

***All in the Family:
The Effects of Foster Parenting on the
Permanent Children of Foster Parents***



Hand-outs

A Training Designed for Foster Parents

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2008
(Revised 2009)

Getting to Know Me!

I have been a foster parent for 3 or more years

I have received prior training on this topic

I am an agency staff person

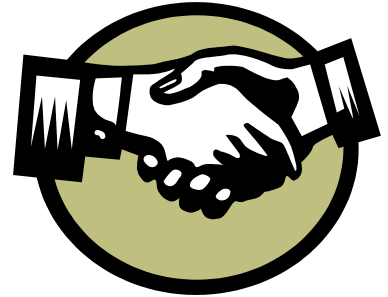
I am a foster parent recruiter, licensor or trainer

Nobody has ever talked to me about this topic before

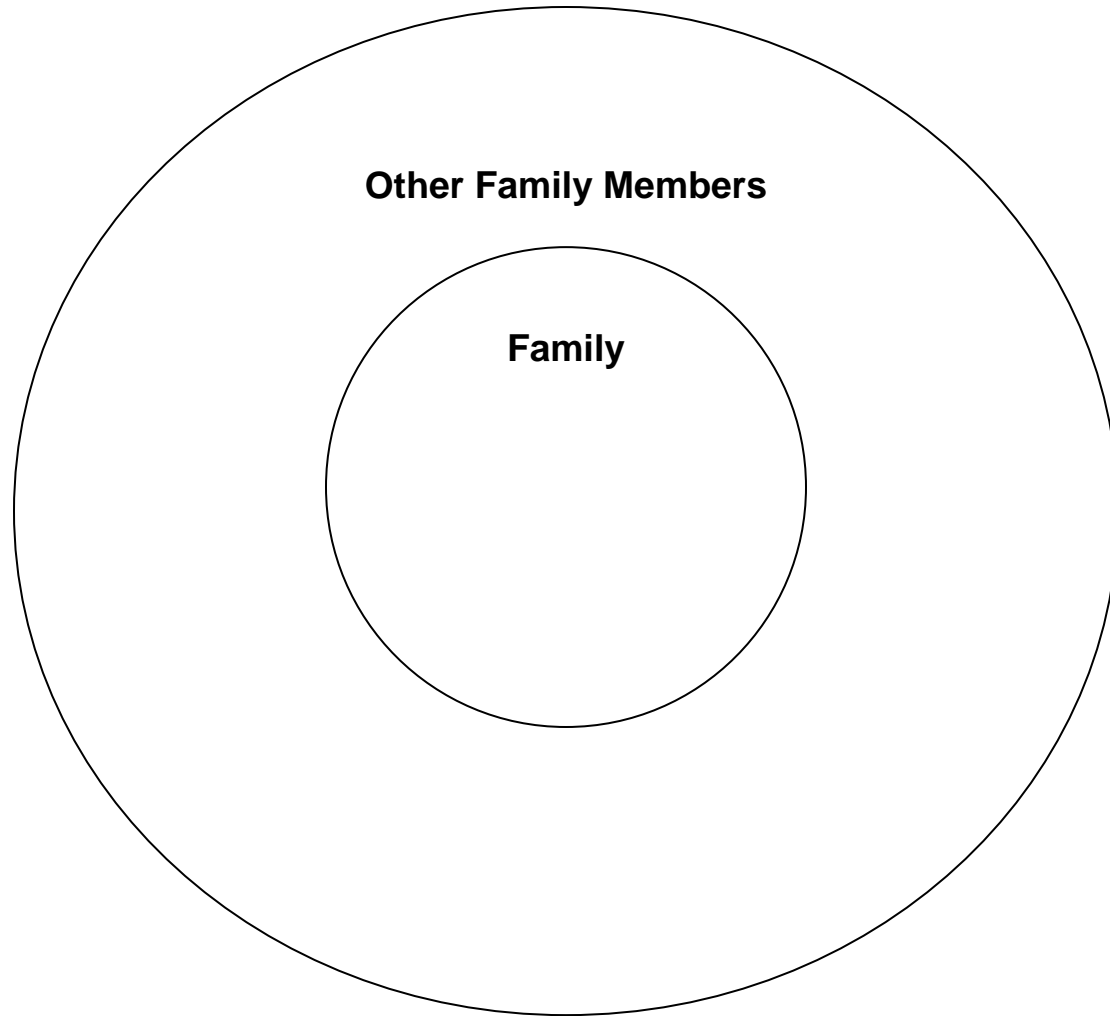
I grew up as the permanent child of foster parents

I am here to learn more about how to help permanent children of foster parents cope with the stresses of foster parenting.

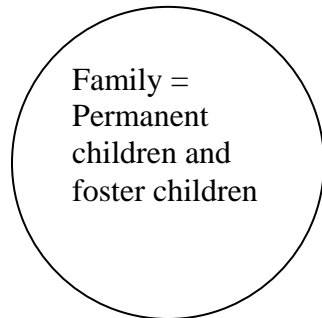
I like chocolate!



All in the Family . . .

