

# Acknowledgements

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Thank you to all!

The staff at the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership

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**Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership**  
Dedicated to professional development



Helen Bader School of Social Welfare

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# Caregivers Fostering Permanency: Resource Guide for Child Welfare Workers

The following resource tool is meant to be a **guide for child welfare workers as they work with, and empower, foster parents to better promote and support child permanency**. There are many important **roles that foster parents can play** in supporting child permanency, including:

- communicating positively with birth parents
- actively participating in reunification efforts
- supporting children through transitions
- providing emotional support to children
- opening their homes and hearts through adoption

As the trends in child welfare move toward concurrent planning, foster caregivers must play larger, more important roles in helping the children in their care achieve timely permanence.

It has become a Child Welfare **best practice to include foster caregivers as primary team members** – treating them as important resources and participants in case planning. Due to the changing nature of caregivers’ roles in achieving child permanence, child welfare workers must, themselves, be clear about these new roles. They need the knowledge and skills to help foster parents grow into these new roles. The following **resource guide is meant to aid workers in their understanding of what caregivers can do to promote child permanency and to provide specific ideas for communicating, educating, including, and supporting caregivers**. It is our hope that these ideas and examples make this resource both user-friendly and immediately relevant.

Much of what child welfare workers are being asked to do may seem time-consuming or a little frightening (e.g. encouraging birth parent/foster parent relationships). However, when done well, it can help ensure that children’s needs are met, and that they achieve timely and lasting permanency.

This resource guide is meant to be used as an **as needed resource**, and is organized by **seven case time frames**:

- 1) First Month of Placement**
- 2) Life of the Case**
- 3) Permanency Consultations and Reviews**
- 4) Reunification**
- 5) TPR/Adoption by Foster Parent**
- 6) Change of Placement**

Each of the seven time frame sections is meant to stand alone, and can be referenced according to where an individual case is in the permanency process. Therefore, there is some overlap between the various sections.

Within each time frame there are **four categories for foster parent involvement and needs**, in regard to permanency issues:

*Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*  
*Role B) Role in the Family Interaction Plan*  
*Role C) Supporting the Child through Permanency Issues*  
*Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

Within each A-D category there are several **Key Points**, accompanied by bulleted or boxed tips, which provide more specific examples and scripts. Most of the sections also contain resource recommendations for further reading, and there is a full **bibliography** at the end. This resource guide includes **seven overarching themes** which bear brief discussion:

1. Workers must help foster parents understand that safety, permanency, and well-being are the BMCW's primary goals for children. It is expected that foster families work towards reunification. When reunification is not the goal, foster families are often considered first as long term permanency options. In this way it is the adults, not the children, who are taking the emotional risks of placement. It is particularly important that "foster-to-adopt" parents understand this and commit to supporting reunification efforts.
2. It has become a Child Welfare best practice to **include foster caregivers as primary team members**, treating them as important resources and participants in permanency planning. Foster parents are often highly committed to, and knowledgeable about, the children in their care, and can play many important roles. Child welfare workers should work to educate them about their various roles (e.g. court hearings, team meetings, family interaction), encourage their participation, include them in permanency discussions, seek and value their input, etc.
3. **"Concurrent planning"** is discussed several times in this resource tool, and refers to the practice of simultaneously working toward two permanency goals – usually reunification, and an additional goal, such as adoption. One of the big challenges here is to help foster-to-adopt caregivers manage living with ambiguous permanency outcomes, despite their hopes to adopt, while also ensuring that they are actively supporting the concurrent reunification plan.

4. Caregivers can do many things to promote reunification and meet children’s needs, including shared parenting. **Shared parenting** entails a good working relationship between birth parents, caregivers, and child welfare workers. While these relationships can be challenging to navigate, shared parenting has been identified as a Child Welfare best practice, particularly in the context of concurrent planning. The parent/caregiver relationship can exist on a continuum of contact, but requires ongoing, open communication and a focus on working together to meet the child’s needs. The child welfare worker’s role is essential and includes the following:
  - setting up expectations for working together
  - facilitating introductions and meetings
  - helping to identify each person’s role
  - teaching/modeling good communication skills
  - mediating conflict
  
5. In addition to having good communication with the birth family, it is vital that **foster parents actively support child-birth family connections**. This may include preparing the child for visits, speaking positively about birth family, inviting parents to appointments, promoting phone calls, hosting sibling visits, etc. There are several web-based resources identified that provide more information and specific ideas for promoting positive birth parent/foster parent relationships and family connections.
  
6. **Foster parents also have their own significant support needs**. While education, resources and respite are important, a caregiver’s emotional support needs are often overlooked. Nationwide, foster parent retention is a significant problem, and caregivers often cite leaving because they don’t feel respected as part of the child welfare team (e.g. important issues are not communicated, their feedback is not solicited, supports are not provided and they don’t feel appreciated.) Foster parents are asked to do a very difficult job without much training or support. Most come to care deeply about the children in their care, but become frustrated with a system that doesn’t always value or support them in ways that feel meaningful. Good social work skills, such as empathy, active listening, and communicating in a strengths-based manner can go a long way in making caregivers feel empowered and supported. This, ultimately, helps the children in their care as well.
  
7. Finally, **foster parents must actively support children** through their permanency process. In the sections about how caregivers can support the children in their homes through their permanency issues, attachment, trauma, and loss/grief are mentioned several times. It is vitally important that foster parents understand how these issues affect the children in their care and are supported in developing parenting strategies that will help the children to heal. Following is a brief description of what is meant by each term:

- **Attachment** is the formation of a significant and stable emotional connection between a child and (usually) close family members. It is a two-way reciprocal process between the child and caregivers and requires much time and many positive, nurturing interactions. The attachment process typically begins in early infancy as the child bonds with one or more primary caregiver. Although it is an ongoing process, the child's experiences throughout the first few years of life are pivotal. Secure attachment is correlated with the following developmental achievements:

- maintaining the bonds of trust
- achieving full intellectual potential
- developing a conscience
- having healthy relationships with others
- identity and self-esteem
- learning to regulate emotions
- language development
- brain structures and organization of the nervous system

Insecure or absent attachment is associated with problems in one or more of these developmental areas. Foster parents should work to cultivate an attachment with all of the children in their care. Sometimes they must use very specific attachment strategies. This is important even when the permanency plan is reunification. It is also imperative that, with reunification, attachment is preserved/built between children and their birth parents.

- Childhood **trauma** can be understood as a reaction to a traumatic event or situation that overwhelms a child's ability to cope. Traumatic events can include:
  - physical abuse
  - neglect
  - sexual abuse
  - removal from birth parents or other attachment figures
  - witnessing domestic violence

Effects include, but are not limited to, problems with behavior, physical health, brain development and emotional development. Effects can be both cumulative and long term. Early childhood trauma such as abuse, neglect, removal, and multiple placements can also impede a child's ability to form healthy attachments and to resolve grief issues. Foster parents must understand how trauma has impacted the child in their care and utilize appropriate parenting techniques.

- **Grief** has to do with a child's reactions to loss, such as removal from birth parents. These reactions can depend upon age, developmental level, previous life experiences, emotional/psychological health, and family/social environment. Typical feelings include sadness, anger, guilt, and insecurity.

Behavioral indicators include changes in appetite, sleep problems, aggression, etc. Social indicators include withdrawal, irritability, clinging, etc. Many children in foster care experience **traumatic grief**, where the trauma symptoms impact their ability to move through the typical bereavement process – resulting in emotional, behavioral, social, and/or cognitive problems. Traumatic grief can also impact the child’s ability to form healthy attachments. Foster parents must understand the grieving process of the children in their care, and how to help them through this process.

# First Month of Placement

## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

**Key Point #1:** Shared parenting, a common term for the positive working relationship between birth and foster parents, is a best practice that can benefit all team members.

