

## Foster Parents Often Foster the Whole Family

Fostering Connections with Birth Family

By: Carrie Craft

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When doing foster care, we are given many opportunities to gain a connection to the child's family. How we choose to use these opportunities makes the difference between fostering a child and fostering a family.

### Taking Time with Parents and Extended Family

I've met grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other family members both before and after visits. Remember that these family members are experiencing a great loss as well. They often do not get the visitation time that parents are offered.

- Listen to what they have to say, if you're comfortable with the conversation. I've taken time with parents and other extended family members to jot down genealogy and later added that information to the children's life books. One grandfather related his WW II stories. This is a great way to help instill pride in the children's birth families, and to build a sense of self-esteem and identity within the child.
- The holidays bring a great opportunity for forming a connection with the family. Consider taking a gift to the parents. I usually get the child's picture taken for Christmas, and then bring framed photos to the parent. I also include an envelope with several different pictures in a variety of sizes, which parents can keep for themselves or choose to give to extended family. Additionally, I like to frame a smaller size photo, like a 5"x7", for grandparents at Christmas time. Another idea is purchasing a small scrapbook into which you can just slip photos. This makes a great gift, and the parents seem to enjoy the candid pictures. If you are uncomfortable giving a gift, a simple card is a nice gesture.

Remember that the goal of fostering is almost always reunification of the family. In most cases, this is best for all involved. By fostering these connections with the parents and building a relationship of trust, foster parents begin to mentor a whole family instead of fostering one child. Parents may then be willing to ask of you, the foster parents, parenting questions or advice. And, when the child goes home, the parents will have you as another resource to lean upon while they work to rebuild their lives. This is, hopefully, a relationship that will last between your two families for some time to come.

Your efforts to foster the whole family and build trust will give the child the opportunity to have several people in his/her life that care for him/her.