

# INFORMATION PACKET:

## Birth and Foster Parent Partnership: A Relationship Building Guide

*August 2022*

### *CREDITS:*

Excerpts from the booklet *Birth and Foster Parent Partnership: A Relationship Building Guide* (June 2022).  
Developed by the Birth and Foster Parent Partnership in collaboration with the Children's Trust Fund Alliance, Youth Law Center's Quality Parenting Initiative, and Casey Family Programs.

The following packet contains information on the above topic. If you wish to receive training credit for reading this packet, please fill out the "Information Packet Questionnaire" at the back of this packet. Return the questionnaire to the Alaska Center for Resource Families for 1.0 training credit. The articles are yours to keep for further reference.

For more information about this topic or other topics related to foster care, please contact:

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[www.acrf.org](http://www.acrf.org)



The Alaska Center for Resource Families, a project of Northwest Resource Associates, is under contract with the State of Alaska Office of Children's Services to provide training and information to foster parents statewide.

# BIRTH AND FOSTER PARENT PARTNERSHIP: A Relationship Building Guide



JUNE 2020

*Practical tips to help create and sustain positive lasting relationships between birth families, foster families and kinship caregivers to best support the children and youth in their care.*

## Acknowledgements

A publication of the Birth and Foster Parent Partnership, created with parents, in collaboration with the Children's Trust Fund Alliance, Youth Law Center's Quality Parenting Initiative and Casey Family Programs.



**Youth Law Center** is a public interest law firm that works to protect children in the nation's foster care and justice systems from abuse and neglect, to ensure they receive the necessary support and services and maintain ties to their families and communities whenever possible so that they become healthy and productive adults. The Quality Parenting Initiative is Youth Law Center's approach to strengthening foster and kinship care.

<http://www.ylc.org>



**Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI)** is an approach to strengthening foster care, refocusing on excellent parenting for all children in the child welfare system. QPI is creating a movement to transform foster care through a network of families, youth, agency leaders, judicial leaders, agency staff, and community organizations committed to developing and sharing results-based solutions, advocating for and implementing policy and practice changes, and changing the culture of child welfare to focus on the QPI goal of excellent parenting for every child and youth in care.

[qpi4kids.org](http://qpi4kids.org)



**Children's Trust Fund Alliance** is a membership organization that provides support to state children's trust and prevention funds and strengthens their efforts to prevent child maltreatment. The Alliance members invest more than \$200 million each year in prevention strategies for families. The Alliance also works with national partners, state organizations, parents, federal agencies and others to impact policies, practices, systems changes and trainings. Through the Alliance National Parent Partnership Council and the Birth Parent National Network, the Alliance has elevated the voice of parents and others with life experience in child maltreatment.

[ctfalliance.org](http://ctfalliance.org)



### **Birth Parent National Network (BPNN)**

**Birth Parent National Network (BPNN)**, is a national platform for birth parents to work in partnership with organizations and policymakers to share their life experiences and make recommendations to improve policies and practices that impact children and families. BPNN's goal is to strengthen and support families and improve outcomes for families at risk or involved with the child welfare system. The dynamic network includes hundreds of parent and organizational members. To make a difference locally, in your state or at the national level, join the BPNN.

[ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn](http://ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn)



**Casey Family Programs** is the nation's largest operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care and building Communities of Hope for children and families across America. Casey Family Programs works in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories and with more than a dozen tribal nations to influence long-lasting improvements to the safety and success of children, families and the communities where they live.

