

# Reunification: Bringing Your Children Home From Foster Care

## Introduction

*When can my children come home?*

This is the first question many parents ask when their children or youth are in foster care. (In this factsheet, we use the term “foster care” broadly. It refers to any situation in which children are in the State’s custody, whether they stay with relatives, in a licensed foster home, or in a residential facility.)

When children are placed in foster care, it can be very stressful for everyone in the family. You may feel angry, overwhelmed, or worried about your children’s safety and well-being. Your children may be confused and scared.

But foster care is not forever. Children and youth can and do return home to their families. In fact, this is the most common outcome.<sup>1</sup> Reunification—which means getting the family safely back together—is almost always the first goal and in your child’s best interest.

Being involved with the foster care system can give your family support and a chance to be stronger than before. By fully participating in your case plan and the services it includes, you can strengthen your skills to become the best parent that you can be for your children.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2015). *The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2014 estimates as of July 2015* (22). Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport22.pdf>; Center for Law and Social Policy. (2007). *Is Kinship Care Good for Kids?* Retrieved from <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/files/0347.pdf>

## WHAT’S INSIDE

Introduction

What can I expect while my children are in foster care?

What can I do to help my children come home?

What will happen as reunification gets closer?

What can I expect after my children come home?

What other resources can help me and my family?

## About 3 in 5 children in foster care return home to their parents or other family members.



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2015). *The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2014 estimates as of July 2015* (22). Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport22.pdf>, Center for Law and Social Policy. (2007). *Is Kinship Care Good for Kids?* Retrieved from <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/files/0347.pdf>.

**NOTE:** This factsheet provides a general overview of the reunification process. Laws and policies governing foster care and reunification are different in each State. You may be able to find more information about your State’s foster care system by using Child Welfare Information Gateway’s State Guides and Manuals Search at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/sgm/>. Select your State and an audience of “Parents.”

For specific information about laws or policies that could affect your case, talk to your lawyer or a local legal services or parent advocacy organization. (Additional resources are provided at the end of this factsheet.)

### What Can I Expect While My Children Are in Foster Care?

The goal of the foster care system is to ensure children’s safety and well-being. To do so, the agency will provide a safe, temporary place for your children to live and will work with you and your family to develop a case plan.

No one can tell you exactly how long your children will be in foster care; this will depend on your case plan and the circumstances that brought you to the foster care system. Reunification does not happen overnight, but everyone agrees that the first goal is to reunite children and youth with their families as soon as possible.

Federal law requires States to establish a “permanency plan” for each child in foster care (meaning, a plan for where the child will live when they leave foster care—whether they go home to their family [reunification], live permanently with a relative [kinship care], or are placed for adoption). Permanency plans also include services that families must complete in order for children to return home. If the child remains in foster care for 15 out of 22 months, in most cases, the law requires the child welfare agency to ask the court to terminate parental rights (end the legal parent/child relationship). During this 15-month period, however, States are required to work to bring parents and children back together.

*"I really appreciated the support and trust that I received from my child welfare caseworker and probation officer. They both believed that I could change and become the strong, resilient, and healthy parent that I am today. I really benefitted from being part of a child welfare system that helped me build protective factors in my family."*

—Toni Miner, Birth Parent National Network, Colorado

## Your Child's Foster Care Placement

While they are not living with you, your children might live with a family member or close friend (sometimes called *kinship care*); an unrelated foster family; or in an emergency shelter, group home, or other treatment facility.

Research suggests that, if children must be placed out of your home, living with relatives or close friends (*kin* or *fictive kin*) can help them thrive.<sup>2</sup> The agency will likely ask you whether there are family members who can provide a safe place for your child to stay. You may ask the agency to consider placing your child with relatives, even if your relatives live in another State. Give the agency as much contact information for your relatives as you can. If you are worried that your family cannot afford to take care of your children, the agency may be able to help with financial and other supports. Relatives will be screened (have a *background check* or *home study*) to be sure that they can provide a safe temporary home.

