
CONNECTIONS



FOSTERING HOPE AND HEALING FOR
FAMILIES THROUGH THE SHARED
LOVE OF A CHILD

Simple things a caregiver can do to open the door for connection with a parent:

- Practice good self care – you can be a much more open and kind foster parent when you are calm and your cup is filled!
- **RESOURCE:** “First Telephone Call from a Foster Parent to a Parent.” Available for download at: <https://cherish.kindering.org/resources>
- Invite parent to well child exams and therapy appointments, maybe invite parents to play at the park afterwards.
- Remember to refer to the child as “your child” when speaking to the parents. Try not to use possessive words about the child, even on your social media accounts (If posting a picture of a foster baby and your bio son, maybe consider saying “These sweet boys” instead of “My sweet boys”).
- Meet up at a McDonald’s with a play place –public place, neutral ground, near bus stop.
- Ask parent best way to communicate – e.g. text, social media, phone calls, notes.
- Ask parents for pictures of themselves or ask if you can take a picture of them for the child (it may be very hard for parents in crisis to print pictures themselves). Hang these pictures in your home to help children know you are ok with them talking about and remembering their families. Make sure to ask an older child if they are ok with pictures of their parents prior to putting up the picture.
- Set up a new email just for communication with parents if needed (e.g. katiefostermom@outlook.com).
- Consider a prepaid cell phone for communication if needed.
- Consider a new Facebook account for communication if needed (e.g. “Foster Parent Sue”, not using children’s pictures or name).
- Print pictures of events and daily activities regularly and include in visit bag or pass on at court, meetings, or doctor appointments. You can also use a digital photo sharing app if appropriate.
- Ask parent about child – favorite foods, activities, routines.
- Ask parent about themselves – favorite activities, foods, cultural activities – get to know them!
- If feasible provide transportation to some or all visits to be able to greet parent and check in briefly. It is particularly helpful to arrange to transport to the first visit, as that is a great time to connect with the parent.
- Pass on child’s art, school work, report cards and projects to parents.
- Utilize free passes to children’s museum, science center or aquarium with parent. Your local ESIT center may be able to help you. Most places have free or highly reduced rates for foster families or kids who receive Medicaid coverage.

- Ask what foods, toys or books they like to have in the visit bag. (Remember you likely have more resources and can utilize WIC, Treehouse, clothing vouchers if needed).
- Speak well of parent to all parties involved.
- Consider special accommodations for holidays or birthdays when regular visits don't happen. Can you provide an extra visit? It may mean a lot to the parent.
- Once a relationship is developed, invite the parent to your family functions
- Consider which caregiver has developed a better relationship with a parent. For example, sometimes a foster dad is easier to interact with than a foster mom as he may not feel like such a direct replacement.
- Ask when court dates are, write caregiver reports and attend court when possible. Attach pictures of the child to the court report to allow all to put a face to the case. Print an extra copy of these pictures and bring to court to give to parents.
- Give hugs, affirm parent's hard work, encourage them forward.
- Ask your social worker to schedule an Ice breaker meeting, ideally within a few days of placement. The purpose of this meeting is not to discuss case details, but to provide the caregiver and parent a chance to come together on neutral ground to discuss the child. If you would feel more comfortable, the SW can mediate the Ice Breaker.
- Take written reports from the court and CPS with a grain of salt. Remember it's not the whole story about a parent; perhaps it's their lowest moment. How would you feel if someone wrote down your mistakes and shared them with others?

Post reunification:

- Consider providing respite or babysitting.
- Let parents know you are still available to be a resource if needed.
- Let parents know how to reach you in the future – Facebook may be good if phone numbers change frequently.

Simple things social workers can do to open the door for connection:

- Offer to provide contact information to other parties and see if parents are ok with it.
- Facilitate Ice Breaker meetings for all parties to meet each other.
- Provide caregiver with guidelines such as "First Telephone Call from a Foster Parent to a Parent."
- Speak well of both parent and caregiver.
- Include caregiver in communications so they know what's going on.

First Telephone Call from a Foster Parent to a Parent

If using a personal phone (cell or home) you can dial *67 before the phone number you're calling to block your number from the recipient, or ask to use the social worker's phone...whichever feels most comfortable. E-mail is also an option, but it is better for later contacts—after some rapport has been established. It is a best-case scenario, in addition to a telephone call, that you meet the parent in-person (at the office or wherever). Nothing beats in-person contact for breaking down barriers! The social worker on the case can set up an in-person "ice breaker" for you—it's fine to make this request of her/him. If making a phone call from home, it's best to wait to make a first telephone call until the child is in bed or out of the home (not going to be interrupting for your attention). You want the focus to be on starting a relationship. Keep the call simple.