<http://www.casey.org>

# 1. Building the Relationship

Birth Parent	Foster Parent/Kinship Caregiver
<p>Suggested ways to build a strong relationship with the foster parent/kinship caregiver through comfort calls and other introductory meetings to share your knowledge about your child, maintain a close bond and keep in regular contact with your child.</p>	<p>Suggested ways to build a strong relationship and support the birth parent in comfort calls and other introductory meetings to help you understand the experiences, culture, traditions and routines of the child so that you can better respond to the needs of the family.</p>
<p>Here are some ideas you may want to share or discuss during a comfort call or an in-person family introductory meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I really love and care about my child.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I am hoping that my child will be able to come back home to me.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I want to know how my child is doing.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I want you to know about my child’s medical information.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I want you to know what my child really likes.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I want you to know what my child doesn’t like.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I want you to know that my child needs this routine for bedtime.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I would like to know what school my child will attend.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I would like to know how many children you have cared for in your home.</li> </ul> <p>You may wish to ask questions about where your child is placed and information about the foster parents/kinships caregivers such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What does your home look like?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Are there any other children in your home?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What does an average day in your house look like?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How will my child fit into your family?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How do you handle discipline in your family?</li> </ul> <p>It would be valuable for you to share your child’s sleeping habits, food preferences, likes and dislikes, medical issues, school progress and other relevant information to help the foster parent/kinship caregiver provide a smooth adjustment for your child.</p>	<p>Here are some ways that you can introduce yourself during the comfort call or in-person family introductory meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> “Hi – I am Betty, the foster parent taking care of your son for now. I can tell that he really misses you and his dad. I wanted to make sure that you knew who was taking care of Tommy and I would love for you to help me to do this.”</li> </ul> <p>The foster parent/kinship caregiver may ask the birth parent questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do you have any ideas how I can help your child tonight?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What is your child’s favorite toy? Likes? Dislikes?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What is your child’s favorite song that he/she likes?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Does your child have a bedtime routine or any sleep habits?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How are you doing?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do you have anyone who can support you right now?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Can I tell your son or daughter that you are doing okay to help him or her feel more comfortable?</li> </ul> <p>If you are comfortable doing so, you might share information about your family size and the ages and gender of the other children in your home. You may also want to describe a little about what your home looks like and the general neighborhood where you live.</p> <p>If the birth parent does not want to talk during the first comfort call, you may say you understand why they may be upset and ask if it would be okay to call back. Explain that you would like to share how their son or daughter is doing and also obtain ideas from the parent about how best to support their child at this challenging time.</p>
<p>Some suggested ways to talk with the foster parent/kinship caregiver about topics to recognize the individuality of your child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> You may wish to share information about how your child looks forward to certain religious holiday celebrations. For example, your child may wish to light Chanukah candles during this Jewish holiday. You may wish to ask to take your child to the synagogue to celebrate this time together.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> You may wish to share how you help your daughter braid her hair. You might ask to arrange a weekly time to help her do this.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> You might want to share your child’s likes or dislikes about different activities (e.g., playing in snow, riding a bicycle, etc.).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> You may wish to talk about cultural opportunities for your teen such as participation in Tribal gatherings, LGTBQ and other support groups that meet regularly.</li> </ul>	<p>Some suggested ways to talk with the birth family about topics to recognize the individuality of their child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> You may be unsure about how to assist a child/youth with their grooming, haircare or hygiene due to their cultural upbringing. You might ask the birth parent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> “Do you have any advice on how to best help your child with their grooming and haircare – does she/he have any special clothing preferences?”</li> <li><input type="radio"/> “Does your child have a favorite way of bathing – does he or she prefer a shower or bath?”</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> You may learn that the child or youth wishes to attend weekly religious services. You may wish to talk with the birth parents to make arrangements for this.</li> </ul>

## 2. Supporting the Relationship

Children and youth benefit and learn healthy communications skills when they see the foster parents/kinship caregivers and birth parents talking regularly in a positive manner. Seeing them all working together can help the children and youth realize that they do not have to choose one family over another. It also shows the child or adolescent that adults can get through difficult situations by communicating and supporting each other.

Open and ongoing communication between the foster parent/kinship caregiver, the birth parent and the child can help build trusting and lasting relationships. Birth parents may be more likely to stay connected and share information when the foster parent/kinship caregiver is willing to support and encourage the birth parent and child or youth to ask for help whenever needed. Regular communications between them can help them stay up-to-date on all matters relating to the child and family. It also can help clarify different or confusing feelings that the birth parent, child or youth may be experiencing during this period of time.