### **Workers should:**

- Develop a personal comfort level with shared parenting
- Talk with birth and foster parents about the benefits of working together:

- makes the child more comfortable (fewer divided loyalty issues)
- meets the child's needs
- easier to coordinate family interactions

- Bring birth parents and caregivers together early (when it's safe and the birth parents are willing). In lieu of an early meeting, at least facilitate a birth parent-caregiver phone call within the first few days.
- Workers will often need to help foster parents and birth parents develop skills and strategies for initial interactions and communication. They also need to help caregivers and birth parents identify **roles and expectations**.
  - **Help foster parents to:**

- ask child-focused questions:

- "likes" and dislikes"
- routines
- how to comfort
- religion
- special needs/preferences

- compliment parent about their child
- assure the birth parent they will support the case plan:

"I'm here to take care of your children while you are working to meet court conditions – I'm not here to take your kids away from you."

"What should I have little Ciera call me, since you are 'mom'?"

# First Month of Placement

## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

- understand challenging birth parent behaviors (anger, increased drug use, not showing up, etc.) through the lens of grief, and to not personalize the anger or make generalizations:

“When a parent has their children removed they usually feel overwhelmed and are struggling with grief, shame, fear, and helplessness. It’s normal for parents to go through periods of intense anger as they are grieving, and to behave in ways that seem counter-productive. Know that this will probably pass, and that the anger isn’t really about you.”

- **Help birth parents to:**

- Share information about child:

- “likes” and “dislikes”
- routines
- ways to comfort
- Special needs
- important relatives

- Ask caregiver pertinent questions and discuss important issues:

- if and when they can call
- religious preferences
- cultural considerations
- hygiene expectations
- what they would like their child to call the caregivers

- Understand that a positive relationship with caregivers will help their child:

“I know you’re really angry right now, but we need to focus on helping Maya adjust. Working with her foster parents will help her to settle in more quickly, without having to worry about hurting your feelings”

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [Birth and Foster Family Partnerships, NRCFCPP](#)
- ❖ [Resource Parents Partnering with Birth Parents to Benefit Children, IFAPA](#)
- ❖ [Preventing the Triangulation of the Triangle of Support, Lutz, NRCFCPP](#)
- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 4](#)

# First Month of Placement

## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

**Key Point #2:** Caregivers must develop empathy for birth parents and then talk and behave in ways that their empathy is reflected to the child. Relative caregivers sometimes need more support in this area.

**Workers should:**

- Empathically discuss some of the challenges that a birth parent has experienced. If confidentiality is a concern, discuss typical birth parent issues and the associated challenges:

- AODA
- mental health issues
- domestic violence
- histories of abuse, neglect, or foster care

- Focus on the birth parent's strengths
- Explore the caregiver's core values (e.g. forgiveness, human dignity) and help them apply these to the birth parents
- Clarify confidentiality concerns with a supervisor

**Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 4](#)
- ❖ **Supervisor** – to clarify confidentiality questions

**Key Point #3:** Foster parents must understand that safety, permanency, and well-being are the BMCW's primary goals for children and be willing to work to support the case plan and, potentially, be a resource for adoption.

**Workers should:**

- Educate caregivers about the permanency process and how decisions are made. This includes an explanation of why reunification and relative placements are valued:

- Families have a right to be together and are the best permanency options when a child's needs are safely met.
- Children, parents, siblings, and relatives usually share important emotional and/or historical connections.
- Parents generally deserve opportunities to parent their children.
- Relative placements ensure more cultural and familial continuity.

# First Month of Placement

## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

- Ensure that caregivers understand their role in working toward the case goals
- Be clear and honest about the unpredictability of outcomes

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 1](#)
- ❖ [Foster Parents and Permanency, Bodner, Permanency Planning Today, NRCFCPP, \(pp. 4-5\)](#)
- ❖ [Achieving Permanence for Children in the Child Welfare System \(p. 3-6\), Lutz, NRCFCPP](#)
- ❖ [An Overview of Concurrent Planning, NRCFCPP](#)

**Key Point #4:** It is critical that foster parents participate on the child welfare team.

### **Workers should:**

- Provide basic overviews of team meetings, court hearings, case decision-making processes, including purposes, procedures, and time frames.
- Educate caregivers about their roles at various case planning activities by:

- updating team about any child issues (academic, behavioral, emotional, medical, social, etc.)
- sharing any concerns
- clarifying roles and expectations

“As the foster parent, you will get to know Julie really well. If you can come to case planning activities like \_\_\_\_\_, it would be really helpful. These are also good opportunities to build your relationship with her birth mom.”

- Provide dates for meetings/hearings ASAP and include foster parents in scheduling subsequent dates/times for meetings

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch.2](#)
- ❖ [Preventing the Triangulation of the Triangle of Support: Relationships Between Public Child Welfare Workers, Resource Families and Birth Families. Lutz, NRCFCPP](#)

# First Month Placement

## *Role B) Family Interaction Plan*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parents must understand the purpose and importance of family interaction for the child and their family.

**Workers should:**

- Explain the goals of family interactions for that particular parent/child:

“Since Destiny is just a baby, her mom needs lots of time with her to work on attachment”

- Educate foster parents about the importance of frequent family interactions, particularly for infants and young children:

- Interactions may decrease the child’s anxiety.
- Interactions provide opportunities for establishing, promoting, and maintaining relationships.
- Visits give birth parents opportunities to evaluate their parenting and to practice new behaviors.

“Mom is learning how to bond with Javon and it’s important to give her the opportunity to practice this several times a week. Since he’s only an infant, Javon needs lots of time with mom to build his attachment with her.”

- Discuss the attachment process and the importance of frequent interactions for young children who are forming attachments to birth parents.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 3, 4](#)
- ❖ [Resource Parents Partnering with Birth Parents to Benefit Children, IFAPA](#)

# First Month Placement

## *Role B) Family Interaction Plan*

**Key Point #2:** Foster parents must understand their role in the family interaction plan.

***Worker should:***

- Develop visitation plans with caregivers.
- Clarify logistics:

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• times/dates</li><li>• Who will be providing transportation (encourage foster parents)?</li><li>• What foster parents should provide for visits (snacks, games, nothing)?</li></ul> |
|--|

- Educate caregivers about what happens at visits, including how this is connected to the goals for the interactions
- Tell caregivers how they can get information about what happened at a visit (this is critical, so they can best support the child)
- Let foster parents know who to communicate problems or concerns with, etc.
- Help caregivers identify a “plan B” if birth parents no-show or cut visits short
- Ensure that caregivers understand they may not cancel visits, use them as rewards, threats or punishments
- Introduce foster parents to any sibling caregivers and any other important relatives and give permission for caregivers to facilitate interactions with these individuals
- Help foster parents set up a phone call schedule with parents/relatives

**Resources:**

- ❖ [Visit Coaching: Building on Family Strengths to Meet Children’s Needs, Beyer](#)

# First Month Placement

## *Role B) Family Interaction Plan*

**Key Point #3:** Foster parents need basic information about preparing the child for visits and instruction on how to provide emotional support, as per their developmental level.

**Worker should:**

- Share things to say to a child before a visit:

“You’ll be visiting with dad at the visitation center for two hours and you’ll play games and have a snack. A social worker will be there with you.”

- Discuss ways to debrief a child after a visit:

“What was the best part of the visit and the hardest part of the visit?”

- Help foster parents manage any challenging behaviors:

- Develop consistent routines for after visits.
- Identify the child’s comfort objects.
- Have the child draw or journal a picture of their feelings.
- Plan individual time with the child for that evening.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 3](#)
- ❖ [Touchpoints: Preparing Children for Transitions. ARW](#) (also recommends kid’s books)
- ❖ [Resource 21, Separation, Placement and Permanence.](#) WI Child Welfare Training System
- ❖ [Visit Coaching, Beyer, p. 21-22](#)

# First Month Placement

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## *Role B) Family Interaction Plan*

**Key Point #4: Foster parents benefit from concrete ideas about how to use visits and interactions to build their relationship with birth parents.**

***Workers should:***

- Provide caregivers with concrete ideas :

- Using a communication log/ notebook.
- Sending along pictures, artwork, or report cards.
- Writing a letter or introduction and ongoing notes to update and encourage the birth parent.
- Dressing the child up for visits.
- Asking the birth parents for a picture of themselves.
- Involving birth parents in scheduling/attending appointments.
- Asking birth parents for care giving advice.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 4](#)
- ❖ [Recruitment, Training, and Support \(pp. 36-40\), Family to Family](#)

# First Month Placement

## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parents can help promote placement stability and well-being by transitioning the child into their home.

