



F.a.c.e.s.
Foster a Child to Excel in Society

The **FACES** Foster care awareness campaign

May 2021

Family Reunification
Resources

Handy guide for family reunification

WHAT IS FAMILY REUNIFICATION?

Reunification is the most common outcome for youth in out-of-home care and foster parents can be one of the most important resources to help children reunify with their families. The goal of family reunification is to ensure the children(s) safety and once that is achieved is to reunite them with their families as soon as possible. Thus, child welfare agencies implement multifaceted strategies that build on family strengths and address concerns. Such strategies may include family engagement, maintaining family and cultural connections, connecting families to evidence-based services in the community, regular and frequent visits among family members and with the worker, and parent education, among others.

Returning children(s) home often requires intensive, family-centered services to support a safe and stable family. Services should be tailored to each family's circumstances and should address the issue(s) that brought the child(s) and family into the child(s) welfare system.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION

For parents anticipating a child's return home from foster or kinship care, reunification holds much promise. It's a new start--a milestone that marks their having reached an important goal. But for families and workers alike, it's important to see reunification as a process, not an event. It's a time of change and adjustment, discovery and challenge. There are no guarantees of success. It is estimated that nationally 25% of reunified children return to foster care at some point. Many parents need to know that their children can return home. It sounds basic, but some parents have internalized feelings of failure, doubt, or guilt that make it hard for them to see that reunification is truly possible¹. A study by Inger P. Davis and John Landsverk on the effects of parental visiting and foster care reunification² determined that maternal visits was the strongest predictor in reunification amongst their study. The majority of children who reenter care after reunification do so within a year³.

ASSESSMENT

Families have said the following strengths were essential to their ability to reunify, remain intact, and maintain healthy functioning: commitment, insight, communication, humor, initiative, boundary setting, creativity, flexibility, social support (receiving and giving), and spirituality (Lietz & Strength, 2011). This list underscores how important it is for us to identify and emphasize family strengths. It also provides some guidance for skills and resources that you can focus on in your case planning with families³.



PREPARING FOR FAMILY REUNIFICATION - THE PROCESS AND INFLUENCES

What do parents need to be thinking about to prepare for their children's transition back home? How can social workers help parents get ready?

HOUSING

A family's physical home environment can have a big influence on the success of reunification efforts. According Miller and colleagues (2006):

The overall quality of the physical home environment was significantly linked with success of reunification. Children were more likely to stay reunified in homes that were rated by observers as well kept and not cramped. Access to stimulating play options was significantly positively linked with success of reunification. Children rated by observers as having greater access within their immediate home environment to child-oriented play options such as books, puzzles, and balls were more likely to stay reunified.

Social workers are vital partners in helping a family find and afford housing, and in making sure the physical environment in the home is appropriate. We can do this by:

ADVOCATING FOR APPROPRIATE HOUSING FOR FAMILIES

Helping families rearrange and use available space differently. This may involve providing families with concrete resources such as developmentally appropriate games and books--some families don't know what is appropriate or helpful for children's development and for building a more positive relationship, and may not know to provide space for this in the home.

Helping families identify and use community resources that provide good space for family activities, such as quality day care, parks, libraries, community centers, and church-based activities.

Rather than penalize parents for housing resources they don't have, our system can recognize when parents are working to meet their children's developmental needs despite housing problems.

SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Another concrete way parents prepare for reunification is to build a strong, ample support network. Social workers should use the time prior to reunification to explore and plan with parents the types and levels of support the family will need to maintain a successful reunification.

Completing a visual tool with a family, such as a genogram or a schedule of a parent's typical day, can be especially helpful at this point, since it allows parents to visualize what help they have, what help they need, and how to fill in the gaps. Don't forget to ask parents which social supports they would like at each CFT, since this might change over time.



PARENTING SKILLS

Before reunification, therapy and other formal supports will be valuable for many families, as will supports that help parents learn and use effective parenting skills. Parents need information that will help them understand the kinds of behaviors they may see once children come home, and practical skills for helping children manage behavior, as well as respite services.

EMOTIONAL PREPARATION

Preparing for reunification also means learning about the emotional side of reunification and coming to terms with what that experience might be like for different family members.

It's common for parents and children to have a mix of feelings about the upcoming transition--excitement, relief, joy, ambivalence, anxiety, stress, hope, anger, and insecurity. Parents and children may not be ready or willing to talk with a social worker about their feelings, but social workers can nonetheless explain to all family members that it's normal and OK to feel a wide range of emotions.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Workers should help parents examine their expectations about reunifying.

THE VACFSS

Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services ensures the well-being of Indigenous children and youth who have come into a continuing care order. Our approach is situated with the child at the centre of their circle of support, surrounded by family and community.

Together, we hold a shared vision of first reducing the numbers of Indigenous youth in care through a commitment of developing child specific lifelong plans with an emphasis on returning to family, extended family and community and secondly to ensuring that those children that are leaving the system are doing so with a strong Indigenous identity and a leadership vision of their future.

PRESERVING, REUNITING AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

The Family Preservation and Reunification program provides culturally-informed services to referred Indigenous families who are experiencing situations that may place their children at risk. The program focuses on collaborative planning and services to families engaged in VACFSS' Child Protection, Guardianship and Resources programs.

The program aims to improve parenting confidence and abilities, to promote safe, timely, and lasting reunification, and to facilitate connections to Indigenous teachings and ceremony.