## Your Family's Rights While Involved With the Foster Care System

Federal law provides some rights for families of children in the foster care system. For example:

- People suspected of child abuse or neglect have the right to be notified of the specific allegations against them and the outcome of the agency's investigation.

- To ensure children are placed with relatives whenever possible, States are required to locate and notify relatives (on both sides of the family) of children who are removed from their homes within 30 days.
- States must try to keep siblings in foster care together.

Additional rights vary by State. You may find more information about the laws governing foster care in your State (including parents' rights) by using Information Gateway's State Guides and Manuals Search at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/sgm/>. Select your State and an audience of "Parents." In some cases, certain rights of parents may be limited or suspended by a court order.

Many States recognize that parents whose children are in foster care have the right to:

- Be informed about the process, any court hearings, and what is expected of them
- Speak for themselves and be listened to at each step of the process
- Have legal representation (by a lawyer or attorney)
- Participate in the development of their family's case plan and be informed of any changes
- Be offered services that will help them bring their children home again
- Have regular visits and contact with their children while they are in foster care
- Stay informed about their children's health, development, and progress in school
- Receive fair treatment regardless of race, culture, gender, or religion—including having culturally sensitive services provided in the language they prefer

Fathers who are not married to their children's mother may need to establish paternity before their rights are recognized. See the Information Gateway publication *The Rights of Unmarried Fathers* for more information at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/putative/>.

<sup>2</sup> Conway, T., and Hutson, R. Q. (2007). *Is kinship care good for kids?* Center for Law and Social Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/files/0347.pdf>

Your children also have rights while they are in foster care. These include:

- Appropriate food, clothing, and shelter
- Freedom from harm, danger, or neglect
- Access to education
- Medical, mental health, and dental care
- Someone to represent their interests at hearings (such as a guardian ad litem or court appointed special advocate)
- Placement with siblings when possible; if siblings must be separated, they should have frequent visits
- Placement in a setting where their native language is spoken and where their religious customs can be maintained

If you feel your rights or those of your children are not being respected, or if you have other concerns about how your case is being handled, you may find helpful information in the Information Gateway factsheet *From Complaint to Resolution: Understanding the Child Welfare Grievance Process* at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cw-grievance/>.

## Your Case Plan

Before your children come home, the child welfare agency and court must be certain that:

- **You can keep your children safe.** While your children are in foster care, the agency will regularly assess your family's strengths, needs, and progress toward resolving the issues that caused your children to be placed into care. These might include drug or alcohol use, family violence, neglect, or other unsafe conditions.
- **You can meet your children's needs.** The agency will work with you to ensure that you can provide a safe place for your children to live, enough food to eat, medical care, and emotional support, among other things.
- **You are prepared to be a parent.** By learning how to strengthen your parenting skills and being willing to get help and support when you need it, you can keep your family strong. This may include continuing to participate in services offered to you while your children are in foster care and even after they come home.

Your case plan is a road map for bringing your children home.

Your caseworker will work with you to develop a case plan to help your family meet these goals. (The agency might call this something different, like a *service plan*, a *treatment plan*, a *reunification plan*, or a *permanency plan*.) This plan is the road map for reunification with your children or youth—it will spell out exactly what you need to do and learn in order to bring and keep them home. Here are some things you can expect from your case plan:

- **You have the right to help develop the plan.** Your caseworker will meet with you to learn all she or he can about your family. Tell him or her about:
  - Your family's needs (those that brought your children or youth into care, as well as others that might affect your ability to bring them home safely)
  - Your strengths (what you do well)
  - Your support system (people who help out you and our children, such as neighbors, close friends, or family members)
  - Your child's special needs (including medical needs, school issues, fears, etc.)
  - Your goals and dreams for your family, and what help you might need to get there

Be sure to speak up about anything that concerns you or that you don't understand. You will be expected to sign and follow this plan.