**Workers should:**

- Provide concrete ideas about how to help the child feel safe and comfortable, while maintaining an emotional connection to birth parents:

- Include previous caregivers in transition plans (planned placements).
- Have caregivers facilitate timely phone calls between the child and siblings, relatives, and prior caregivers (ensure they have permission and phone numbers.) Even infants benefit from hearing their parents' voices
- Help caregivers obtain comfort objects like night-lights, toys, and blankets.
- Encourage caregiver to incorporate child's familiar foods, activities, routines, etc. This information must be obtained from parent or previous caregiver.
- Help caregiver obtain a picture of birth parents for display in child's room.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 3; Appendix 6](#)
- ❖ **Resources 18-19, Separation, Placement and Permanence**, WI Child Welfare Training System

**Key Point #2:** Foster parents must know how to talk with the child about reasons for placement, as per their developmental level.

**Workers should:**

- Provide concrete ideas about the “when’s, how’s, and what’s” of these conversations:

“Your mom loves you very much, but can’t take care of you right now because she has a sickness called ‘addiction.’ When someone has an addiction it is hard for them to think clearly and make good decisions that keep their children safe. Your mom is getting help from doctors.....I know she wants to get better and to take care of you again. Let’s draw a picture for her.”

- Provide children’s book recommendations
- Contact a child’s therapist for help

**Resources:**

- ❖ [Touchpoints: Preparing Children for Transitions. ARW](#) (also recommends kid’s books)

# First Month Placement

## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

**Key Point # 3:** Foster parents should help the child stay immediately connected (emotionally and physically) with biological family - parents, siblings, and other relatives. Relative caregivers may struggle more with this.

**Workers should:**

- Continue to stress the importance of regular family interactions for the child as a way to minimize the trauma of separation.
- Provide caregivers with specific ideas:

- Display of pictures of birth family.
- Encourage and support regular phone calls/emails/letters.
- Have the child draw pictures of family member.
- Have regular conversations about family, i.e, "I noticed that your mom draws really well. I bet you got your artistic talents from her." "Did you have any favorite family Christmas traditions?" "I know your mom loves you and is trying really hard to \_\_\_\_\_"

**Key Point #4:** Caregivers must have a basic understanding about issues of attachment, trauma, and loss. They must also know how to best meet their children's emotional needs, despite the nature of temporary care and ambiguity of permanent outcomes.

**Workers should:**

- Educate caregivers about attachment, trauma, and loss, as per the child's developmental level and unique circumstances. Basic definitions are:

- **Attachment** is the formation of a **significant, stable, and reciprocal emotional connection** between the child and (usually) family members.
- **Childhood trauma** can be understood as a reaction to a traumatic event or situation that overwhelms a child's ability to cope.
- **Grief** has to do with a child's **reactions to loss**, such as removal from birth parents. Many children in foster care experience **traumatic grief**, where the trauma symptoms impact their ability to move through the typical bereavement process.

Attachment, trauma, and grief can all impact one another.

# First Month Placement

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## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

- Keep in mind that many children in care, including infants, are dealing with issues of insecure/disrupted attachment, trauma, and loss. These can all impact one another, and **must be addressed** by caregivers and, often, professionals.
- Educate the caregiver about the attachment process and specific developmentally appropriate activities they can do to build attachment e.g., infant slings, eye contact games, time-ins, lots of nurturing, etc.
- Educate the caregiver about childhood grief and what behaviors may be indicative of grief (irritability, withdrawal, clinging, eating and sleeping issues, etc.)
- Provide trauma-informed strategies for supporting the child and managing behaviors:

“Jaime has been really withdrawn this week. He might still be in shock about being removed from his mother’s care. Let’s come up with some ideas to help him.”

- Make early referrals for therapy, Birth-To-Three, and other resources/supports as needed

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [Grief and Loss, ARW](#)
- ❖ [Parenting the Traumatized Child, ARW](#)
- ❖ [Child Trauma Academy](#)
- ❖ [ATTACH](#)
- ❖ [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)

# First Month Placement

## *Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

**Key Point #1:** Many foster parents will experience challenges (with “the system,” birth parents, and/or children). It is critical to meet their needs early in the placement and to make them feel appreciated.

### **Workers should:**

- Provide regular check-ins early on, asking specific questions:

- “How are you feeling about the phone calls Tyrone is having with his mom? I know she’s pretty angry right now.”
- “Jimmy has been displaying some pretty tough behaviors. How are you doing? How can I help?”
- “Foster parents can feel really overwhelmed at first. Please don’t hesitate to email or call me for anything you need, or to just vent.”

- Respond quickly to foster parent phone calls and needs.
- Make appreciative and complementary comments.
- Provide empathy for struggles:

“It must be so hard to deal with all the temper tantrums Mary is having. I think any foster parent would feel overwhelmed by them.”

- Don’t personalize caregivers’ anger and frustration. Recognize it as stemming from unmet needs and challenges.
- Encourage use of resources and supports including attending a New Placement Check-In session, foster parent support groups, and informal foster parent mentors.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 5](#)
- ❖ [Working with Foster and Adoptive Parents – Sensitivity for Social Workers, Foster Care and Adoptive Community On-Line Training Program](#)
- ❖ [Guide to Supporting Foster Parents, WI Foster Parent Training Committee](#)
- ❖ [Why are Foster Parents Leaving?, Schooler](#)

# First Month Placement

## *Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

**Key Point #2:** Many foster parents struggle with the ambiguity of foster care and permanent outcomes – especially if there is a “concurrent” permanency plan in place or the foster parent hopes to adopt. They may need help with becoming emotionally attached to the child, while simultaneously working toward reunification.

### **Workers should:**

- Honestly AND empathically discuss the challenges of concurrent planning:

“It must be so hard to be asked to love a child like your own, knowing that they will probably be reunified with their birth parents. Baby Clara is lucky to have such compassionate foster parents. You’re giving her a great start in life.”

- Explicitly check-in about how they are managing this challenge.
- Provide a balance of good listening and support with education and honesty.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [An Overview of Concurrent Planning, NRCFCPP](#)

**Key Point #3:** Some foster parents will need extra support in managing anger, or other feelings, about birth parents.

### **Workers should:**

- Remember that foster parents are not trained child welfare social workers. They are usually more focused on helping children and need to be met where they are.
- Listen and empathize with their experience before moving to disagreement, education or directives. Once caregivers are validated and feel understood, the worker can often help them to see things from another perspective:

“I know it can be hard to talk positively about a dad who hurt his child. Sometimes it’s even hard for social workers to find the positives. But, it’s really important for Isabella’s self esteem that she knows her dad loves her and has some good qualities.”

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [Working with Foster and Adoptive Parents – Sensitivity for Social Workers, Foster Care and Adoptive Community On-Line Training Program](#)
- ❖ [Guide to Supporting Foster Parents, WI Foster Parent Training Committee](#)

# Life of the Case: (Reunification/Concurrent)

## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parents must understand that safety, permanency, and well-being are the BMCW's primary goals for children and be willing to work to support the case plan and, potentially, be a resource for adoption.

### **Workers should:**

- See **Placement: First Month** section for previous discussion points.
- Continue to have regular conversations about these topics, providing education as needed:

"It must be so difficult to not know whether Anna, who you love like your own, will go home or be freed for adoption – especially when mom (i.e. doesn't show for visits). Concurrent planning is so hard on the foster parents, who are willing to both foster and adopt. You are taking the emotional risks so that Ana won't have to move to a new home if she's freed for adoption. While it's so painful at times, it is a wonderful thing that you are doing for her."

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 1](#)
- ❖ [Foster Parents and Permanency, Bodner](#)
- ❖ [Achieving Permanence for Children in the Child Welfare System\(p. 3-6\), Lutz, NRCFCPP](#)
- ❖ [An Overview of Concurrent Planning, NRCFCPP](#)
- ❖ CSSW – Permanency Consultants

**Key Point #2:** Including foster parents as valuable members of the professional team is a best practice that can aid in the achievement of case goals and improve a child's well-being.