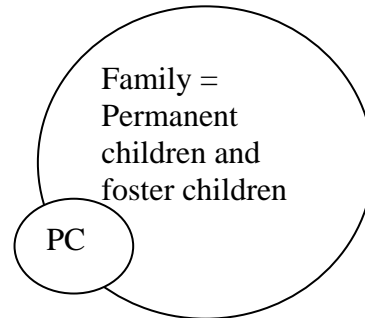


Family Models



One Big Happy Family: entire family integrates the foster child completely into their concept of family.

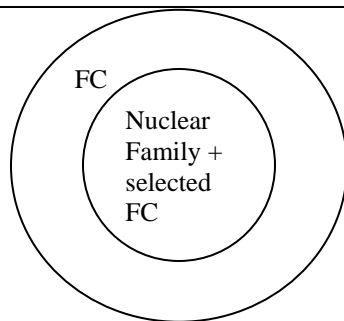
- Expectations and rules are applied to all children
- Unquestioned acceptance (unconditional love) of foster child
- When the child leaves the home, the child also leaves the “family”



I'll Be Over Here . . . : PC may separate from the rest of the family.

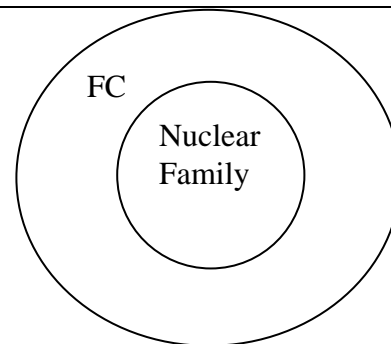
This happens most often when the:

- PC is an adolescent
- Foster child has extreme behavior problems, requiring a lot of parental attention
- Parents expect the PC to feel differently toward the FC than they do



Maybe, Maybe Not: neither rules out nor automatically accepts the foster children into the “family”. Some, but not all, foster children are seen as “family”.

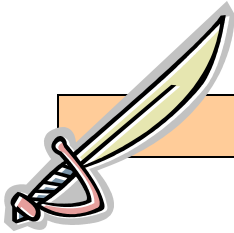
- Long-term foster children are much more likely to be considered family
- Alleviates pressure on PCs to feel emotionally tied to new-comers
- Not all family members agree on who “family” is and when



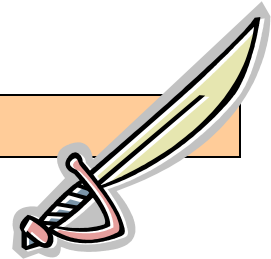
Us and Then: the concept of “family” consists solely of the permanent family. This model may be self-protection for some PCs, who are reeling from the grief and loss of foster children who have come and gone.

- Foster children can come and go with minimal emotional trauma to the PCs
- PCs often feel guilty with this model, because they believe that their parents (and the system) desire a more unified family model

Adapted from All in the Family Home: The Biological Children of Parents Who Foster by Judith Heidbuurt



A Double Edged Sword



Sharing and Losing

Permanent Children of foster parents must share their parents, family activities, toys, room and friendship. However, this “gift” of a family is not always received gratefully by the foster children. In addition, permanent children experience significant loss: loss of parental time and attention; loss of possessions and personal space; loss of innocence.

Being Responsible and Escaping

Permanent children face at least three areas of responsibility: caring for the foster children, protecting their parents from undue stress and sense of general responsibility for their own issues. In addition, they experience confusion over being told that the foster children need them, but having negative feelings toward the children. As a result, they often feel a need to escape by removing themselves from the family in various ways.

Caring and Resenting

Permanent children face an on-going struggle between having a caring attitude, but also feeling resentment toward the fostering experience. They care about, and simultaneously resent, the presence of the foster children. Specific areas of resentment include: resenting the foster child for not being grateful for what is being offered; resenting the losses that they are experiencing; resenting the extra stress that they see placed on their parents.

Stability and Change

The stability that foster families offer to foster children creates, at the same time, a sense of instability within the family. Change occurs within the family; patterns of behavior and activities change; unpredictability of placements causes uncertainty. Having offered a secure stable home to foster children, foster families find themselves changing rapidly and unpredictably.

Drawing Attention and Isolating

Permanent children often feel “forgotten” within their family. They are often irritated and angry at having to wait for their parent’s attention, but may not speak of this because of fear that their parents will react negatively, or that they will cause their parents even more stress. Some react to this feeling by acting out, and others by withdrawing.

Confidentiality and Lack of Privacy

Although permanent children are asked to respect the confidentiality of the children in their homes, they often feel an incredible lack of privacy. Suddenly, there are strangers living in the home, boundaries are not always respected, and there are “officials” in and out of the house on a regular basis. They may feel as if they are living in a fish bowl, and have 2 sets of eyes watching everything they do: the little eyes (of the foster children) within the home and the big eyes (of the Social Workers, licensors, GALs) outside of the home. They often feel as if they have no space to call their own.

Areas of Concern

In the space below, write any ideas that you have for alleviating negative feelings or increasing positive feelings for your permanent child(ren) in the specific Area of Concern.