Maintaining regular contact through visits and sharing time together are other important ways to strengthen and support relationships between the foster parent/kinship caregiver, the birth parent, child or youth.

The foster parent/kinship caregiver can play a critical role in supporting positive, regular visitation between the birth parents, the child or youth and their siblings. Visits enable the child or youth to see that his or her family is okay. This family time together also gives everyone the opportunity to stay connected and work towards reunification together whenever possible. Talks between the foster parent/kinship caregiver and the birth parent can focus on ideas to make the visitation special and memorable for the child or youth. They can also talk about what works best so they can maximize quality time during the visits.

Other opportunities for foster parents/kinship caregivers to help promote family time together include:

- Encouraging birth parents to participate with them in their child's medical appointments, dental appointments, school conferences/events and court hearings.
- Encouraging birth parents to participate with them in family outings, trips to the park, birthday parties, holiday events and other special celebrations.
- Offering to drive the birth family to appointments and events.

*“It’s most effective when the foster parent and birth parent work together to coordinate their efforts in caring for a child, particularly relating to culture and traditions. This helps the children and youth maintain their own sense of identity, family history and also increases connections that help them understand the new relationships in their life. This partnership hastens stable reunification because the child has more supportive people in their constellations and research has shown that this is really important to the child’s future. These connections are critical to older youth who are close to aging out. In the end, this birth and foster parent partnership strengthens both families.”*

**Jessica Lloyd-Rogers, foster parent (Oregon)**

As a former foster parent and the current President of the Oregon Foster Parent Association, Jessica believes in keeping children and youth safe and surrounded by caring adults who help them grow to become confident, caring, competent and contributing adult members of their community.



*“There were barriers to staying connected to my mom while my siblings and I were in care. Because all our visits had to be supervised by a child welfare worker, it was difficult to work around everyone’s schedules. If there had been more time for us to be together as a family before reunification, it would have made things easier.”*

**Kodi Baughman, former foster youth (Iowa)**

## 2. Supporting the Relationship

Birth Parent	Foster Parent/Kinship Caregiver
<p>Suggested ways to strengthen and build a stronger relationship with the foster parent/kinship caregiver by making regular efforts to stay connected and up-to-date about your child’s progress.</p>	<p>Suggested ways to strengthen and build a stronger relationship with the birth parent by discussing how both parties will regularly communicate and share information. In this way, you show respect for the birth parent by requesting his/her input in decision-making around their child.</p>
<p>Below are some suggested ways to regularly communicate with the foster parent/kinship caregiver and your child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Let your children know that it is okay to be with their foster family while you work on getting stronger and healthier.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask the foster parent about setting up a regular time to talk about your son or daughter’s progress.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talk with the foster parents about texting or sending photos or short videos to you about your son or daughter.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask about obtaining art projects, grades and report cards from the foster parents/kinship caregivers.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask about setting up phone calls and facetime chats with your son or daughter multiple times during the week.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> You may wish to share parts of your story with those caring for your children and hearing theirs in return, which can help create trusted connections.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> You may wish to ask the foster parent to help you maintain strong connections between your child and any other siblings in the family and any other important relatives in the child’s life.</li> </ul>	<p>Below are some recommended communication strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> You may suggest to the birth parent, “Let’s talk about what we will agree upon to share in information and how will we communicate back and forth about your son or daughter.”</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> You might also say: “You are the expert in knowing what your child needs. We really value your thoughts and recommendations relating to your child. We hope that you can help us with identifying how best to meet your child’s needs.”</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sharing parts of your story with the birth family and hearing theirs in return can help to create trusted connections.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talk to the birth parents about the specific hygiene items they use with their child so that you can decide if you want to use the same products in your home.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Encourage the child or youth to make cards or art projects as gifts for his or her family.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support the child or adolescent in having contact with his or her siblings and other family members by telephone calls, emails, letters and cards.</li> </ul>
<p>Some suggested ways to get involved in visits and special family time with your child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talk with the foster parent/kinship caregiver about participating in your child’s medical appointments, dental appointments and school conferences/events. In some states, participation in these activities is a legal right of the birth parent.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> When invited by the foster parent/kinship caregiver, participate together with them in faith-based activities, family outings, birthday parties, holiday events and other special celebrations.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If your child is an infant or toddler, during visits, the foster parent/kinship caregiver may provide you with updates through written notes in your child’s diaper bag or a journal. If this happens, you may wish to respond back to the foster parent/kinship caregiver with your own thoughts about your child.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If needed, you could ask the foster parent/kinship caregiver to help with transportation to a visit or ask for a transportation voucher from your social worker.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talk with the foster parent/kinship caregiver about jointly approaching the social worker to request more visits in more natural settings (e.g., the foster parent/kinship caregiver’s home, playground, family resource center or other community space).</li> </ul>	<p>Some suggested ways to work with the birth parents to make the best of visits and special family time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Invite the birth parents, siblings or other family members to school functions, sporting events and community activities or a fun outing.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If the child is an infant or toddler, provide the birth parent with regular updates about their child by sending special notes or a journal in a diaper bag or a small bag that the child carries with them during visits.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Offer to transport a parent and their child to a visit together.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Send the child or youth with all items that they might need during a visit with their parents (e.g., games, snacks and activities they can do with their parents).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborate with the foster families of the siblings of the child or youth to plan joint activities regularly to help maintain sibling relationships during their separation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work with the birth parent to meet jointly with the social worker to discuss visitation plans such as increasing the frequency and length of visits and making arrangements for family visits to occur in the most natural setting possible.</li> </ul>