### **Workers should:**

- Help caregivers to understand the child's permanency plan and the permanency planning process - how and when permanency decisions are made.
- Detail the "how's, why's, who's, and when's" of team meetings, permanency consultations, court procedures and processes, and other decision-making activities.
- Include foster parents when scheduling dates/times for meetings.
- Solicit, and listen to, their feedback.
- Thank caregivers for their hard work.

# Life of the Case: (Reunification/Concurrent)

## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

- Continue talking with them about the importance of their involvement in case planning:

“As the foster parent, you’re really getting to know Kelly well. Because of this, it would be so helpful to the case-planning process if you came to\_\_\_\_\_”

- Encourage and prepare caregivers to actively participate in case planning activities, like family team meetings and Permanency Hearings/Reviews, and ensure their preparedness:

“This is what will happen at the Permanency Hearing.....and your role will be.....If you have any concerns about John’s birth mom, I will be there to resolve any conflict.”

- Share information pertinent to the care of the child, i.e., if a parent is telling the child negative things about the caregiver. Make sure to clarify confidentiality concerns with a supervisor beforehand.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch.2](#)
- ❖ [Relationships Between Public Child Welfare Workers, Resource Families and Birth Families. Lutz, NRCFCPP](#)
- ❖ [Recruitment, Training and Support. Family to Family](#)

**Key Point #3:** Foster parents must understand the importance of birth families, despite maltreatment, and the rights of families to be together if children can be kept safe. Empathy for birth parents aids in this.

### **Workers should:**

- Have honest and clear conversations about safety and parental protective capacities, ensuring that caregivers understand that things don’t have to be “perfect” for reunification or placement with a safe relative

# Life of the Case: (Reunification/Concurrent)

## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

- Help caregivers to see the importance of birth family relationships and connections:

“When Javon’s mom was using, she made some pretty unsafe decisions for him. But, she really loves him and was able to parent him well when she was clean. Because of this, they do have a strong bond. I know you really care about Javon and worry about his mom’s ability to parent him. But, she’s working hard in her treatment program and they both deserve the opportunity to live together again.”

“I know it’s really hard to hear that reunification can happen when there are still many problems in the family. You care a lot about Kerry and want the best for her. Let me explain why we believe it may be in Kerry’s best interest to work toward reunification.....”

- Talk about birth parents in a strengths-based manner.
- Educate foster parents about the dynamics in the birth family, including some reasons for the birth parent’s behaviors, e.g., grief, AODA, mental illness, etc.
- Explore any concerns that relative caregivers have, i.e., they may have information or an emotional history that informs a negative view of reunification. Validate their feelings, seriously consider their concerns (there might truly be safety issues), and gently educate.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [Resource Parents Partnering with Birth Parents to Benefit Children, IFAPA](#)

**Key Point # 4: When safe, everyone can benefit from foster parents and birth parents working together (i.e., shared parenting). This requires foster parents to have empathy for birth parents, and skills to positively interact and communicate.**

### ***Workers should:***

- Become more comfortable and confident with “shared parenting” through reading about it and talking to colleagues who have had success using it.
- Stay updated about the foster parent-birth parent relationship by asking both parents how it is going.
- Continue to educate both sets of parents about the benefits, for everyone, of working together.

# Life of the Case: (Reunification/Concurrent)

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## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

- Quickly address any issues impeding the relationship:

- Articulate each parent's roles, i.e., mom brings diapers and attends doctor appointments and caregiver calls mom when child is sick.
- Clarify goals of shared parenting, such as making placement less stressful for the child and maintaining continuity for the child.
- Help both sets of parents to see one another's points of view.
- Encourage, teach, and model communication skills to both sets of parents. This could include assertive communication and active listening.
- Address conflict right away and help both sets of parents to resolve issue while keeping the focus on what's best for the child.
- Involve supervisors or other professionals if conflict persists.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [Birth and Foster Family Partnerships, NRCFCPP](#)
- ❖ [Resource Parents Partnering with Birth Parents to Benefit Children, IFAPA](#)
- ❖ [Preventing the Triangulation of the Triangle of Support, Lutz, NRCFCPP](#)
- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 4](#)

# Life of the Case: (Reunification/Concurrent)

## *Role B) Family Interaction Plan*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parents must understand the importance of birth family interactions/connections and develop strategies to help the child maintain and build emotional connections with birth parents, siblings and other important people.

**Workers should:**

- See “Placement: First Month” section for previous discussion points.
- Continue to help caregivers promote healthy family interactions:

- Give caregivers birth-parent-positive messages:
  - “Jake’s dad loves him so much, and feels really badly about how his addiction affected his parenting. He’s working really hard and you can play an important role in helping this family stay together.”
  - “I wish you could see the way Nick’s eyes light up when he sees his dad.”
- Video or audio tape the parent reading a book to the child at a visit and have the caregiver play it before bed
- Encourage foster parents to invite family members to special school, sporting, and community functions.
- Encourage caregivers to host sibling visits.
- Introduce caregivers to important relatives.
- Encourage caregivers to have the child make a holiday card for the birth parents.

- If appropriate, encourage caregivers to have visitation in their home and invite the birth parents to family activities while providing guidelines and support as needed.
- Have explicit conversations with relative caregivers to explore whether their own history with the birth parents is impacting their ability to honor the child’s relationship with them; offer support and sensitively educate and explore solutions.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 4](#)
- ❖ [Primary Family to Foster Family](#), Ginther
- ❖ [Resource Parents Partnering with Birth Parents to Benefit Children, IFAPA](#)

# Life of the Case: (Reunification/Concurrent)

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## *Role B) Family Interaction Plan*

**Key Point #2:** As discussed in the “Placement: First Month” section, it’s important that foster parents help with preparing their child for, and supporting them with, visitation issues.

**Workers should:**

- See “Placement: First Month” section for previous ideas.
- Continue to check in with caregivers about how the child is doing before, during and after visits.
- Help foster parents understand why the child may be struggling.
- Provide caregivers with specific, developmentally appropriate strategies for supporting the child and managing behaviors.
- Encourage caregivers to provide the child with transportation. This can minimize the child’s stress and improve parent/caregiver communication.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [Touchpoints: Preparing Children for Transitions. ARW](#) (also recommends kid’s books)
- ❖ [Resource 21, Separation, Placement and Permanency.](#) WI Child Welfare Training System
- ❖ [Visit Coaching: Building on Family Strengths to Meet Children’s Needs, Beyer, pp. 21-22](#)

**Key Point #3:** The Family Interaction Plan should minimize barriers and be clear to foster parents. Including caregivers in the plan makes things a little easier and shows that you value them as members of the team.

**Workers should:**

- Respond quickly to any concerns regarding family interaction.

“I know that visits can be really disruptive to your family, but they’re really important to Carman because \_\_\_\_\_. Is there anything I can do to make things easier for you?”

- Include caregivers in scheduling in order to minimize frustration and scheduling conflicts.

# Life of the Case: (Reunification/Concurrent)

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## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

**Key Point #1:** Caregivers must have developmentally responsive strategies for managing the child's behavior and meeting their emotional needs. They must be mindful of the issues of trauma, attachment, and grief.

### **Workers should:**

- See previous "Placement" section for a more detailed discussion of trauma, grief, and attachment.
- Check in regularly about how the child is doing, as well as how the caregiver is feeling. (caregivers who are angry, overwhelmed, or stressed may be an indication of unmet needs.)
- Continue to educate caregivers about trauma, attachment, and grief.
- Provide specific strategies to build attachment and a sense of safety.
- Give permission to ask questions, vent, and share ideas.
- Provide timely formal and/or informal (by worker) evaluations to assess a child needs and meet any service needs quickly. This can save a placement.
- Work to quickly help foster parents understand what is underneath the child's behaviors (e.g., grief, fear, divided loyalties, etc.) and to not personalize the behaviors.
- Offer useful behavior management strategies such as specific tools and ideas.
- Praise foster parents for the things they are doing well.
- Offer and encourage respite. This can salvage stressed placements.
- Connect caregivers with an experienced informal mentoring foster family and encourage participation in the child's therapy in order to learn therapeutic parenting.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 3](#)
- ❖ [Resources 4, 5, 6, & 16, Separation, Placement and Permanence](#). WI Child Welfare Training System
- ❖ [Attachment, ARW](#)
- ❖ [Parenting the Traumatized Child, ARW](#)
- ❖ [Grief and Loss, ARW](#)

# Life of the Case: (Reunification/Concurrent)

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## *Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

**Key Point #1:** Workers must have a good understanding of the foster parent’s personality, experience level, stage of foster parent development, and goals regarding child permanency (Adoption-focused?). Support should be tailored to that foster parent’s stage/needs.