- **Other people also may help to develop this plan.** The purpose of this is to involve as many people who love and support your child as possible. These might include:
  - Other members of your family and your child's family, including your child's other parent and his or her relatives
  - Representatives from your child's school or your church
  - A guardian ad litem (GAL) or court appointed special advocate (CASA)

- Close family friends
- An advocate to support you during this process. Some agencies have “parent partners” available. These are people who have been in a similar situation and are now trained to help other parents.
- Your teenager, if he or she is old enough

Sometimes planning happens in a group meeting called a *family team meeting*, *family group conference*, or *family group decision-making meeting*.

- **Your plan will include supports and services.** These services are intended to help your family get stronger. They might include (among other things):
  - Counseling (for you and/or your family)
  - Drug or alcohol treatment
  - Help with housing, transportation, food, and other needs
  - Help building job skills and finding employment
  - Anger management classes
  - Parenting classes

You have a right to ask for services you believe you or your child need to address the situation that caused concern for your child’s safety.

- **Your needs should be considered.** Services and visits with your children or youth will be arranged around your work schedule whenever possible. If you can’t afford the services in your case plan, the agency may refer you to community agencies that can help or ask that services be paid for through a community services agency.
- **Your case plan will likely include a second goal for your child, in addition to reunification.** Other possible goals include:
  - Living permanently with a relative (kinship care or guardianship)
  - Adoption
  - Another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA) or independent living for some older teens

Your caseworker will pursue this goal while he or she is working with you to bring your children home. This is called *concurrent planning*. It does not mean that the agency does not want your family to get back together. It simply recognizes that your family’s situation is complex and requires additional planning to ensure your child has a safe, permanent home.

- **You have the right to be kept informed.** You will receive a copy of your case plan. If your first language is not English, you have the right to an interpreter and to receive a copy of the case plan in your native language. You should be informed of any changes to the plan, and the plan should be reviewed regularly.

### Strengthening Your Family

Your case plan is not just about “checking boxes” to get your children home. The goal is to create a stronger family for your children and yourself. One way you can do this is by building what are called *protective factors*—strengths that help all families get through tough times. They include:

- Ways your family members show that they love and care about each other
- Information about raising children and what they need at different ages
- The ability to “bounce back” after challenges
- Support from family and friends
- Resources for meeting day-to-day needs (like housing, food, clothing, etc.)
- Ways to help your children to get along well with you and with others

Ask your support team to help you build protective factors now, so your family is even stronger when your children come home. You can also find tips for building strong families from Strengthening Families (<http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies/2015/SF-Parent-Brochure-web.pdf>) and on the Child Welfare Information Gateway website at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/guide.pdf#page=48>.

## What Can I Do to Help My Children Come Home?

While your children are in foster care, it is important to fully understand why they are there and to participate in your case plan to make your home safe for their return. If something changes that makes the plan more difficult for you to follow, talk to your caseworker or your lawyer right away. Let your attorney know if the services described in your plan do not meet your needs, are not available when you need them, are too expensive, or are too difficult to access.

Other things you can do are outlined in more detail below. They include visiting your children regularly and working with your team. It is important to document your progress, including keeping track of visits with your children and participation in services.

*"I graduated from a year-long inpatient treatment program, started working full-time and doing all of the services that the court had ordered. Working a job, going to services and working on self is extremely difficult... One by one, I was able to work down the list of required services. I went from non-compliant to partially compliant to compliant... Today I can attest to the power of faith, support, and love. My daughter and I are together. And she is a light brighter than anything that has touched my life."*

—Shrounda Selivanoff, Birth Parent National Network, Washington

### Visit Regularly

Visiting your children while they are in foster care has many benefits. Most importantly, it helps to preserve and strengthen your bond while you are separated. It can soothe children's fears and worries by showing them that you care about them and can be counted on to be there for them when you say you will. It also shows the agency that you are committed to your child. Try not to miss any visits. If something is getting in the way of scheduled visits (e.g., transportation, work schedule), talk with your caseworker to develop a new plan.

Visits can be awkward, especially if they are supervised or take place somewhere that is not comfortable or familiar. The following tips may help make visits more comfortable and rewarding for both of you:<sup>3</sup>

- **Bring things to do.** Toys, games, books, and other activities give you all something to focus on. Also, bring something that makes the environment feel more like "home" (such as a blanket and pillows for snuggling or, if it is allowed, a special snack). Bring a camera or phone to take pictures, or ask the caseworker to take pictures of the family together. If you want to bring your child a gift, check with your caseworker and the foster parent first.
- **Use the time to bond.** It is important for you to continue to play an active role in your children's lives. You can rock, sing to, or snuggle an infant. Toddlers might enjoy showing off new skills like walking, jumping, or playing with blocks. With older children, you can talk about their favorite activities and topics. Encourage them to tell you about things that have happened at school, and avoid topics that create tension.
- **Try to stay positive.** When children ask when they can come home, avoid giving a specific time, like "next week" or "before your birthday." Instead, reassure your child that you are working on being together as a family.
- **Allow your children to express their feelings.** It's normal for children to feel angry or scared. Use your visits to reassure them that you love them and are working to bring them home. Younger children may seem to have "forgotten" their parents or seem more comfortable interacting with foster parents. Give your children the time they need to get comfortable with the situation and interact with you. It's okay to ask for help and guidance if, for example, a fussy baby is hard to soothe or a toddler is having a tantrum. Visits are a good time for you to strengthen your parenting skills and learn valuable tips.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Rise. (2009). "One step at a time." Retrieved from <http://www.risemagazine.org/item/one-step-at-a-time/>.

- **Get to know the foster parents.** Having a good relationship with your child’s foster parents can make the time apart easier on you and your children. Ask your caseworker if you can meet your children’s foster parents and how best to tell them about your children. You can ask how your children are doing at their house, or ask if you can meet them for any upcoming doctor’s appointments or parent-teacher conferences. You also may want to ask what new skills your children have learned; what new foods they like; or how they like their schools, activities, and friends.
- **Help children say goodbye or “see you soon.”** When it’s time for the visit to end, tell your children that you’ll see them again as soon as you can.
- **Keep in touch between visits.** Ask your caseworker and the foster parents about the best ways to let your children know you’re thinking of them while you are apart. These might include scheduled phone calls, letters, or email, especially on special occasions.
- **Keep visiting.** It will get easier.

Other concerns you may have about visits include the following:

- **Siblings.** If you have more than one child in foster care, your children should be placed together unless it is not best for their safety or health. If your children are separated in foster care, you may want to ask your caseworker:
  - Why were my children not placed together?
  - Are you working to find a placement where they can be together?
  - Can our visits can be coordinated so that we can all be together at the same time?
  - Are my children visiting with each other, in addition to visits with me?
- **Long-distance visits.** If you are unable to visit your children in person because of distance or other reasons (e.g., incarceration), ask your caseworker:
  - How can you help us stay in touch? Can we have telephone and/or video calls?
  - Can I send my child letters?

- **Progress in visits.** Your visits with your children may be supervised, especially at first. Eventually, as you make progress on your case plan, you can ask for unsupervised and longer visits. Ask your caseworker
  - How are you evaluating my family’s progress?
  - What would you like to see happen before we can have longer visits?

*“My visits with my daughter are the most important 90 minutes of my whole week. I do everything I can to be prepared and stay positive because I know that time is important to her too. Those visits with my daughter help me stay focused on what’s really important in my life and what my priorities are. For me that’s being the best father I can be for her.”*

—Jacob, Parent from Oregon

## Work With Your Team

Your experience with the foster care system will include many different people. Some of these are your caseworker, your child’s foster parents, your lawyer/attorney, and your child’s advocate. You also might work with a peer mentor, peer advocate, or parent partner. Working well with each of these members of your team will improve the chances of bringing your children home.

### Your caseworker (or social worker):

- Works with your family to develop and monitor your case plan
- Arranges services for you and visits with your child
- Reports to the court on your family’s progress

Building a relationship with your caseworker will help you understand your case better and make progress toward reunification.

Tips for working with your caseworker:

- Ask any questions you may have about your case plan, your caseworker’s expectations, and the services or resources that he or she can provide.
- Stay in touch and tell your caseworker about any changes in your life (new home, new job, etc.).

