

Social workers



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Tools to improve cooperation between biological parents and foster parents

Social workers should assure safe environment for foster child and development according to his/her needs and abilities. This could be accomplished through supporting good cooperation and mutual respect between foster and biological family.

Foster care is complex process that includes many stakeholders and the most important are foster child and his biological family, foster family and social worker. Quality and efficiency of foster care depend very much on individual characteristic of all included participants and their ability of effective communication and cooperation. After making good assessment and matching child with suitable foster family social workers should help both families, foster and biological, in their new roles in child's life.

In order to succeed in this demanding task, social workers can do the following:

- Place a child in a foster family close to the place where his/her biological parents live.
- Provide foster parents with a complete set of information concerning the child and his/her situation.
- Put clear requirements on biological parents in order for their child to return to them.
- Help biological and foster parents with instructions in organizing meetings of foster child with biological parents
- Adequately and in a timely manner inform the foster children/youth on all relevant information regarding the fostering process.
- Respect and accept cultural, social and economic differences of the parents
- Instruct foster parents how to help child integrate his/her identity from biological family with a new one, build in foster family
- Use experience and exercises from different trainings that would improve their communication skills (eg exercises from the Falefos workshops for social workers)



*“My task in shaping cooperation with the foster family, the biological family and the child is to make foster parent sensible as much as possible to maintaining contact of child with his/her biological family and to accept the child.”
(interviews, Social worker)*

Planning and guiding transition of child from biological to foster parents and vice versa and/or to independence

Social worker should approach each situation of the child and their biological families individually. Transition from biological to foster family, and vice versa, should be carefully planned and done in cooperation and with consent of all parties included in this process.

It's necessary to make good matching of foster child with foster family, considering characteristics and needs of the child and possibilities and skills of foster family. Good preparations that include giving all important information to the child and foster parents, as well as providing a support of the biological family to a child's transition will make his/her adaptation to a new surrounding more successful. Every change of child's life circumstances should be well prepared and supported by all included parties in order to make child feel secure, happy, successful and affiliated.

What can make your work, as social worker, easier and more successful:

- Make a good assessment of the needs and characteristics of the foster child
- Make a good assessment of the potentials and skills of the foster family
- Give all important information about the child to the foster parents as well as information about foster family to the child and his/her biological family
- Listen carefully to what all parties are saying
- Make individual plan for the foster child and include in this process foster parents and foster child and whenever is possible biological parents



*"From our first meeting I talk to her and I'm trying to explain to her what is happening and I never criticise her biological mother."
(Interviews, foster mother)*

"Foster care allows the parallel development of affection to foster parents by retaining affection to biological parents and identifying with them (if possible), so biological parents have a chance to participate in the care for child's life in some aspects."

Kletečki Radović I Kregar Oreškovič, 2005

Changing perspectives

Widening the view: the importance of every point of view in building the foster care project

Foster care means accompanying the child for a piece of his path and grow together.

The foster care project starts and makes developments during the time thanks to the contribution of the point of view of all actors (the child, his/her family, the foster family, the social workers).

This process requires to social workers the ability to read the needs, the meaningful bonds, the life-reality, the limitations and the deficiencies, the protective elements, the current or the feasible resources in the family of each child, identifying their potentialities for changing.

Foster care is a dynamic process, "always in construction", finalized to stimulate positive changes in the child's development, in parents' competences, in the family systems.

Therefore foster care is constantly monitored, assessed, re-planned keeping in mind the changes occurred, through an integrated vision from social, psychological, educational, legal points of view.

Therefore, for the social worker it is very important to:

- Improve the ability to identify useful indicators, to listen to the points of view of the other actors in order to understand the current situation and the changes occurred in the meantime, within a team where discussion and the reflection are stimulated.
- Give space to the "individual knowledge" of each actor, to the expression of every single voice (child, biological family, foster family), that allow to see the situation from new perspectives and enrich the whole knowledge.



*"Fostering is an experience that starts from the wish to open ourselves and help the others, during which we can learn a lot about ourselves."
(Foster parents)*

Communication in the foster care process

Foster care is... building trust

Essential element of the foster care process is a good communication among the actors, that generates trust between “foreign” worlds, with the aim that these worlds become meaningful and united in the child’s experience, in order to offer educative and emotional opportunities for his/her development.

Active listening is an essential component of communication and its most important aspect is **TO BE PRESENT** to the other person

In detail:

- Favouring a clear and transparent communication among the team of different actors involved in foster care;
- Building “child-oriented” contests for participation, where listening to his/her fears and expectations, accompanying him/her to understand the reasons and the steps of the foster care process, supporting him/her in the critical moments and in the conflict with his/her story and belongings;
- Considering the child’s biological family as active participant of the process, within a transparent and coherent relationship with the social workers, where it is possible to recognise and give value to the child’s experience and to support the development or the recovery of parents’ skills;
- Valorising and assuring constant support to the motivation, the commitment and the resources of the foster family, identifying firm modalities for the participation to the planning and the monitoring phases of the foster care process;
- Developing a working method able to generate “gatherings” and reciprocity and to ease the cooperation and the development of all actors, walking together towards the same direction.



*“Foster care is when you commit something to another person you trust.”
(Eleonora and Gabriele, III grade school)*

Slowdown: recognizing the importance of wellbeing in your work

Taking care of carers

Caring about foster projects means for the social workers to “be” in the situations, to “do” and also to “think/plan” interventions that are consistent with the different life situations of children and teenagers.

Foster care is a process with many dimensions that need to be taken into account. It often requires on behalf of the social workers to have a direct and constant contact with painful pasts and feelings, with fears and ambiguities, with possible moments of conflicts among the different points of view.

Have a walk or hang out with a friend! Leaving your routine will help you to see your current situation differently.

Which factors can help the social workers to deal with this complexity?

- A stable and multi-disciplinary working team, where it is possible to integrate and connect the professional methodology of each social worker or service;
- Dedicating time and space to a common reflection on each foster care project and on the operative practices;
- Professional supervision;
- Updating training courses in order to examine in-depth specific phases or topics of foster care and/or to examine and adjust the working methodologies.



*“I think the most helpful was the visit at the foster parents’ house. They helped the kids to understand the whole situation. I would never do that without them.”
(biological father)*

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