While this does take time on the front end, it will help in the long run. Foster parents are rare, valuable resources, doing a really tough job. Investing time and energy into them ultimately benefits children and families.

### ***Workers should:***

- Spend time getting to know the foster parents, e.g., ask questions about goals, motivations, strengths, and needs.
- Frequently check in with how THEY are doing, not just focusing on case management activities.
- Recognize that each foster parent is going to need something different at different times.
- Use social work values and communication skills to guide your practice.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [Guide to Supporting Foster Parents, WI Foster Parent Training Committee](#)

**Key Point #2:** Caregivers benefit from clear conversations and support around the ambiguity of foster care and permanency outcomes. They are asked to emotionally attach to the child, while simultaneously working toward reunification.

They need support and recognition that they care deeply about the children in their care. As parents, their “hearts” are often in the lead versus the “head” of the social worker. Workers should help them balance their “hearts” with their “heads.”

### ***Workers should:***

- See “Placement” section for more discussion
- Maintain a balance between having honest conversations about any reunification/relative placement goals AND providing empathic emotional support – particularly if the caregiver wants to adopt.
- Be sensitive to a caregiver’s previous losses, such as infertility and/or miscarriages.
- Help caregivers understand the nuances of why reunification is preferred for that individual child.
- Support them through the challenges of bonding with the child, while protecting their hearts from possible loss.

### **Resources:**

# Life of the Case: (Reunification/Concurrent)

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## *Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

- ❖ [An Overview of Concurrent Planning, NRCFCPP](#)

**Key Point #3:** Foster parents need emotional support. They are being asked to do a very challenging job and want to feel appreciated and supported.

**When they become angry or upset it is important to understand what is underneath the anger (i.e., feeling powerless) and respond in a supportive, professional manner.**

### ***Workers should:***

- Check in regularly and ask about how THEY are doing.
- Give permission to vent, ask for help, and ask questions.
- Ensure caregivers' needs and the needs of the child are being met in a timely and appropriate manner.
- Don't personalize angry comments or behaviors.
- Listen to foster parents, explore their feelings and viewpoints, and validate their concerns. Balance this with education about other factors they may not be seeing or be aware of.
- Walk the fine line between listening, supporting, educating, and confronting
- Show your appreciation for the caregiver's hard work, i.e., "I love my visits to your home because it's clear how much you care about little Juan. You always come so prepared!"
- Encourage early use of personal resources and supports, as well as foster parent associations.
- As needed, connect them with informal foster parent mentors who can provide additional support.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [Guide to Supporting Foster Parents, WI Foster Parent Training Committee](#)
- ❖ [Working with Foster and Adoptive Parents – Sensitivity Training for Social Workers, Foster Care and Adoptive Community On-Line Training Program](#)
- ❖ Supervisors are good resources

# Permanency Consultations and Reviews

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## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

**Key Point #1:** It is imperative that caregivers' voices be heard in case planning activities such as Permanency Consultations (even though caregivers are not physically present) and Permanency Reviews. If they know the child well, they are often able to share valuable information.

***Workers should:***

- Obtain pertinent caregiver input prior to Permanency Consultations and Reviews. This could include the child's emotional and/or behavioral issues, foster parents' willingness to adopt, concerns about birth parents, and visitation.
- Encourage attendance at, and prepare caregivers for, Permanency Hearings/Reviews:

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Educate caregivers about their role at court.</li><li>• Tell foster parents what kind of information is important to share at court.</li><li>• Ensure that parents have received the appropriate forms to fill out for court.</li></ul> |
|---|

- Communicate outcomes and action steps, as well as changes in the permanency plan to caregivers in a timely manner (within a few days) and explain the "whys" of any decisions or action steps.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 1](#)

**Key Point #2:** Caregivers may need continued encouragement to develop shared parenting activities that are appropriate to the permanency plan and have empathy for the birth family.

***Workers should:***

- Provide education, ideas, and support for working more closely with birth parents, as appropriate.

# Permanency Consultations and Reviews

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## *Role B) Family Interaction Plan*

**Key Point:** Foster parents need to be kept updated about any changes in the Family Interaction Plan.

***Workers should:***

- Have a timely (within a few days) phone call or meeting to discuss any changes to visitation schedules, logistics, or participants.
- Include foster parents in any scheduling changes, so as to minimize disruption in their lives.

# Permanency Consultations and Reviews

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## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

**Key Point:** Foster Parents may need help with supporting and preparing the child for any changes.

***Workers should:***

- Let caregivers know what their role is, right now, in preparing the child, i.e., should they be talking with the child about pending changes?
- Provide individualized ideas for how to talk with the child and support them through any difficult feelings.
- Involve or enlist a therapist, as needed.

# Permanency Consultations and Reviews

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## *Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

**Key Point #1: Foster parents may have disagreements or concerns with the outcomes of the Permanency Consultation or Review.**

***Workers should:***

- LISTEN, explore their perspective (maybe it is legitimate.)
- Empathically explain how and why decisions were made, including a specific explanation of how it is the best interests of this child.

**Key Point #2: Caregivers who want to adopt, where reunification remains an active goal, may need extra support.**

**It is not easy for them to love a child enough to want to parent them permanently, and to simultaneously work toward reunification. Especially when the case has been moving slowly or there have been challenges with the birth parents.**

***Workers should:***

- Explore caregivers' feelings and provide emotional support and appropriate education.
- Acknowledge issues of loss and lack of control, especially when infertility is an issue for the caregiver.
- Help with any challenges the foster parent is having with supporting the permanency plan (concrete or emotional) while focusing on the goal of ultimately helping the child.
- Support caregivers with any frustration at the system or birth parents. Mediate and advocate as necessary.

# Reunification

## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parents must have a clear understanding of why reunification is occurring including how and why child welfare professionals make decisions.

Foster parents are usually unaware of standards and best practices that govern the child welfare system. They simply want what they think is best for the child in their care.

### ***Workers should.***

- Explain why reunification is occurring and explore any concerns that foster parents may have:

- “How do you feel about Clara being reunified with her mother?”
- “Do you have any concerns about the pending reunification?”
- “Jill’s mom has been working with me, got an apartment, and demonstrated safe and nurturing parenting skills at visits. This is what I’m seeing \_\_\_\_\_. She deserves another chance to parent her kids. Can you share your concerns about Jill’s safety at home with mom?”

- Explain the rules and regulations that govern the child welfare system, such as federal mandates (ASFA) and safety issues.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ Supervisors can clarify confidentiality issues.

**Key Point #2:** Caregivers should play an important role in the reunification transition. They can provide valuable information and insight during this such as pace, the child’s feelings, and needed supports.

### ***Workers should:***

- Educate foster parents about how a well planned and executed transition will benefit the child.
- Discuss the details of the reunification plan as soon as possible and include caregivers in its development.

# Reunification

## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

- Elicit caregiver feedback about the reunification process:

- concerns and ideas
- what is going well versus what is not
- how the child is doing

- Facilitate a meeting to negotiate clear expectations for caregivers and birth parents working together during the transition:

- coordinating schedules
- sharing parenting strategies
- mentoring the birth parents, i.e., role modeling

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 3](#)

**Key Point #3:** It is often in the child’s best interest to maintain a post-reunification child-foster parent relationship. The child’s experience of loss will be minimized, and the relationship can become a “natural” resource for birth families.

