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6 tips to build open relationships after adoption from foster care

Mandy Taylor, foster and adoptive parent, and parent support supervisor

When we adopted four children from foster care, my husband and I wanted to maintain contact with their biological parents, but we weren't sure how to begin. Our agency had always defined when, where, and how we would have supervised visits while the children were in care.

From the time our children were first placed with us through foster care, we'd begun building a relationship with their biological parents. Beyond standard visits, we worked to build trust and keep communication lines open, demonstrating we wanted what was best for the children.

The same was true when foster care led to adoption, when maintaining that contact was up to us. This was tough to navigate, learning what would keep everyone safe without offending anyone.

We've been through this process three times and worked through challenges over the years. What we learned can help provide structure for your developing relationship.

1. Clarify your openness. This won't work unless you can accept that your child called someone else "parent" before you. We are "Mom" and "Dad" to our

kids, but they have given their biological parents new, special names that honor their family connection.

2. Begin parent to parent. Develop trust and rapport with the biological parent before introducing contact with the child. If confidentiality is required, contact could be mediated through an agency where no identifying information is exchanged.

3. Prepare for hard questions post-visit. After a visit, kids may feel sad, wondering, "Is she really OK?" They'll likely want to know when they'll be able to see their biological parent again. They often replay parts of the conversation, looking for meaning.

4. Children will have different emotional responses. Kids sometimes struggle with guilt after a visit. If they're happy with their adoptive family, that can feel like they're betraying their biological family. Talk about those feelings and emotions: It's OK to be sad that you're missing them. It's OK to be happy you're here. It's OK to be loved by two families.

5. Talk with the biological family about the child's emotions. When I've shared with the biological family how the child responds after a visit, they've been open to verbalizing supportive messages to the kids: It's OK to enjoy the things you're doing. I hope you will share those things with me. You can draw me a picture or talk to me about it.

"Empathy is about finding echoes of another person in yourself."

— Mohsin Hamid

6. Be willing to listen and learn. I assumed one parent was selfish for missing a visit until she told me later that some days saying goodbye again is too hard. "It reminds me of the last visit I had with my mother when I was in foster care," she said, "and I feel like a failure." Listening and learning from each other are key to building empathy.

Openness after adoption from foster care is possible. I hope more people will give these relationships a chance.



Adoption and guardian assistance for tutoring support

- This service is available to eligible children with a medical subsidy, whether they attend public/private schools or are homeschooled.
- The child must meet one of the following criteria:
 - Age 7 or older and needs tutoring to raise a failing grade (C or below) in a general education class, required elective for high school students, or support for a child with below average standardized test scores.
 - Receiving educational services as part of an IEP or 504 plan and requires specific help beyond parental assistance. If a child does not have an IEP or 504 plan, the parent must contact the local intermediate school district to obtain one. MDHHS-Pub-1511 (Rev. 5-25) Previous edition obsolete.
- This service will be authorized for 12 months.
- Maximum payment for this service is \$150 per week.
- This service can be used during the school year or summer months.
- Prior approval is required for Academic Credit Recovery/summer school, and courses must meet high school graduation requirements.
- Prior approval is required.

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All three Post-Adoption Resource Centers have many family fun events planned, as well as support groups and trainings. Please check your Post Adoption Resource Center region's Facebook page or website, watch for monthly calendars, or give us a call to find out what is available near you.

REGION 2

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