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

While the children are in care, it will be important for the birth family and the foster parent/kinship caregiver to keep their relationship strong by working as a supportive and unified team. It is especially helpful when the foster parent/kinship caregiver and the birth parent decide together how they will share consistent information about the child with the various other professionals who may be involved in working with the family. Other professionals

may include social workers, medical and dental providers, schools, family members, special service providers and others. This will also help create a collaborative effort in helping the family work toward reunification or alternative living arrangements.

During this time, the birth parent may be working to fulfill all of the requirements of his/her case plan to seek reunification. The foster parent/kinship caregivers can look for ways to be supportive and the birth parent can keep the foster parent/kinship caregiver updated on their progress, concerns and any other important information. Birth and foster parents/kinship caregivers can work together to begin preparing the child for a positive reunification if that is part of the plan.



*“A strong relationship between a birth parent and foster parent can make a huge difference for a child and their birth family. I think it is awesome to know that your child is safe. I especially appreciate that the foster parent wants to know what practices I use to care for my child. I also have some comfort knowing that the foster parent cares about me. In this way, I can move forward with my own healing and also work on a plan for a better life for me and my family.”*

**Shana Hunts Along, birth parent (Minnesota)**



Shana is a citizen of Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota. She overcame major substance use challenges and successfully turned her life around and reunified with her two children. Today, Shana works as a parent mentor and community outreach advocate with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Law Center in Minneapolis and she provides support to American Indian families affected by the child protection system. It was this center that successfully represented her when her child welfare case was open. Shana helped to create the Parent Mentor Program within the ICWA Law Center.

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

Birth Parent	Foster Parent/Kinship Caregiver
<p>Suggested ways for keeping your relationship strong with the foster parent/kinship caregiver while working with the system and planning for reunification.</p>	<p>Suggested ways for keeping your relationship strong with the birth parents while working with the system and planning for reunification.</p>
<p>Ways for you to work in a team approach with the foster parent/kinship caregiver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talk with the foster parent/kinship caregiver about how the two of you can jointly approach the social worker to request: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Access to resources from the department and other service providers to help you move toward reunification</li> <li><input type="radio"/> More frequent visits with the children</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Visits occurring in the most natural setting</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talk with the foster parent/kinship caregiver about holding regular family meetings to discuss ways to move forward with reunification or alternative living arrangements.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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.</li> </ul>	<p>Ways for you to work in a team approach with the birth parent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assist the birth parent in understanding the roles and responsibilities of the various service providers and systems who are involved with the child.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Advocate together with the birth parent to access all the services and resources needed to help the family reunify.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support the birth family in meeting together regularly as a family unit to discuss plans for working toward reunification or alternative living arrangements.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide opportunities to celebrate successes of both the child or youth and the birth family.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask how you can continue to support the birth parent and the foster parent connections for the child after reunification or change in placement.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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.</li> </ul>