### **Workers should:**

- Inform caregivers and birth parents about the benefits of a continued relationship, e.g., less loss for child and continued support system.
- Include the child in conversations, as appropriate.
- Facilitate a meeting to help caregivers and birth parents negotiate post-reunification contact, if needed:

- periodic outings with both families
- periodic child outings/overnights with foster parents
- dinners/holidays together
- phone calls, emails, and letters

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [Grief and Loss, ARW](#)

# Reunification

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## *Role B) Family Interaction Plan*

**Key Point:** Foster parents should be included in family interaction planning during the transition. Regardless of their feelings about reunification, transition times are often a period of great stress and ambivalent feelings for caregivers.

***Workers should:***

- Include caregivers in scheduling.
- Communicate any changes in a timely manner.
- Clarify caregiver's role, e.g., talking and sharing information directly with parents, being available for parent phone calls during longer visits, etc.

# Reunification

## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parents must know how to talk with the child about, and prepare them for, reunification. Transitions play a crucial role in child well-being and placement success. Foster parents can be key players in this success.

### **Workers should:**

- Provide foster parents with specific information and ideas:

- Mark off days on a calendar.
- Talk with the child about the progress their parents have made.
- Use birth-parent positive language with the child.
- Spend special time together.

- Discuss important messages the caregiver should give the child:

- “We’ll always care about you.”
- “You didn’t do anything wrong.”
- “Your mom will be so proud of how mature you’ve gotten.”

- Help caregivers create a goodbye ritual for their family and the child:

- good-bye letter about how much the child has grown/how they’ve touched the foster family’s life
- special scrapbook of the child’s life in the foster home (child takes with them)
- read through the child’s life book together
- special dinner, party, outing
- religious ceremony, if appropriate
- gift for child to take with

- Involve child/family therapist as needed.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [Touchpoints: Preparing Children for Transitions, ARW](#) ( also recommends kid’s books)
- ❖ **Resource 19, Separation, Placement and Reunification.** WI Child Welfare Training System
- ❖ **Helping Foster Parents cope with Separation, Loss, and Grief,** Edelstein, CWLA

# Reunification

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## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

**Key Point #2:** Foster parents may need information, ideas and support in order to help the child manage reunification-related feelings and behaviors.

***Workers should:***

- Inform the caregivers about typical feelings and behaviors associated with reunification, e.g., ambivalence, excitement, fear, loss, etc.
- Provide specific strategies to manage any challenging behaviors.
- Involve child/family therapist as needed.

# Reunification

## *Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

**Key Point #1: Reunification can be a painful time for caregivers, particularly for those who wanted to adopt. It can elicit strong feelings of grief, loss, powerlessness, fear, anger, and guilt.**

### ***Workers should:***

- Explore, listen, and validate caregivers' feelings about reunification, i.e., feelings are not right or wrong, they just are.
- Help them process any feelings of loss or grief regarding their inability to adopt. Some caregivers may not recognize they are going through a grieving process.
- Assess for negative behaviors stemming from these feelings ( i.e., unconscious sabotage of placement or emotional distancing from child) and help the caregivers understand and manage their behaviors.
- Help caregivers create rituals for themselves and permanent family members after a child leaves:

- making a scrapbook (family keeps)
- taking a vacation
- having a special meal where family members talk about their feelings

- Make a referral, e.g., counseling, foster parent support group, and informal foster parent mentor.
- If caregivers still want to adopt, it may be appropriate to gently help them explore other avenues for adoption.
- Give caregivers explicit permission to take a break between placements of a new child. They may need time to grieve and process their loss.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 5](#)
- ❖ [Helping Foster Parents cope with Separation, Loss, and Grief](#), Edelstein, CWLA
- ❖ [Guide to Supporting Foster Parents, WI Foster Parent Training Committee](#)
- ❖ [Grief and Loss, ARW](#)
- ❖ [The Coalition for Children, Youth and Families](#)

# Reunification

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## *Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

**Key Point #2:** Caregivers may need help in supporting any other children in the home (permanent or foster) through their feelings.

Young children often struggle to understand why their foster sibling is leaving, may fear for the child's safety, or may worry that they, themselves, will have to leave. Foster and adopted children's issues of abandonment, jealousy, grief, and trauma may be triggered. Some children may even feel relieved or guilty.

### ***Workers should:***

- Help foster parents prepare their other children for the transition in a timely and developmentally appropriate manner:

- talk about it prior to the move
- facilitate some fun activities that can translate in to good memories
- let each child can give the leaving child a memento

- Help caregivers assess their children's emotional reactions to the loss, and offer appropriate support:

- rituals
- therapeutic play activities
- talking about feelings
- scrapbooking their time together
- writing letters or drawing pictures for the transitioned child
- saying prayers for the child
- therapy
- assure that they will not leave, too (unless they are a foster child)

# TPR/Adoption by Foster Parent

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## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parents need education about adoption versus foster care, and help with making an honest assessment about their choice to adopt.

### **Workers should:**

- Help caregivers understand how adoption may benefit the child (attachment and continuity). Balance this with discussions about the importance of honest self-assessment about what they can handle and what is best for their family.
- Include permanent children (biological or adopted) in the discussions.
- Provide education about post-adoption resources and assistance, and how these differ from foster care.
- Educate the caregiver about typical adoption-related issues in the life cycle, e.g., loss, abandonment, self-esteem, identity, etc.
- Consult with a Permanency Consultant and/or Adoption Specialist to answer all of the caregiver's questions.
- Refer the family to Coalition for Children, Youth, and Families

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [Preparing and Supporting Foster Parents who Adopt, Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)
- ❖ [Changing Hats](#), Keefer
- ❖ [Resources, Coalition for Children, Youth, and Families](#)
- ❖ [Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association \(WFAPA\)](#)
- ❖ [CSSW – Permanency Consultants](#)
- ❖ [ARW](#)

# TPR/Adoption by Foster Parent

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## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

**Key Point #2:** When considering adoption, foster parents deserve disclosure of child/family background issues that have not yet been discussed. This could include medical and genetic information.

**Workers should:**

- Go over relevant history:

- prenatal drug/alcohol exposure
- known familial mental illness, cognitive disabilities, or genetic history
- number of previous placements
- abuse/neglect
- developmental delays
- pertinent medical history

- Educate caregivers about what the child's history and issues may mean in the future.
- Be honest about what is known versus what is not known.
- Consult with your supervisor regarding confidentiality issues.

**Key Point #3:** Many children benefit from some level of post-adoption relationship with important family members. When these relationships are not possible or appropriate, it is important to help children come to some resolution.

**Workers should:**

- When appropriate, educate foster parents, birth parents, siblings' caregivers, and relatives about the potential benefits of post-adoptive relationships for the child:

- continued relationships with siblings
- a sense of roots/identity
- ability to ask questions of family members down the road
- decreased loss/grief issues
- less idealization or extreme negative view of birth family
- more accurate understanding of adoption circumstances

# TPR/Adoption by Foster Parent

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## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

- Do a family tree and/or eco map to explore children's important connections.
- When appropriate, hold a meeting to help foster parents negotiate for post-adoptive contact with birth parents, relatives, and/or siblings' adoptive/foster families. These relationships can vary from yearly letters/photos, to ongoing contact.
- Help caregivers create/add-to child's life book before finalization, as this information can be difficult to get later.
- Use child's therapist as needed.

**Key Point #4: Many pre-adoptive caregivers need to be educated about the TPR and adoption processes. This would include potential challenges, such as parental appeals.**

### ***Workers should:***

- Educate caregivers about the TPR process.
- Provide written and verbal information about court proceedings, time-lines, etc.
- Assist caregivers in preparing for court hearings.
- Keep caregivers abreast of important dates and any complications.

### **Resource:**

- ❖ [Legal Topics, Wisconsin State Law Library](#)

**Key Point #5: Voluntary TPR's (this often happens when caregivers and birth parents have good working relationships) can be less traumatizing for everyone.**

### ***Worker should:***

- Talk with birth parents about the benefits of a voluntary TPR, e.g., less traumatic for child and the possibility of semi-open adoption.
- Encourage positive birth parent-caregiver interactions.
- Facilitate a meeting between the birth parent and the Permanency Counselor at children's court.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ **Children's Court – Permanency Plan Counselor**
- ❖ **Permanency Consultant**

# TPR/Adoption by Foster Parent

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## *Role B) Family Interaction Plan*

**Key Point:** If possible, pre-adoptive foster parents should be involved with planning for any continued birth family/child interactions that will occur prior to the adoption, and/or any final good-bye visits.

