

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.ffa.org/>
 - National Foster Care Coalition: <http://www.nationalfostercare.org/>
 - Child Welfare League of America: <http://www.cwla.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/>
 - Child Welfare Information Gateway: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/>
 - 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:
 - North American Council on Adoptable Children: <http://www.nacac.org/>
 - 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>).