*“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)**





## 4. Keeping the Relationship Strong after the Family Leaves the Child Welfare System

After the child(ren) or youth and parents are reunited, it usually takes some time for the family to readjust to living together. In many situations, it is the positive and supportive relationship that the birth parent experienced with the foster parent/kinship caregiver that helped the parent gain the necessary skills and tools to successfully provide a nurturing and stable home for their children. We often see parents and caregivers continue to keep in contact with each other and provide support to each other. Many foster families/kinship caregivers stay closely connected with the birth family and

build long-term relationships for the children and family. Some foster parents become known as “aunts’ and “uncles” to the children. During post reunification, a birth parent may wish to continue having contact and communication with foster parents/kinship caregivers to keep them involved as a support. The birth parent may ask the foster parent/kinship caregivers to attend family celebrations or to help with babysitting or respite care as is done in an extended family system.

Birth Parent	Foster Parent/Kinship Caregiver
<p>Suggested ways for continuing your relationship with the foster parent/kinship caregiver during post reunification and beyond.</p>	<p>Suggested ways for continuing your relationship with the birth parent and children during post reunification and beyond.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Share that you wish to continue to have contact and communication with the foster parents/kinship caregivers as way to keep them involved as a support for you and the child or youth.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talk with the foster parent/kinship caregiver about helping out with child care or respite care.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Invite the foster family/kinship caregiver to join family outings, birthday parties, school events, holiday events and other special celebrations.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Continue to share pictures of your family and children with the foster family/kinship caregivers and let them know how much you appreciate their help.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talk to your children about their foster family/kinship caregivers so they know that they are still loved by them too.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask the foster parent/kinship caregiver if he/she will partner with you to share how your positive relationship with each other helped your family be strong and reunite to help make the child welfare system be as strong as possible for other parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Continue to include the birth family in special family events, celebrations and holidays.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide assistance with child care or respite care.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Let the birth parents know that you are available to them and will support them as they gradually learn to readjust to their role as the main caregivers.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Remind birth parents that they do not need to be perfect and that everyone may need time to adjust and learn their new roles. This is especially important during the beginning stages of post reunification.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Let the birth parents know that you would be happy to participate in family outings, birthday parties and other events whenever you are invited by the birth family.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talk with the birth parent about both of you sharing your positive collaborative experiences with other child welfare workers, foster parents and other birth families still involved with the system.</li> </ul>

*“At the end of the placement, as long as it is safe, a child should have everyone who they love in their life.”*

**Jody Rodgers, birth parent (California)**

Jody is raising her three children and working at a dream job as a parent mentor. She has struggled with substance use and domestic violence challenges and her children were placed in out-of-home care. She is grateful for the journey because without it she would not be the strong woman, friend, mentor and mother that she is today. Today, she is a nationally recognized parent advocate.



## Glossary of Terms

All definitions, except for comfort calls, icebreakers and parent partner programs are collected from the Child Welfare Information Gateway, a service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, [childwelfare.gov/glossary/glossary](http://childwelfare.gov/glossary/glossary)

**comfort calls** – Agencies may arrange a call between the foster parents and birth parents within 24 hours after the child has been removed. It is important to have buy-in from the agency, caseworker, birth parent, and foster parent to conduct this type of call. Caseworkers can request permission from birth parents to share their contact information. The foster parent introduces himself/herself and shares with the birth parent how their child is doing. The foster parent also lets the birth parent know of their interest in working in partnership

with the parent to minimize the trauma of foster care and support reunification if possible. During the call, the foster parent may try to gather some information from the birth parent regarding sleeping habits, food preferences, likes and dislikes, etc.