**This should be discussed well before TPR.**

***Workers should:***

- Be clear about the goals for any birth parent-child visits prior to a pending TPR/adoption, and help caregivers, children and birth parents prepare.
- Continue to include foster parents in scheduling.
- When relationships will be severed, work to help all parties find some closure:

- Encourage the birth parent to write a letter to the child.
- Take pictures of the last visit and give copies to the birth parent and adoptive parent/child.
- Encourage the child to write a letter or draw a goodbye picture.
- Schedule therapy sessions between parents and child.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [The Coalition for Children, Youth, and Families website lists adoption therapists.](#)

# TPR/Adoption by Foster Parent

## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

**Key Point #1:** Pre-adoptive foster parents may need help in knowing how to talk with the child about adoption, and the accompanying changes, as per the child's developmental level. Even young children benefit from basic discussions.

**Workers should:**

- Help caregivers have clear, honest, and direct conversations with the child about adoption:

- future contact with birth family
- “forever” aspect of adoption
- any name changes
- other changes that will occur
- timelines and processes

- Work to ensure all adults (caregiver, birth parents, case worker, and providers) are giving the child similar messages.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [The 3-5-7 Model: Preparing Children for Permanency, Henry](#)
- ❖ [Touchpoints: Preparing Children for Transitions. ARW](#) (also recommends kid's books)
- ❖ [Helping Your Foster Child Transition to Your Adopted Child, Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)
- ❖ [Raising Adopted Children](#), by Lois Ruskai Melina
- ❖ [W.I.S.E. Up Powerbook, About.com](#)

**Key Point #2:** Pre-adoptive caregivers need information about the typical feelings and behaviors of a child during this transition, .e.g., grief, hope, fears, excitement, confusion, ambivalence, and guilt.

**Workers should:**

- Educate caregivers about typical adoption/transition issues:

- grieving for the end of birth relationships
- testing to see if adoptive parents will really keep them

# TPR/Adoption by Foster Parent

## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

- Provide foster parents with specific, individualized ideas about how to help the child to manage their feelings and behaviors:

- talk about how all feelings are okay and normal
- help children identify and express feelings through a feelings chart
- have kids write or draw pictures about their feelings
- read children’s books about adoption
- expect regression

- Help pre-adoptive parents to not personalize the child’s behavior.
- Help pre-adoptive parents encourage the child to open up about all of their feelings, including the more difficult ones:

“Lots of kids who are about to be adopted have big, confusing feelings. Sometimes they worry that if they love their adoptive parents, it means they don’t still love their birth parents. We want you to know that your heart is big enough to love both sets of parents, just like our hearts are big enough to love many children. You can talk about any feelings with us, and we will always love and care about you – even when you miss your birth mom or are angry at us.”\*

\*less secure adoptive parents may need help with this

- Help caregivers create a special ceremony (may be religious) to mark the change
- Encourage pre-adoptive parents to work with a therapist as needed

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [Helping Your Foster Child Transition to Your Adopted Child, Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)
- ❖ FARC lending library

# TPR/Adoption by Foster Parent

## *Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parents may benefit from extra emotional support while waiting for the TPR and adoption to happen. This is especially true if there are challenges, such as birth parent appeals.

**Worker should:**

- Keep the caregivers informed when the timeline is changing, e.g., educate about process, length, and potential outcomes of appeals.
- Provide frequent check-ins and explore how the caregivers are managing the challenges:

“This can be a really anxious time for foster parents. How are you feeling? Is there anything I can do for you?”

- Refer them to a foster parent support group.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [Working With Foster and Adoptive Parents – Sensitivity Training for Social Workers, Foster Care and Adoptive Community On-Line Training Program](#)
- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 5](#)

**Key Point #2:** Foster parents need clarity about their new role and support in adjusting to the changes. Because they are negotiating a new role with the child and extended family, this might be particularly difficult for relative pre-adoptive caregivers.

**Worker should:**

- Educate foster parents about typical challenges involved in the foster-to-adopt role shift :

- decision-making
- discipline
- obtaining resources
- post-adoption relationships with birth family

- Assist caregivers, as needed, in clarifying and fitting into their new roles.
- Facilitate meetings (pre-adoption) to explore, discuss, and negotiate post-adoption plans for continued birth family relationships. Note that any agreements are not legally binding.
- Explore and discuss the challenges and complexities of role shifts for relative caregivers and help them to identify clear roles and boundaries within the family.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [Changing Hats](#), Keefer

# Changes of Placement

## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parent involvement in child transitions is crucial for ensuring a smoother, less traumatic move.

In most cases, foster parents should have detailed information about, and input into, the child's transition plan. When possible, foster parents should work directly with the new caregivers.

**Worker should:**

- Educate caregivers about the importance of transitions for child well-being.
- Provide dates, times, and timeframes in an expedient manner so caregivers can prepare themselves and the child.
- Obtain caregivers' input when developing a transition plan, such as scheduling visits with the new family.
- Facilitate a meeting (or, at least, phone calls/emails) between the two sets of caregivers so the foster parent can share important child information:

- routines
- likes/dislikes
- fears
- comfort objects
- discipline strategies
- emotional and behavioral needs
- personality

- Help foster parents obtain information about the new caregiving family, so they can help prepare the child.
- When appropriate, encourage foster parents to host initial visits at their home in order to make the child more comfortable.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 3](#)
- ❖ **Resources 18-19, Separation, Placement and Permanence.** WI Child Welfare Training System

# Changes of Placement

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## *Role A) Teaming and Working with Birth Parents*

**Key Point #2:** When children and foster parents have positive relationships, it is ideal for foster families and the child's new caregivers to maintain a post-transition relationship.

**When children have strong emotional ties to their foster parents, it can be very traumatic to simply sever the relationship.**

***Worker should:***

- Assess the appropriateness (safe? have an attachment?) of a post-transition foster parent-child relationship.
- Educate both sets of caregivers when this is in the "best interests of the child," and encourage buy-in.
- Facilitate a meeting to clearly identify roles and expectations. This will look different depending on the child's needs and comfort level of both sets of parents.

# Changes of Placement

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## *Role B) Family Interaction Plan*

**Key Point:** Foster parents should work to have good relationships with the child's important connections, e.g., birth parents, siblings, and their foster/adoptive parents, extended family. These connections can play a key role in facilitating the new caregiver's relationship with these individuals and help ensure more continuity for the child.

***Worker should:***

- Encourage foster parents to introduce the new caregivers to the child's important connections, when appropriate.
- Help foster parents encourage the child's important connections to be open to the new caregivers.

# Changes of Placement

## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parents should play a key role in preparing the child for becoming part of a new family.

***Worker should:***

- Give foster parents ideas about how they can prepare the child:

- Talk positively about the new family.
- Ask the child how they feel about the plan, addressing any fears and feelings.
- Use life books to help the child process feelings.
- Count down the days leading up to the move on a calendar.
- Involve a therapist, particularly if there is a strong attachment to current caregivers, or the child has a history of traumatic loss.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [Touchpoints: Preparing Children for Transitions. ARW](#)

**Key Point #2:** Foster parents must support the child through their difficult emotions (e.g., grieving, fear, confusion) and help them come to some resolution. Moves are hard on children, regardless of their age or reason for the new placement.

***Worker should:***

- Help caregivers understand and appropriately manage the child's feelings and behaviors related to the transition.
- Educate foster parents about the right messages to give the child:

- "It's not your fault."
- "I will always love and care about you."
- "You will always be in my heart."
- "You are going to be okay."

# Changes of Placement

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## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

- Help caregivers develop goodbye rituals for the child, to mark the occasion and help with resolution:

- Create a ceremony (maybe religious).
- Have a special dinner or activity.
- Create a scrapbook.
- Share happy memories.
- Give the child a good-bye letter detailing how they impacted the caregivers' lives and how they've grown and matured.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ **Resource 6, Separation, Placement and Permanence.** WI Child Welfare Training System

# Changes of Placement

## *Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parents may need extra support at this time, especially if the move was not requested by them or if they hoped to adopt the child. Caregivers may struggle with very real feelings of grief, powerlessness, anger, and fear.

