How to Keep a Balanced Support System in Place

There are many techniques a foster parent can use to keep a balanced support system in place throughout all phases of placement. These techniques can be divided into four categories: training and skill-building; family relationships and communication; friends and other foster parents; and teamwork. By keeping a balanced support system in place throughout the phases of placement, foster parents can reduce their stress and the stress on the whole family.

Pre-Placement

Keeping a balanced support system through:

Training and skill-building

- Participate in pre-placement training, classes, and workshops
- Take online training and read about foster care

Family relationships and communication

- Support family members by:
  - Devoting special time to the children already in your family
  - Talking with all family members to ensure they are committed to fostering
  - Involving grown children and extended family members in discussions about fostering
- Hold family meetings to:
  - Identify, discuss, and solve family issues and feelings about fostering
  - Define each partner's limits and how to keep from exceeding those limits

Friends and other foster parents

- Reach out to others, especially close friends, who are not involved in fostering
- Connect with other foster parents through support networks in national, state, and local organizations, such as:
  - National Foster Parent Association: http://www.nfpainc.org/
  - Family Focused Treatment Association: http://www.ffta.org/
  - National Foster Care Coalition: http://www.nationalfostercare.org/
- Join a foster parent support group
- Establish a relationship with a respite care provider
Teamwork

- Recognize that you’ll need additional support and know where to get it
- Get as much specific information about the child as possible
- Request a pre-placement visit
- Contact the school the child will be attending
- Actively participate in the child’s welfare team
- Keep communication open with your caseworker

Early in Placement

Keeping a balanced support system through:

Training and skill-building

- Get advice from experienced foster families and mentors
- Adjust parenting style to fit the new foster child’s temperament and behavior
- Learn about specific behavior challenges through additional training and research:
  - FosterParentCollege.com®: http://www.fosterparentcollege.com/
  - American Academy of Pediatrics: http://www2.aap.org/fostercare/

Family relationships and communication

- Hold family meetings to:
  - Allow family members to voice their feelings
  - Set aside time for each family member to check in
- Partners should:
  - Communicate regularly and actively listen to one another
  - Regularly schedule free time for each partner
- Redistribute household work
- Take family vacations and pursue individual hobbies
- Have realistic expectations for the family and the foster child

Friends and other foster parents

- Plan your first respite care break
- Attend foster parent support group
- Adjust support networks throughout placement, as needs often change over time (See the Support Networks handout for this course.)
Teamwork

- Keep in regular contact with the caseworker
- Continue to be active in the child welfare team
- Seek out help from the caseworker and other professionals if needed
- If necessary, attend family therapy with a therapist experienced in foster care and child welfare dynamics

Post-Placement

Keeping a balanced support system through:

Training and skill-building

- Attend training to understand the effects of adoption and look up adoption resources:
  - Adoption.org: http://www.adoption.org/
- Learn about grief and loss issues in foster care
- Take additional training based on current needs

Family relationships and communication

- Allow family members to process and express feelings of grief and loss at their own pace and in their own way
- Take a break between placements
- Regroup as a family and assess the placement together
- Discuss the decision to adopt or continue fostering with grown children and extended family

Friends and other foster parents

- Enroll in an adoptive parent support group, if applicable
- Connect with other adoptive parents through support networks in national, state, and local organizations
  - National Council for Adoption: https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/
  - National Adoption Center: http://www.adopt.org/
  - AdoptUSKids: http://www.adoptuskids.org/
- Continue attending foster parent support groups
- Discuss feelings of grief and loss with experienced foster parent friends and mentors
- Discuss the decision to adopt or continue fostering with close friends
• Stay in touch with foster parent friends
• Spend time with friends not involved in foster care

Teamwork
• Continue mental health counseling for family members as needed
• Discuss an open adoption with the caseworker, if applicable
• Request a post-placement discussion with the caseworker
• Reflect on the placement and assess the strong and weak points

Most importantly, learn from the experience.

References:
The information in this handout was adapted in part from: the Children’s Research Triangle
(http://www.childstudy.org/) and “The Impact of Fostering on Birth Children” course on FosterParentCollege.com®
(http://www.fosterparentcollege.com).