

## when your children are returned to your care:

This is an exciting time, but it is important to reunify your family slowly, as you and your children get to know each other again.

- **Be consistent.** Follow the rules that the children are used to from foster care. Find out what time they went to bed, what they ate for breakfast, any fears they have, and other crucial details about their lives. Maintain these routines, especially during the first few weeks that they are home with you.
- **Get support.** Everyone is overwhelmed with the changes in your family—you, your children, your extended family and your partner. Get support to deal with the stress you are under. Reach out to a clergy member, neighbor, friend, or a family support program when you need to talk. Seek professional counseling before things get out of control.
- **Learn as much as you can about child development, communication skills and discipline techniques.** Your child may have entered a new stage while they were in placement, and you need to know how to deal with him effectively. If you have taken parenting classes, review the materials you received, or take another class. Libraries have lots of books on parenting that you can borrow, and many websites are helpful.
- **Listen to your children.** Make time to give each child attention each day. Resist the urge to substitute giving “things” for giving “time.”
- **Start with today.** You can't change the past, so start today as the new and better parent you are NOW.
- **Take care of yourself.** Pay attention to your own needs for rest, proper nutrition, adult relationships and respite from your children.
- **Give yourself and your children time to adjust.** You are forming a new family, with healthier lives than you had before your children were placed in foster care. It takes time, love and patience to put all the pieces together.



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# parenting from a distance

## HELP FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT

**PARENTING SERIES**

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## when your children are first placed in foster care, or with a family member:

It is natural to feel angry, hurt, or ashamed. You may feel it is not your fault, or that you were treated unfairly by the child protective system. Perhaps you feel your children are now safer than they had been, and are grateful for the intervention. Whatever the situation, some things that can help you are:

- **Understand how the system works.** Under the Adoption and Safe Families Act, parents are required to take responsibility for changing their situation within a limited amount of time. Child Protective Services (Children and Youth or Department of Human Services/DHS) is required to arrange for hearings in family court to decide whether the child will be sent home, put up for adoption, put in another living situation, or referred for legal guardianship. Ask for written information on your rights—and responsibilities—while your children are not in your care. Contact a legal aid office or law center in your community for help. Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance also has information for parents who have been reported to child welfare.
  - **Ask for help.** This is a difficult time for you and your children, and you will need lots of support. Contact a family support program for help, and seek out counseling, anger management classes, and stress reduction techniques to improve your coping skills.
  - **Be respectful with caseworkers, supervisors and others who work with your family.** It may seem like they are not as helpful as you would like, but remember they have a difficult job to do. You and they *both* care about your child—it might be hard to do, but try to work together for your child. Communicate calmly and know what you are talking about; keep appointments and answer questions honestly. Keep a written record of contacts with your caseworker and any services that you use.
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## while your children are living away from you:

Here are some tips for doing your best while you are separated from your children:

- **Remember that you do not have much time to show that you have solved, or nearly solved, the problems that led to the placement in the first place.** CYS or DHS will work with you to provide services to help you, but only you can make changes in your family life. Don't wait to get started!
- **Work on your goals.** You must work with professionals to solve the problems that led to your children going to live with a foster family or relatives. Drug and alcohol abuse, neglecting a child's physical or medical needs, and injuring a child are common reasons that children are put into placement. No matter what the reason the children were placed in foster care or with a family member, you will need to make changes in the way you care for your children—and in the way you live your own life.
- **It is important that you remain involved in parenting through visits with your children.** Be on time, and consistently attend your visits. Ask about whether you can write to or call your child, speak to his foster parents, or other interactions you may be allowed to have.
- **Reassure your child—but be honest about what you are working on and what the future may hold.** Don't make promises you are not able to keep. Let your child know you are doing your best—and then do it.
- **Let your child know where you are living, since children often worry about where their biological parent is when they are in placement.** Bring photos, if possible, of your living space or describe it to your child.
- **Show your child he is important to you.** Listen to what your children are telling you during visits—take an interest in their school, friends and activities.
- **Children often become close to their foster families; this is not done to hurt you or punish you for past mistakes.** Try to keep a positive attitude toward the foster parents—they care about your child, too. If you feel your children have been well cared for while in foster care, compliment the foster parents or their agency.
- **Be positive.** Visits with children are not the time to talk to caseworkers, criticize services or foster parents, or react negatively to the situation. This will only upset your child, and will not improve your relationship with child protective systems. Use the time to talk with, read to, and play with your child. Enjoy the time you have and practice what you are learning in classes and support groups when you are with your child.