**family reunification** – Refers to the process of returning children in temporary out-of-home care to their families of origin. Reunification is both the primary goal for children in out-of-home care as well as the most common outcome.

**fictive kin** – People not related by birth or marriage who have an emotionally significant relationship with an individual.

**foster care** – A 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians, and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes, but is not limited to, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and preadoptive homes. (Adapted from the Code of Federal Regulations)

**foster parent** – Adults who provide a temporary home and everyday nurturing and support for children who have been removed from their homes. The individual(s) may be relatives or nonrelatives and are required to be licensed in order to provide care for foster children. In some states or jurisdictions, foster parents are referred to as 'resource parents.'

**icebreakers** – These are child-focused, face-to-face meetings held between birth parents and foster parents as soon as possible after a child is placed in out-of-home care. Ideally such meetings are held no later than three to five days after placement. Icebreakers are recommended whenever a child experiences a placement change – from home to a foster home, from the foster home back to his or her parents, etc. The purpose of the icebreaker meeting is twofold: to share important information about a child and to begin building a relationship between the child's birth parents and the new caregivers. Both of these purposes are critical in reducing the trauma the child has experienced as a result of placement. Icebreakers open the door for communication and enable the birth and foster parents to exchange information about the child. (Biehle, Karri, and Goodman, Denise, *Icebreaker meetings: A Tool for Building Relationships Between Birth and Foster Parents*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012)



**kinship adoption** – Adoption of a child by someone related by family ties or a prior relationship.

**kinship foster care** – An arrangement that can occur when a public child welfare agency has legal custody and places a child with relatives or kin in a foster care arrangement. This type of arrangement is often referred to as either “formal” or “public” kinship care. Kinship foster homes may be either licensed or unlicensed, depending on State licensing requirements and family preferences.

**kinship navigator program** – A federally funded program that connects children involved with child welfare to grandparents or relative caregivers and helps those caregivers identify and access needed services. Kinship navigator programs are funded through grants established by the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018.

**non-relative extended family members** – When a child is detained by the county social services agency, the agency has certain legal obligations to identify and notify relatives (including siblings) of the child’s removal. The county agency also has a legal obligation to assess those relatives and/or non-relative extended family members (NREFMs) for placement.

**parent partner programs** – Parent partner programs provide a peer-to-peer approach for supporting parents and their families in achieving positive outcomes. Parent partner programs include caring and empathetic parent partners, with previous lived experiences with the child welfare system, who provide guidance, mentoring, advocacy and support to new parents facing the challenges and emotional impact of the child welfare system. Parent partners also may be referred to as parent advocates, family advocates, parent mentors, veteran parents, parent allies and system navigators. Parent partner programs vary in their approach and the way they are structured. For more information about Casey Family Programs’ work on how parent partner programs support reunification as well as a snapshot of research on these programs, please see *How do parent partner programs instill hope and support prevention and reunification?*, Issue Brief: Healthy Organizations, Casey Family Programs, updated May 2019, [casey.org/parent-partner-program](https://casey.org/parent-partner-program) and *How do parent partner programs instill hope and support prevention and reunification?* Appendix A: Snapshot of research on parent partner programs, Casey Family Programs Healthy Organizations Issue Brief, updated May, 2019, [casey.org/appendix-a-research-parent-partner-programs](https://casey.org/appendix-a-research-parent-partner-programs)

**resource family** – Includes foster/adoptive parents, foster parents, and relative or kinship caregivers. (Adapted from the *Annie E. Casey Foundation*.)

**respite care services**– Short-term child care services intended for parents and other caregivers that offer temporary relief, improve family stability, and reduce the risk of abuse or neglect. Respite can be planned or offered during emergencies or times of crisis.