Decision Making	Sharing (house/things/items)
Confidentiality/Privacy	Behavior/ Different Expectations

Role Displacement

Value Differences

Sharing Parents

Loss and Grief

Areas of Concern (Completed)

Decision Making

- Involve all family members in the decision to foster
- Clearly explain what fostering means – the behaviors that may accompany children; the feelings that this will evoke in PCs, etc.
- Involve all family members in the decision to accept (or not) each specific child
- Have a family generated checklist of what will be an acceptable new placement
- Try not to use guilt to encourage children to conform to your wishes
- Allow and encourage your PCs to talk about their feelings
- Hold regular family meetings so PCs can voice their opinions

Sharing (house/things/items)

- Make sure that your children have some personal items that they are not required to share.
- Make a space in the house that is for the nuclear family only; give your PCs a place to escape to
- Always have extra clothes on hand, so that your PCs do not have to share their clothes
- If possible, minimize the sharing of bedrooms
- Provide each child with a special box or footlocker to store their important belongings
- Allow and encourage your PCs to talk about their feelings

Confidentiality/Privacy

- Explain to PCs that there are things that you know about them (like they wet the bed at age 8) that they don't want others to know and that there is no reason for others to know – compare this to the confidentiality/privacy needs of a child in care
- Discuss behaviors that they should watch for, and beware of, and tell you about
- Throw out all rules of tattling (you need all the eyes and ears that you can get!)
- Make a space in the house that is for the nuclear family only; give your PCs a place to escape to
- Have locks on doors and rules about knocking before entering
- If possible, minimize the sharing of bedrooms

Behavior/ Different Expectations

- Explain that all people develop at different rates – point out areas to the PCs where they may themselves be advanced or delayed
- Explain that children of different ages have different rules (a 14 year old can ride his/her bike to school alone; a 4 year old cannot); children of different developmental levels will also have different rules
- Give the PCs added perks to go along with the higher expectations you hold of them
- Do not change your expectations for your own child
- Allow and encourage your PCs to talk about their feelings

Role Displacement

- Whenever possible, maintain the role that your child finds most meaningful
- It may be easier to displace the youngest child than the oldest child
- Praise your PC in the roles that he/she does well
- Do not burden your PC with a new role of care for the foster child unless your PC truly wants this role
- Allow and encourage your PCs to talk about their feelings

Value Differences

- Ask your PCs what the most important family traditions to them are, and do not change these. (Note that this may have nothing to do with holidays, but may be something like “Friday pizza nights”.
- Regardless of the culture of your foster children, introduce books and toys into the home with a multi-cultural theme
- Do not erase any of your old traditions when introducing new ones
- Clearly state your families values and expectations to all in the family
- Prepare your children for the likelihood of inappropriate language and behaviors
- Allow and encourage your PCs to talk about their feelings

Sharing Parents

- Always set aside time alone with your PCs
- At least weekly, have an hour to spend alone with each PC (go for a walk, take him/her grocery shopping, etc.)
- Make time for the nuclear family on a regular basis
- Use respite
- Take nuclear family vacations
- Allow and encourage your PCs to talk about their feelings
- Take a break between placements

Loss and Grief

- Introduce your children to the five stages of grief
- Allow and encourage your PCs to talk about their feelings
- Seek counseling if a PC seems especially saddened
- Take a break between placements
- Allow your child to keep a memento of the child who is leaving
- Have a good-bye ritual
- Have times throughout the year when past foster children are remembered

10 Tips for Preparing Your Children

1. Elicit the child's fantasies about the sibling about to join the family.
2. Be aware that adults may need to adjust a child's fantasy of siblings, particularly if the child expects a "picture perfect" experience.
3. Give the child a voice, separate from the parents.
4. Pay attention when the child's view does not match that of the parents.
5. Note that children without other siblings seem to have more difficulty with the transition because of divided attention from their parents, or how they perceive the new child behaving toward their parents.
6. Practice future-thinking, helping children project themselves into situations where they will be able to keep their identity apart from their new siblings. (For example, playing soccer, beginning middle school, etc.)
7. Be aware that kids equate parental love with the amount of attention given. A new child will demand more attention, even if it is negative attention.
8. Help the child do some "grown-up talk" about behaviors that might occur with the new sibling.
9. Provide ways to grow the sibling relationship, suggesting that they play a video game together, pick out dessert together or take turns choosing a movie for the family to watch.
10. Remind children of why they were excited to get a new sibling and seek commonalities that might help them renew that initial excitement.

Traits for Success

Be Aware of the Issues

Communication

Problem Solving



Preserve Family Time

Preserve Family Space

Preserve Family Boundaries

Preserve “Couple” Time

Use Respite

Maintain Family Roles

Involve Permanent Children in all Decision Making

Regularly Tell Permanent Children that You Love Them

Spend Time Alone with Each Permanent Child

Whenever Needed, Take a Break



Action Plan

Date:

Today in class (All in the Family: The Effects of Foster Parenting on the Permanent Children of Foster Parents) I learned of several strategies for my child(ren) minimize the stresses of being a foster family.

In my family, I will try to change or add the following:

Signature:

