



Foster Parents



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The importance of relations with biological parents for the child's well-being

Time to observe, talk, get to know the history of the child and its family, to understand and to help.

It's worth connecting families, even if only through memories.

Infants form certain attachment (secure or insecure relationship) with their parents. Children remember their parents. They have a right to receive information about their families. A biological family is a source of the child's identity. In their adulthood, children who don't know their biological families, often look for their roots and the sense of belonging to a family, although they can have doubts concerning their bounds towards biological parents. Necessity of cooperation with biological parents enables a chance of effective coping with concurrent emotions.

"I want everyone to understand that no book and no doctor will ever substitute one's own active thought, one's own attentive perception."

J. Korczak, Jak kochać dziecko

This is why it's worth:

- Gathering as much information about the child's family (parents, siblings, grandparents) as possible;
- Asking oneself questions about the child's feelings, the reasons for its behaviour, the reason why the child avoids certain topics;
- Discovering what is good and what is difficult in relationships between the child and its biological parents, and openly discussing these issues;
- Considering the possibility of meetings between the child and its parents – foreseeing threats and fostering good relationships;

- Fostering one's own sensitivity to signals sent by children – words they use when talking about their biological parents, questions they ask, emotions they show then;
- Asking for help, e.g. talking to other foster parents in order to understand the child and help it restore its damaged confidence in the world.



"...the previous life of the child was the best from the child's perspective, children don't assess it like we do – objectively and from the outside. To children it doesn't matter where they were and in what conditions, as long as they were with their parents." (interviews, Foster Parents)

Loyalty conflict

Which of the families is mine?

A loyalty conflict is a situation when children are aware of the existence of their biological parents while staying with a foster family. On the one hand, children feel a bond with their biological family, but on the other hand, their everyday needs are satisfied by other people. Consequences of such a situation can include emotional and health problems, resulting in lower quality of life. The situation is difficult not only to the child but also to foster and biological parents.

Do you compete with biological parents for the child's feelings?

How to deal with a loyalty conflict?

- Explain to children that you understand their emotions.
- Show children that they have a right to have dilemmas and doubts.
- Talk to children about their biological families.
- Don't make children feel guilty about their feelings.



*"I know that the child will never look at me the way it looks at its biological mum."
(A foster mother)*

Me as a foster parent

What is my role in this situation?

The role of a foster parent is to provide children with care and a possibility of development, and to fulfil their psychological needs. When these tasks are carried out, an emotional bond between children and their carer is developed. Accepting the fact that taking care of children may be temporary can entail negative emotions and, as a consequence, make it difficult to fulfil the care-related tasks. Realizing these difficulties makes it easier to cope with them.

Is a foster family the child's family?

Challenges faced by foster parents:

- Accept the fact that children can return to their biological parents.
- Look for positive aspects of the children's return to their biological parents.
- Appreciate the fact that you were there for children when they needed you.



*"They told me I had to leave her. But she's my whole family."
(A biological parent)*

Social network, self-helping group for foster parents

Building a support network for foster families.

In their everyday life, foster parents encounter many problems. The main sources of their difficulties are problems with emotional and social development of children. In the foster family, children are faced with different requirements than the ones they know from their biological families. Children learn the norms anew, learn how to interact with others, and gain skills allowing them to follow common rules. As a result of a clash of such different worlds, the child's social adaptation and introduction to cultural values entail conflicts and difficult situation that not always can be resolved in privacy. They need both informal help (non-institutionalised support provided by acquaintances, friends, other foster families) and formal help (institutionalised support provided by specialists, aid institutions, NGOs).

"No one lives only to himself. We're here also for others."
Saint Gregory the Great

Foster parent could get some tips from:

- Meeting, talking and sharing problems with other foster parents;
- Taking part in workshops, training courses in such issues as building mutual relationships in a family, taking into consideration the rule of openness to the other, which is supported by the ability to distance oneself (psychological renewal and a possibility of discovering new sources of internal strength);
- Actively resolving difficult situations within the relationship (readiness to listen actively, to hear the other person out, and to talk), getting to know each other, respecting each other, showing empathy, etc.;
- Using consultancy services – consultations with specialists (such as a lawyer, a psychiatrist).



"Training courses organised at that time by the Society of the Friends of Children (TDP), we completed the whole cycle, they were quite good. However, talking to a foster family who were our friends and other foster families proved to be far better than those specialist training courses – such an exchange of experiences is most useful." (interviews, Foster Parents)

Biographical work

The significance of the child's past

Coming to a foster family opens a new chapter in children's life, however, they already have some history they shouldn't forget. The role of foster parents can be to support children in gathering information about their past and understanding its significance in the context of the current situation. By preserving the memory of the children's past, foster parents make it possible for the children to maintain their relationships with their biological families. Also, returning together to the difficult past enhances the bond between the children and their foster parents.

"A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots."

Marcus Garvey

Ideas for a child's lifebook:

- Information about the child;
- Information about the family and people important to the child;
- Places, dates, and events that are important to the child;
- Key moments, memories;
- Information about the school, friends, pets;
- Photographs, pictures, quotes from the child's words;
- Drawings;
- ...



"It would be worth getting rid of this constant sense of temporariness, the thought that they came to us for an unspecified time – the children don't know whether it's worth growing attached, they aren't sure whether this is and will be their place. You need to let the children feel it's their place, that they have something on their own here, and not only something they use." (interview, Foster Parent).

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