Be prepared for the child's parent to be angry and upset. Listen for a bit to get a sense of how he/she is doing emotionally—this will give you guidance on how to proceed. Be supportive and empathetic re: where the parent is emotionally in the moment. Be clear in your intentions for this telephone call. Identify who you are (first name is fine), ex: "I'm Jane, your baby's foster mom." Let the parent know how her child is doing in the moment, ex., "He is sleeping now, he had macaroni and cheese for dinner, he is talking about how much he misses you." Let the parent know you are not trying to replace her or to adopt her child. Let the parent know that you are calling not only to tell her how her child is doing, but also to get her input on her child's care, and (if this is comfortable for you) to indicate that you are there for her, too (you are rooting for her success; you care about them both).

Here are some questions you might ask:

- What do you want me to know about your child?
- What is the routine regarding food? Bottle? Cup?
- What is the routine regarding bedtime?
- Can you tell me about any medical concerns? Is your child taking medications?
- Does your child have allergies?
- Who is your child's doctor? (You could offer to mom that she can join you at an upcoming appt and state that you believe the child will feel more comfortable if she is there.)
- Correct spelling of child's name?
Confirmation of child's birthdate?

Here are some questions the child's parent might ask you:

- Where is he sleeping? How is he sleeping?
- How is his eating?
- Does she share a room? A bed?
- How many children are in your home?
- Can I meet you? (You may want to address this before it even comes up. Per the parent ally who consulted on this form, ALL parents want to meet their child(ren)'s caregiver(s).

Closure:

Use your judgement regarding suggesting any future contact. You might feel comfortable suggesting letters in the diaper bag to start out. You can set it up that you will talk to the social worker about X (something you have discussed that needs follow-up) and the parent can check-in with the social worker.

Once rapport has been established, it may be comforting to let the parent know that you have been a foster parent for X number of years (if this seems helpful to the parent). (Sharing this info before rapport is established might be distancing, i.e., 'I'm so good at what I do'). You can also add information about how many children are in your home, if that feels helpful.

USE: “I will try...” or “I will call...” or “I will send...” (give a definitive plan regarding what type of future contact you will engage in). Contact through the social worker, initially, is a safe way to do it if you are unsure of how to proceed. You don’t want to leave a parent (someone who is likely to be in crisis) hanging. If it feels comfortable, this may be a time to schedule an in-person meeting (or to let the parent know that you will ask the social worker to set one up). Take into account what feels comfortable (and possible) for the parent.

Overview of Tasks in Telephone Call:

- Introduce yourself.
- Listen empathetically to how parent is doing. Make supportive comments. To help the parent who is stuck (angry, sad, blaming, denying, etc.) get unstuck, you might say something like: “I’m here to keep your child safe—to care for him and meet his needs—while you focus on your needs and getting things done—I want you to be the best parent you can be. Please know that I am rooting for you both.”
- Ask questions, provide information.
- Reassure parent that their child is safe.
- Find closure at end of the call. Talk about next contact—something concrete. Co-create a plan for a next contact with each other.

A few notes about visits between the child and his/her parent:

- Visits (or Family Time) are extremely helpful for maintaining the bond a child has with his/her parent and for helping a parent stay hopeful and motivated regarding reunification.
- A parent will feel supported and respected if he/she knows that you are in favor of his/her visits.
- Sometimes, visits don’t get started as soon as they could because of a lack of visit supervisors, etc. With approval from the social worker, you might consider setting up a visit while everyone is waiting for visits to start. Or, again with approval, offering an additional visit each month that you will supervise.

A few notes about your role in relationship to the parent:

- Reaching out can feel scary. Please seek out others for support (other foster parents, your CHERISH Therapist if you are involved with CHERISH, your private agency social worker, members of your faith community, etc.).
- Know that having a relationship with your foster child’s parent is usually best for your foster child’s emotional well-being, as well as yours. Please imagine if you had a birth child removed from your care what you would feel and the questions/needs you would have.
- No matter what the ultimate permanency plan, a child will want to stay connected to you or to his/her parent for the long haul. You will be able to fulfill that wish if you have a genuine relationship with your foster child’s parent.

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As a foster parent or relative caregiver, you play an essential role in the life of the child in your home. CHERISH™ is privileged to join with you as you cherish the child in your care! Young children in dependency are particularly vulnerable and may need special support to get the right start in life. Kindering's CHERISH™ program developed and provides an infant mental health centered approach to ESIT services, designed to meet the needs of children in dependency. CHERISH nurtures children's connection with parents and caregivers along their journey navigating the child welfare system.

Referrals to CHERISH can be made by
calling **(425) 653-4321**
or emailing cherish@kindering.org

For more information about the CHERISH Program, visit
our website at www.cherish.kindering.org

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