

# Project MARCH

Making Appropriate & Timely Connections for Children



## Promising Practices in Foster Parent Retention



- The No. 1 reason foster parents leave agencies is a perceived lack of agency **responsiveness, communication** and **support**.
- The **entire agency** must work to retain a pool of engaged, well-trained and well-supported resource families.
- **Retention** is as important to agencies as recruitment. **Satisfied**, experienced foster parents are the foundation of recruitment.
- Good casework built on **relationship building** and **information sharing** goes a long way to help retain parents.

*“Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning.”*  
- Bill Gates

Understanding the reasons why parents leave agencies is key to foster parent retention.

### Three things new foster parents wish their agencies knew:

“As a new foster parent, I may have **unrealistic expectations**. I may be broadsided by shattered assumptions.”

“Although I have had the training, I do not have life experience in **living** with traumatized children. I **will** have emotions and thoughts that catch me unaware.”

“My family will go through a **transformation**, that fostering isn’t a job, but a lifestyle change for the entire family. Our family may be changing and no one supports us and guides us through those changes — ones we may not like.”

Being aware of the challenges facing new foster parents can help foster care workers begin to have conversations that will help new parents navigate the changes in their family.

For more information about foster care and adoption, please call (877) 994-9970

## Dealing with common expectations

*Even the best pre-service training may fail to prepare families for the challenges they will face as foster parents, because foster parents often believe that their experience with foster care will be different. It is important for foster care workers to be aware of the common expectations parents have and to address them with families through open dialog so the gap between what the family expects and reality does not overwhelm new families leading them to make the decision to close their home.*



### What are some common expectations?

1. Our love will be enough.
2. We will feel love for and connection with this child quickly.
3. This child will step into our family and easily function with our rules, goals and ambitions.
4. Our biological children will embrace this new child as a sibling.
5. Our child will fit well into our extended family and be welcomed by them.
6. Our friends and acquaintances will validate our role as parents and support us through this fostering process.
7. We will never feel regrets or ambivalence in adopting this child with a traumatic past.

## Using home visits to improve retention

Home visits with families provide a good opportunity to address issues that the family is going through before they reach a crisis situation. Below are some questions that can help get the conversation started about the changes the family may be experiencing. Foster parents often note that having a listening ear is the best solution to the situation.

1. How do you see yourself? How has that changed since the child entered the family?
2. What does your support system look like? How have your social activities changed?
3. How have you been impacted by the responses from family and community regarding the issues you face with the child? How have these responses made you feel?
4. How are you managing strong feelings? How do you see your spouse managing strong feelings? Has that changed since the child has entered you family?
5. Do you feel competent as a parent? If not, when did it change for you?
6. If you have other permanent children in the household, how would you describe changes you've seen in them? Positive? Neutral? Negative?
7. Do you feel safe? Do your children feel safe?
8. Do you react to triggers connected to the child's trauma experiences?
9. Do you feel you have control over your life?
10. Do you believe you can influence the behavior of your traumatized child?
11. Have you noticed any changes within yourself as a result of the stress under which you live? (numbing, hypersensitivity, or increased sleeplessness)
12. Do you use outside resources to help in decision-making? (self-protection and setting boundaries)