- Keep your appointments and complete services in your plan.
- If you have questions or concerns, always start with your caseworker. If you feel the caseworker is not listening to you, talk to his or her supervisor or your lawyer.

#### Your children's foster parents/caregivers:

- Take care of your children while they are in care
- Can make visiting easier and help your children stay in touch with you between visits

#### Tips for working with your children's foster parents:

- Communicate in a way that is safe and respectful for everyone. (Some parents use a journal to ask questions or exchange short notes with the foster family during the children's visits. In some cases, the foster parents also will use a journal for updates about the children's school progress or other milestones. Other families share important information such as nap schedules, food preferences, and doctor's appointments through their caseworker.)
- Tell them as much as you can about your children, including their likes and dislikes, fears, and how they like to be comforted. You know your children best, and this will help the foster parents take the best possible care of your children and help them feel safe and secure.
- Let your children know that their foster parents care about them very much. It may help your children feel more comfortable if they see you and their foster parent getting along.

#### Your lawyer/attorney:

- May be appointed by the court if you qualify for financial assistance. Alternatively, you may hire your own or work with a local legal services agency (for more about legal services or to find help in your area at [http://apps.americanbar.org/legalservices/findlegalhelp/faq\\_freehelp.cfm](http://apps.americanbar.org/legalservices/findlegalhelp/faq_freehelp.cfm))
- Represents your interests and speaks up for you in court, including asking for the services you want or need
- Should talk to you about your case between court dates and let you know what to expect

Being completely honest with your lawyer helps him or her do the best job possible.

#### Your child's GAL or CASA:

- Is a trained volunteer who may be assigned to your children during the court process
- Monitors your children's case while they are in foster care
- Makes recommendations to the court about what is best for your children

You can work with your children's CASA or GAL by providing any information he or she needs to make good decisions for your children. For more about CASA, visit [http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPIsE/b.5301303/k.6FB1/About\\_Us\\_\\_CASA\\_for\\_Children.htm](http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPIsE/b.5301303/k.6FB1/About_Us__CASA_for_Children.htm).

#### Peer mentors (sometimes called *peer advocates*, *parent partners*, or *parent allies*):

- Are available to help families in some States
- Are parents who have had children in foster care and successfully brought them back home
- Were once in a similar situation and can answer questions, offer advice, and support you during the process

If you have not been offered a peer mentor, ask whether one is available to you. You also can find organizations that provide parent advocacy services at [https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionsaction=rols:main.dspROL&rolType=Custom&RS\\_ID=138](https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionsaction=rols:main.dspROL&rolType=Custom&RS_ID=138).

*"As a parent partner, we are trained to work with parents to help them build protective factors, provide them with emotional support, guide them in building relationships with their caseworkers and help them understand and effectively navigate the child welfare system. I have similar life experiences so parents feel comfortable talking with me."*

—Brejea Colthirst, Birth Parent National Network, California



## What Will Happen as Reunification Gets Closer?

One of the best indicators that you are getting closer to bringing your children or youth home will be your visits with them. Moving from supervised to unsupervised visits and receiving longer visits (as long as an overnight, weekend, or more) are good signs that your case is progressing. If you see progress and want to make a change in visits, talk with your caseworker.

During this period, you will want to be actively preparing for your children to come home. Continue to use the services in your case plan, and other community resources as needed, to help you do the following:

- Better understand your children's needs (including any special behavioral, emotional, or medical needs they might have)
- Feel confident as a parent (including attending parenting classes and/or individual or family counseling sessions)
- Find resources to help your family stay strong: Work with your caseworker (or in a family group conference or family team meeting) to identify the services you will need when your children come home. Line up informal supports for your family (such as neighborhood and community centers, child care, 12-step or other support groups, and healthy family members and friends who are willing to help during the transition).

At some point, your children or youth may come home for a "trial home visit." This means that they live at home with you on a trial basis, but the agency still maintains legal custody for a period of time.