Available support and resources for families & caregivers

MÉTIS HEALTHY BABIES HEALTHY CHILDREN PROGRAM

Support to Métis folks, expectant parents, and families with children 0-6, including peer counseling, referrals, diapers, groceries, etc.

Phone: 1 (647) 615-6724

Email: alexandrian@metisnation.org

JAMES FUNNYHAT

Virtual stories and songs with James Funnyhat for children ages 10 and under

Visit his website today: click [here](#)

TRADITIONAL INDIGENOUS KINSHIP PRACTICES AT HOME GUIDE

Being Child-Centred During the Pandemic from Indigenous Motherhood

Visit their website today: click [here](#)

POSITIVE PARENTING TIPS

Audio file from Durham Children's Aid Society. Click on each link to play the file in your browser, or right-click and choose 'Save As' to save a copy to your computer. ([Audio File](#))

HELPING CHILDREN REGULATE THEIR EMOTIONS

Audio file from Durham Children's Aid Society. Click on each link to play the file in your browser, or right-click and choose 'Save As' to save a copy to your computer. ([Audio File](#))

FAMILY MEETINGS

Audio file from Durham Children's Aid Society. Click on each link to play the file in your browser, or right-click and choose 'Save As' to save a copy to your computer. ([Audio File](#))

DESCRIPTIVE PRAISE AND ENCOURAGING GOOD BEHAVIOUR

Audio file from Durham Children's Aid Society. Click on each link to play the file in your browser, or right-click and choose 'Save As' to save a copy to your computer. ([Audio File](#))

EMOTIONAL MESSAGES: HOW THE LANGUAGE WE USE CAN AFFECT A CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR

Audio file from Durham Children's Aid Society. Click on each link to play the file in your browser, or right-click and choose 'Save As' to save a copy to your computer. ([Audio File](#))

SPENDING TIME WITH CHILDREN

Audio file from Durham Children's Aid Society. Click on each link to play the file in your browser, or right-click and choose 'Save As' to save a copy to your computer. ([Audio File](#))



FAMILY GROUND RULES

Audio file from Durham Children's Aid Society. Click on each link to play the file in your browser, or right-click and choose 'Save As' to save a copy to your computer. ([Audio File](#))

TRANSITION TIMES TO AVOID MELTDOWNS

Audio file from Durham Children's Aid Society. Click on each link to play the file in your browser, or right-click and choose 'Save As' to save a copy to your computer. ([Audio File](#))

REQUESTS FOR TEENAGERS

Audio file from Durham Children's Aid Society. Click on each link to play the file in your browser, or right-click and choose 'Save As' to save a copy to your computer. ([Audio File](#))

HELPING A CHILD WITH ANXIETY

Audio file from Durham Children's Aid Society. Click on each link to play the file in your browser, or right-click and choose 'Save As' to save a copy to your computer. ([Audio File](#))

PARENT2PARENT SUPPORT NETWORK

Flyer for a support network that allows adoptive parents and kinship or customary caregivers to connect with and support one another

Website: click [here](#)

FOSTER PARENTS SOCIETY OF ONTARIO

Website for the Foster Parents Society of Ontario (FPSO), the dedicated voice of foster families in Ontario

Website: click [here](#)

LEAGUE OF ONTARIO FOSTER FAMILIES

Website for the League of Ontario Foster Families (LOFF), the provincial voice for the protection, support, education and advocacy for all foster family care providers

Website: click [here](#)

CAREGIVER TIPS & RESOURCES

Collection of resources from the Ontario Caregiver Organization

Website: click [here](#)



YOUNG PARENTS NO FIXED ADDRESS

Google Document with a list of community resources including food banks, mental health resources, and agencies

Website: click [here](#)

DIRECT SUPPORT SERIES AND LEADERSHIP SERIES

Free online professional and personal training for supporters of people with autism and developmental disabilities. From A Centre for Conscious Care

Website: click [here](#)

CAREGIVERS AND COVID-19: HELPING KIN, CUSTOMARY CARE AND FOSTER CAREGIVERS KEEP CHILDREN AND THEMSELVES SAFE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Recording of an OACAS hosted webinar providing practical guidance on caring for children in family-based, out-of-home care (kin, customary care, foster) during the pandemic

Website: click [here](#)

#COVIDISABILITY

Disability-related resources for families during the pandemic, from the Canadian Association for Community Living

Website: click [here](#)

CARING FOR AN INFANT, TODDLER OR YOUNG CHILD WITH COVID-19

Resource from OACAS providing guidance for those caring for young children diagnosed with COVID-19

Website: click [here](#)

HOW TO CARE FOR A CHILD WITH COVID-19 AT HOME: ADVICE FOR CAREGIVERS

Resource from the Public Health Agency of Canada

Website: click [here](#)

CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH PROBABLE OR CONFIRMED COVID-19

Resource from OACAS providing guidance for those caring for someone with COVID-19

Website: click [here](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANSPORTING SOMEONE WITH COVID-19

Resource from OACAS originally intended for child welfare staff

Website: click [here](#)



MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Guidance note from the Child Welfare League of Canada

Website: click [here](#)

VIRTUAL CARE RESOURCE GUIDE

Resource from Empowered Kids Ontario that addresses the foundational elements caregivers and services providers should be thinking about when it comes to virtual care

Website: click [here](#)

