strengths in a family that help protect and nurture children. Foster parents can use them to support building a healthier and stronger family your foster children can return to.

- **Parental Resilience:** Value that families can change for the better. When you support birth parents to make positive changes in their life, you are helping both the child and parent.
- **Social Connections:** If possible, form a relationship with the birth parent from the beginning. Help them get connected to a support network that can continue to support after reunification
- **Concrete Support in Times of Need:** Share knowledge about what your community has to offer and what concrete supports are available for food, kids' activities, and childcare.
- **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development:** Ask the parent about their child and share your knowledge of child development in a respectful way. Share toys or activities and mention how they might be helping with a child's current developmental stage
- **Social/Emotional Competence of Children:** Model how to talk with children and how to manage "big feelings" in a positive way. Point out what a parent is already doing to increase a child's confidence and emotional development.

We understand that reunification can be an emotional rollercoaster for foster parents. It is especially difficult if a child has been with you for a long period of time. We value you and the care you put into fostering a child and their relationship to their family. If you are struggling with your feelings and need support, please reach out to your caseworker or the Alaska Center for Resource Families.

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