## Why Isn't My Case Progressing?

If you are working hard to complete your case plan, you may request increased visits with your children. Increases usually happen gradually. However, if there has not been any change for several months, you may want to ask your caseworker about it.

Sometimes progress is slow because your case plan is not clear. Make sure you understand the reason each service has been included in your plan. Is the program helping you get closer to reuniting with your children? If you do not understand the information you receive from your caseworker, your lawyer may be able to help.

If your progress is slower than you would like, speak up! Ask what needs to happen to show your home is the best place for your child. Work with the agency and your lawyer to come up with a plan that works better for everyone.

You might want to check in regularly (every 2 to 4 weeks) with every member on your team. You can update your team members on any services or programs that you have completed, tell them about any problems you are having, and ask them what you can do to make further progress toward your case plan.

## What Can I Expect After My Children Come Home?

When you have completed your case plan goals and your family is reunited, everyone will need time to readjust to living together. You can help your family during this period by being willing to ask for help if you need it.

### Adjusting

After being apart, you will likely feel excited and happy to have your children home. You also may feel stressed, uncertain about how to handle some things, rejected (if your children or youth talk positively about their foster home), sad about the time you lost or milestones you missed, and afraid of losing them again.

Your children may have difficulty with the transition, too. They may miss friends or family they spent time with while in foster care. Depending on how long they were away, they may struggle with differences between your home and their foster home, including rules, schedules, and even food. It's important to let them know that it's okay to have their feelings, including missing their foster family, and to be as patient as you can with yourself and your children during this transition time.

*"My daughter and I were blessed with an opportunity to connect with her foster parents almost a year after our case closed. I saw how bonded they all were and embraced the notion of them being extended family. As a result, they have shown us nothing but positive support and assistance, such as child care. I would love to see a system where these opportunities to partner between birth parent and foster parent become the norm since we are all coming together on behalf of the child."*

—Alise Hegle, Birth Parent National Network, Washington

## Asking for and Getting Help

After you and your children are reunited, the child welfare agency may keep your family's case open for a while. They will want to be sure that your children are safe and your family has what you need to continue to move forward on a positive path.

During this time, the agency may continue to provide services, sometimes referred to as *in-home* or *postreunification* services, to help your family. This might include someone coming to your home to help you with parenting or other support services. It might also include community-based services such as child care or counseling. These services are intended to support your family and help you maintain the progress you have made.

It's okay to ask for additional help. You may worry that if you share everything is not going perfectly, your caseworker will think your children can't stay at home. But "bumps in the road" are to be expected, and asking for help is a sign of strength. If you're not sure how the

agency will react to something, talk to your lawyer first. They may be able to help you ask for what you need.

## Giving Back

Once you have successfully completed the reunification process with your children or youth, consider using your experience to help others. Are there parts of the system you'd like to see changed? Your voice is powerful.

Would you like to help other families who are going through what your family went through? Your support could make a world of difference. See if there is an opportunity for you to work as a parent mentor in your State. In that role, you can encourage others and show them, "If I can do it, you can too!" (See the list of National Parent and Family Organizations at the end of this factsheet.)

*"After successfully reuniting with my daughter, I know the importance of keeping families together and helping us build protective factors. As parents, we need to be engaged early, helped to obtain needed services and supported in overcoming challenges such as waiting lists, transportation, child care, financial obstacles, language, and cultural barriers."*

—Timothy Phipps, Birth Parent National Network, Oregon

## What Other Resources Can Help Me?

For more information, see the resources listed below.

### National Parent and Family Organizations

- **Birth Parent National Network** works to champion birth parents as leaders and partners in child welfare systems reform. <http://www.bpnn.ctfalliance.org/>
- **Circle of Parents** provides a friendly, supportive environment led by parents and other caregivers, where anyone in a parenting role can openly discuss the successes and challenges of raising children. <http://circleofparents.org/>

- **National Coalition for Parent Advocacy in Child Protective Services** is a group of parent leaders and advocates who have come together to create positive public policy and program changes that prevent removal of children from their families, strengthen and ensure the rights of families whose children have been removed, and return children to their families. <https://strengthening-families.org/parentadvocacy/index.html>
- **Parents Anonymous** uses mutual support and shared leadership to empower, inspire, and create long-term positive changes in families. <http://www.parentsanonymous.org>