*“My advice is that foster parents reach out to biological parents in a genuine way. Being genuine can help alleviate the fear the biological parents may have about the foster parents trying to take their children away from them. I believe foster parents can help biological parents after it is clear that they are there to support them and not judge them. This kind of healthy connection between the children, the foster parents, and the biological parents can make such a positive impact that the foster parents may stay engaged with the family long after the case closes. The big takeaway is to align with the biological parents so that everyone is moving forward together as a team.”*

**Kodi Baughman, former foster youth (Iowa)**



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# TIPS

## for Birth Parents, Foster Parents and Kinship Caregivers

### Birth Parent

- Understand that the foster parent/kinship caregiver is not trying to take your child away from you but is trying to be a support while you are separated.
- Offer information about your child's sleeping habits, food preferences and other likes and dislikes to help the foster parent/kinship caregiver provide a smooth adjustment for your child.
- Stay in regular contact with the foster parent/kinship caregiver and your child and participate in ongoing visitations, attend school functions, events, activities and appointments.
- Ask the foster parent about setting up a regular time to talk about your son or daughter's progress.
- Talk with the foster parents about texting or sending photos or short videos to you about your son or daughter.
- Seek assistance or advice from the foster parent/kinship caregiver to help you get linked to the right services and resources.
- Share challenges that you may be facing to successfully complete your case plan.
- Let the foster parent/kinship caregiver know if you need to make a change in an appointment or commitment.
- Share any strong beliefs or preferences you have related to your child, such as hair length, getting a driver's license, etc.
- Let them know what your goals are and celebrate successes together.
- 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.

### Foster Parent/Kinship Caregiver

- Let the birth parents know that your goal is to help them get their children back home with them.
- Include birth parents in decisions that affect their son or daughter, whenever possible.
- Seek information about the child's routines and likes and dislikes from the birth parent to help the child adjust when he/she is first placed in your home.
- Respect the personal information you may know about a family's situation.
- When talking with the child(ren) or youth, keep your comments regarding the birth parents positive.
- Offer your support or a word of encouragement to the birth parents and avoid criticism.
- Share information in a positive way about the child or youth's progress and the activities in which he or she is involved.
- Stay in regular contact with the birth parents by sending texts, short videos or photos.
- Provide opportunities for the child or youth to connect with their parents beyond telephone calls such as invitations to attend school functions, events, activities, or appointments.
- Call the birth parent when the child or youth is sick and not feeling well.
- Be sure to talk to the parent before taking any major steps with the child or adolescent, such as helping him/her get a driver's license.
- Ask birth parents what extra-curricular activities they think their children might enjoy.



*“Through my long-term experiences as a foster parent, I have worked with many birth parents. I have always been committed to building solid and supportive relationships with birth parents to help them reunify as quickly as possible with their children. I believe that birth parents and foster parents need to always work together to achieve successful reunification and prevent a child from re-entering the system. Strong and caring relationships are key to making this happen.”*

**Amanda Cruce, foster parent (Florida)**

A foster parent for eight years, Amanda is president of the Florida Foster Parent/Adoptive Association.

# INFORMATION PACKET QUESTIONNAIRE

## Birth and Foster Parent Partnership: A Relationship Building Guide

1.0 Credit

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.*

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Street or Post Office City/State Zip*

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

**YES! I would like to receive ACRF email.** *(Includes Training Tracks Newsletter, training reminders and community events or training of interest for Resource Families)*

Are you a foster parent?  YES  NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: \_\_\_\_\_

If NO, please check one:  Pending Foster Parent  OCS  Birth Parent  Adoptive Parent

Residential Treatment Facility (License #: \_\_\_\_\_)  Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Other *(please specify)*: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please read the information packet. Then fill out this questionnaire and RETURN TO: ACRF, 815 Second Avenue Suite 202, Fairbanks, AK 99701. Or fax it to: 907-479-9666, you will be credited with 1.0 Credit for completion of this questionnaire.*

1. This packet presents concepts and ideas that may be useful to your foster parenting experience. Please list two (2) specific ideas or concepts that you learned or reaffirmed from reading this packet. Write a short sentence or two describing how you can use them in your family.

a)

b)

*Please see reverse side*

# **INFORMATION PACKET QUESTIONNAIRE**

2. List each title in this packet. In a few sentences for each article, summarize the main purpose or key points for each article in this packet.

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