### **Worker should:**

- Talk with the caregiver about the change of placement plans in a manner that acknowledges and validates their feelings.
- Provide very clear reasons for why the move is in the best interests of the child.
- Listen, listen, listen! Use good social work communication and empathy skills before moving to the concrete tasks of the transition
- Periodically check in to see how the caregivers are feeling, and if there is any help/support you can provide
- Normalize their feelings and educate as needed.
- Assess for negative behaviors stemming from difficult feelings such as unconscious sabotage of placement or emotional distancing from the child. Help caregivers understand and manage their own behaviors.
- Help caregivers process any feelings of loss/grief regarding their inability to adopt. They may not recognize they are going through a grieving process.
  - If caregivers still want to adopt, it may be appropriate to gently help them explore other avenues for adoption
- Talk with caregivers about goodbye rituals for themselves:

- Make a scrapbook (family keeps).
- Create a ceremony (could be religious).
- Take a vacation.
- Have a special meal where family members talk about their feelings.

- Make a referral, e.g., counseling, foster parent support group, informal foster parent mentor.

### Resources:

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 5](#)
- ❖ [Helping foster Parents Cope with Separation, Loss, and Grief](#), Edelstein, CWLA
- ❖ [Grief and Loss, ARW](#)
- ❖ [Coalition for Children, Youth, and Families](#)

# Changes of Placement

## *Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

**Key Point #2:** As discussed in the previous Reunification section, caregivers may need help in supporting any other children in the home (permanent or foster) through their feelings.

Young children often struggle to understand why their foster sibling is leaving. They may fear for the child's safety or worry that they will have to leave. Foster and adopted children's issues of abandonment, jealousy, grief, and trauma may be triggered. Some children may even feel relieved or guilty.

### **Worker should:**

- Help foster parents prepare their other children for the transition, in a timely and developmentally appropriate manner:

- Talk about it prior to the move.
- Facilitate some fun activities that can translate into good memories.
- Allow each child to give the leaving child a memento.

- Help caregivers assess their children's emotional reactions to the loss. Provide ideas for appropriate support:

- Cultivate rituals.
- Encourage therapeutic play activities.
- Talk about feelings.
- Scrapbook their time together.
- Write letters or draw pictures for the transitioned child.
- Say prayers for the child.
- Offer therapy.
- Assure children that they will not leave, too (Unless they are foster children.)

- Encourage caregiver to include children in good-bye rituals.

# Reaching Adulthood

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## *Role A) Teaming and working with Birth Parents*

**Key Point #1:** Caregivers may be willing to commit to being permanent, supportive adults in their foster children’s’ lives. These relationships can provide children with stability, a sense of permanency, support, and mentoring.

**Workers should:**

- Educate caregivers about Permanency Pacts, and encourage their willingness to enter into pacts with their foster children. Permanency Pacts include things like a willingness to:

- Be a place to come for holidays.
- Cosign for an apartment.
- Be there when the child needs emotional support.
- Provide temporary lodging when the child is homeless.
- Help the child to develop life skills.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [Resource 24, Separation, Placement and Permanence](#). WI Child Welfare Training System
- ❖ [Permanency Pact, The National Network for Young People in Foster Care](#)

**Key Point #2:** Adoption may still be an appropriate way for an older child to achieve a permanent family. Children “aging out,” without a permanent family face many struggles. Adoption can ease their transition into adulthood and connect them with a family for a lifetime.

**Worker should:**

- Discuss the lifelong benefits of older child adoption with both the caregivers and foster child. Don’t take child’s first “no” at face value, but instead continue to explore with them.
- Assess the appropriateness of adoption, exploring and assessing any barriers.
- Facilitate conversations between the foster parents and the child about adoption.

**Resources:**

- ❖ [Permanence for All Youth, Casey](#)
- ❖ [Adoption Has No Age Limits: Adult Adoption, ARW](#)
- ❖ [Parenting Resources, You Gotta Believe](#)

# Reaching Adulthood

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## *Role B): Family Interaction Plan*

**Key Point:** Foster children often try reestablishing relationships with birth parents and other relatives as they are moving into adulthood.

***Worker should:***

- Encourage caregivers to assist foster children in assessing the appropriateness of relatives they are reconnecting with. A foster parent can go with the child to initial visits and help identify whether that individual may be an appropriate and supportive person with whom to re-connect, i.e., are there active addiction or violence issues?

**Resources:**

- ❖ [Permanency: More Than Just Homes, Westerman](#)
- ❖ [Adoption Records Search Program, WIDCF](#)

# Reaching Adulthood

## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

**Key Point #1:** Foster parents can play a big role in working with the child on independent living skills.

So many youth who age out, lack important skills needed to take care of themselves, develop healthy relationships, manage stress, and become productive adults.

**Worker should:**

- Educate foster families about the skills that foster children need to:

- choose colleges
- apply for financial aid
- develop a budget
- find an apartment
- hone interview skills
- find a job
- learn parenting skills
- develop healthy relationship skills:
  - developing and managing healthy, emotionally intimate relationships
  - making informed choices about sexual relationships
  - understanding sexual health and how to obtain sexual health care

- Encourage caregivers to be closely involved in life skills activities such as visiting college campuses or looking for apartments together.
- Provide necessary services and referrals.

### **Resources:**

- ❖ [State of WI Foster Parent Handbook, Ch. 3](#)
- ❖ [Transition Toolkit, FosterClub](#)
- ❖ [Lad Lake](#)

# Reaching Adulthood

## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

**Key Point #2:** Foster parents can play an important role in helping foster children understand and manage any feelings they may be having as they transition out of foster care.

Many youth are excited yet experience fear, anxiety, and abandonment issues. Often these feelings are expressed in challenging behaviors. Youth need A LOT of emotional support during this time.

### **Worker should:**

- Teach caregivers about typical foster youth feelings and behaviors:

- feelings of abandonment may be triggered
- fears of being alone in the world
- pushing caregivers away in a desire to have independence
- identity confusion

- Provide concrete ideas for how caregivers can talk with the child and respond productively to challenging behaviors:

- “I know you’re really excited to be on your own, and don’t like having to call home and tell us where you are all the time. But, we care about you and just want to know that you are safe and okay. We will work on giving you more independence.”
- “This must be a really stressful time for you. I know we’ve been arguing a lot, but I want you to know that I am here for you. It’s okay to talk about anything. I promise I will listen without giving you a lecture.
- It is NOT helpful for a caregiver to say things like, “Fine. If you want out of here so badly, just call your worker and you can leave tonight!”

- Encourage caregivers to balance setting limits with strong active listening and understanding what’s underneath a child’s behaviors.

# Reaching Adulthood

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## *Role C) Supporting the Child Through Permanency Issues*

**Key Point #3:** Caregivers can play a key role in their foster children's positive identity and self-esteem through helping them fill in any gaps in their life book prior to adulthood.

**Workers should:**

- Teach caregiver about the importance of a life book.
- Ensure that the child has a life book; help the foster parent and youth to create one, if need be.
- Assist the caregiver in identifying and filling in any gaps in the youth's life book:

- Take a picture of the hospital where the youth was born.
- Identify previous caregivers, teachers, and important connections that may be able to provide information and pictures.
- Show caregivers how to help the youth to capture important memories and connections through life-lines, family trees, etc.

# Reaching Adulthood

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## *Role D) Foster Parent Support Needs*

**Key Point #1:** This can be a very stressful time for foster parents.

They may be worried about the foster child making bad decisions and the child may also be pulling away, physically and emotionally, as he/she struggles with the transition. At times this can manifest as disrespectful or noncompliant behavior. All of this can result in acute stress and feelings of being out-of-control for caregivers.

### ***Workers should:***

- Provide frequent check-ins with caregivers – about how THEY are doing.
- Educate caregivers about typical caregiver-youth feelings and behaviors during this transition time, including education about the developmental stages around individuation and identity formation.
- Listen, listen, listen and provide emotional support.
- Make appropriate referrals, use therapists who are already working with the youth, and consider connecting foster parents with an informal mentoring family who has had similar experiences

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