## Publications

- ***Understanding Child Welfare and the Courts*** is a guide to the general types of court hearings your family might experience while involved with the foster care system. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cwandcourts/>
- ***The Parents' Get Real Guide to Getting Your Kids Back*** is written by parents who have successfully reunified with their children in the foster care system to support other parents who are currently in that situation. [http://www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org/mirror/downloads/Parents\\_Get\\_Real\\_Guide\\_lores.pdf](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org/mirror/downloads/Parents_Get_Real_Guide_lores.pdf)
- ***Finding Your Way: Guides for Fathers in Child Protection Cases*** provide tips for noncustodial fathers who want to be active participants in their children's child protection cases. They focus on topics such as fathers' legal rights, child support, and courtroom expectations. [http://site.americanhumane.org/fatherhoodocs/father\\_guide.pdf](http://site.americanhumane.org/fatherhoodocs/father_guide.pdf)
- ***A Family's Guide to the Child Welfare System*** helps parents better understand the child welfare system and answers questions many parents will have. [http://guchd.georgetown.edu/products/AFamilysGuide\\_English.pdf](http://guchd.georgetown.edu/products/AFamilysGuide_English.pdf)
- ***Rise magazine*** is written by parents who have faced the child welfare system in their own lives. <http://www.risemagazine.org/>

## Help With Specific Issues

Families become involved with the foster care system for many different reasons, from substance use to domestic violence, to immigration concerns. Below are some resources that may help with your family's specific circumstances.

### Substance Use

- *Addiction in the Family* (Rise magazine) [http://www.risemagazine.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Rise\\_issue\\_20-addiction-in-family.pdf](http://www.risemagazine.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Rise_issue_20-addiction-in-family.pdf)
- *You Don't Have to Stop Being a Parent While You Are in a Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Facility* (New York State Office of Children & Family Services) [http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/policies/external/OCFS\\_2011/ADMs/Attachment%20B%20for%20res\\_sub%20abuse.pdf](http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/policies/external/OCFS_2011/ADMs/Attachment%20B%20for%20res_sub%20abuse.pdf)
- Substance Abuse Resources for Families (Child Welfare Information Gateway) <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/substance/resources/>
- Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

### Mental Health

- Family Resources (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry) [https://www.aacap.org/aacap/families\\_and\\_youth/Family\\_Resources/Home.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/aacap/families_and_youth/Family_Resources/Home.aspx)
- Tips for Parenting With a Mental Illness (Psych Central website) <http://psychcentral.com/lib/tips-for-parenting-with-a-mental-illness/>

### Child Abuse

- *Parenting a Child Who Has Experienced Abuse or Neglect* (Child Welfare Information Gateway) <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/parenting-CAN/>
- *Parenting a Child Who Has Experienced Trauma* (Child Welfare Information Gateway) <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/child-trauma/>

## Domestic Violence

- *Parenting After Domestic Violence* (Child Welfare Information Gateway) <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/guide.pdf#page=54>
- *Children and Domestic Violence Fact Sheet Series* (National Child Traumatic Stress Network) <http://www.nctsn.org/content/resources>

## Immigration

- *Parental Rights: Toolkit & Educational Resources* (Women's Refugee Commission) <https://womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/migrant-rights/parental-rights/toolkit-and-educational-resources>

## Incarceration

- *A Guide for Incarcerated Parents Who Have Children in the Child Welfare System* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Justice, & Federal Bureau of Prisons) <http://youth.gov/sites/default/files/COIP-Parent-Guide-508.pdf>
- *Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration (Tips for Parents and Caregivers)* (Sesame Street Workshop) [http://www.sesamestreet.org/cms\\_services/services?action=download&uid=24467219-1a98-4240-9fc3-cc738714e819](http://www.sesamestreet.org/cms_services/services?action=download&uid=24467219-1a98-4240-9fc3-cc738714e819)

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