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# Working in Foster Care:

## How to prepare the reunification with the biological family?

22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022

# Reuniting foster children with their biological families: Considerations and Preparation

# The importance of the connection to the Biological Family

The permanence of contact between the child and his or her biological family is associated **with lower levels of depression and behavioral problems** in children and is **a facilitating factor in building their identity** and understanding their life path.



It is important to promote the child's relationship with his or her family of origin, since the bond does not disappear when leaving them.

When children are in short-term care and are expected to go back to the biological family, there is a predominant **need to promote a sense of connection and facilitate the relationship to the birth family.**





# The importance of the relationship and bond with the Foster Family

However...

At the same time, the child is expected to build a **secure attachment** to the family, without it interfering with the relationship with the biological family.



This attachment can even be a source of reparation from past harm.

**The Foster Family should be a source of comfort, stability, and affection for the child**, when in their care, while maintaining and promoting the sense of belonging to biological family, in the cases where reunification is a real possibility.



# Collaboration between the families

Steps to ensure a healthy and positive relationship between the biological and foster family, that promotes the child's well-being

Regulate personal thoughts and feelings regarding the other family to facilitate the relationship and promote a sense of belonging in the child (within both families).

Teach and promote good parenting skills and competencies.

Provide information regarding children's progress and the resources that are being used to promote it.

Promote cooperation of both families in the context of visits and schedules.

This is considered one of the most challenging tasks in foster care.

# Reunification with the Biological Family: Technical Teams Role

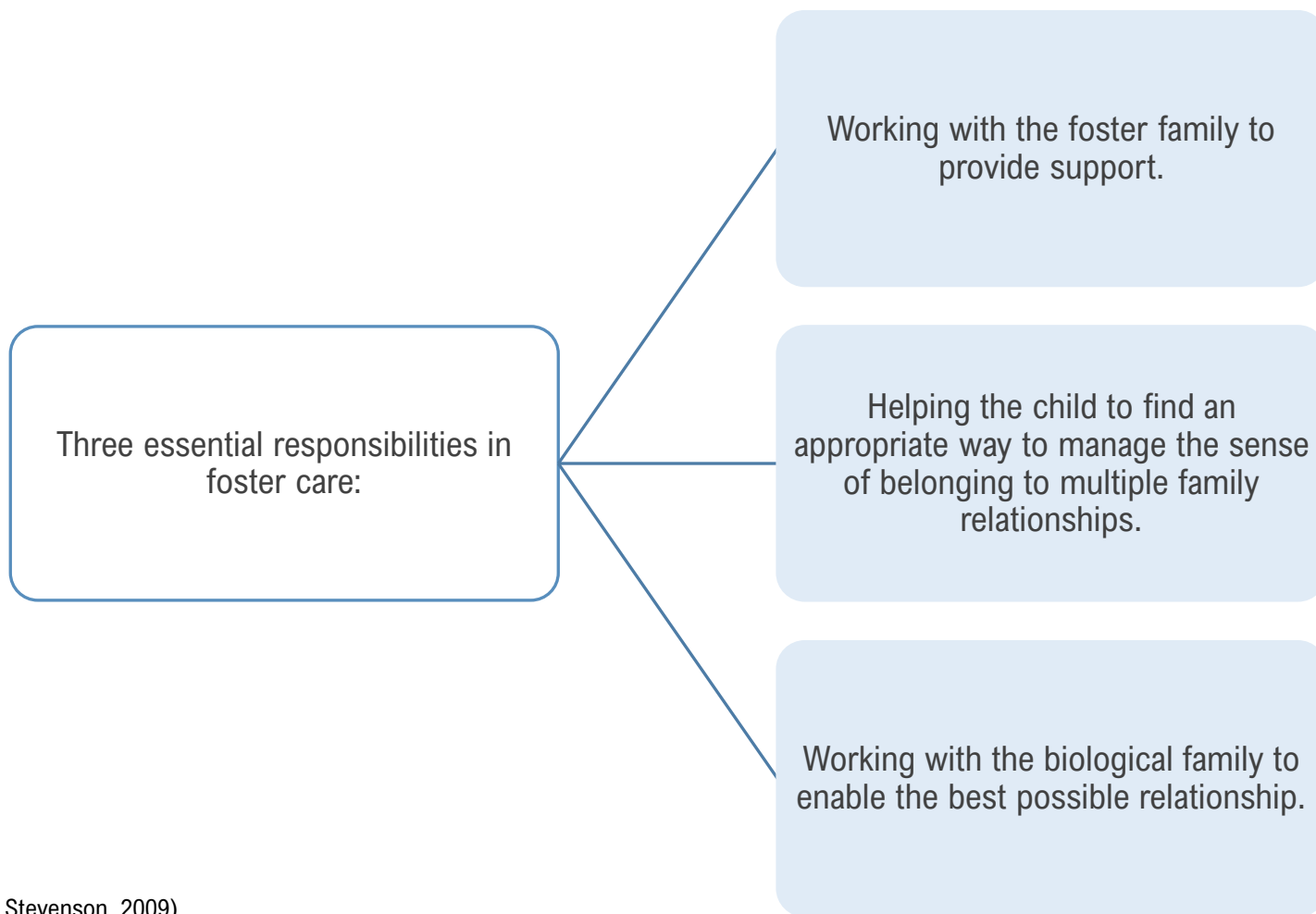
After the child's integration into the foster family, and for the duration of the stay, the competent Foster Care Team has the responsibility to support, assist, promote and assess the placement, until it ceases.

- The measure does not end with the placement.
- It combines:
  - Follow-up, support, and assessment.
  - Seeking to ensure that the foster carers meet the necessary conditions for the child's adequate development.
  - Follow the evolution of the biological family and continuously analyze the conditions or assumptions on which the child's life project is based.
- Accompaniment **cannot be limited to the support provided to the foster family and the foster child, it must include working with other teams that support or with the biological family directly**, seeking to encourage the changes that are necessary for reunification.





# Reunification with the Biological Family: Responsibilities of Teams in Foster Care



# Working with biological Families: Process for Reunification

1. **Analysis** of the biological family difficulties, potentials, and strengths, which is the basis or starting point for the recovery and potential reunification process.



2. **Intervention and support** aimed at promoting the necessary parental competencies.



3. Then, only if the biological family reunites the necessary conditions, the reunification is considered.

\*Assessing **motivation, willingness to change life conditions, and parenting competencies.**

\*\***Example:** Video feedback Intervention for promoting conscious parenting and sensitive discipline.

\*\*\* It's important to **manage the expectations** of both the biological family and the child, **so there are no misconceptions about the child's life plan.**







<a href="https://www.freepik.com/photos/baby-hand">Baby hand photo created by onlyyouqj - www.freepik.com</a>

# Children And Youth In Foster Care:

## The importance of Attachment for Intervention and Reunification

(Cassidy, 1999; Bowlby, 1956)

# What is Attachment? Is it important?

It is a close emotional relationship characterized by mutual affection and a desire to maintain closeness.

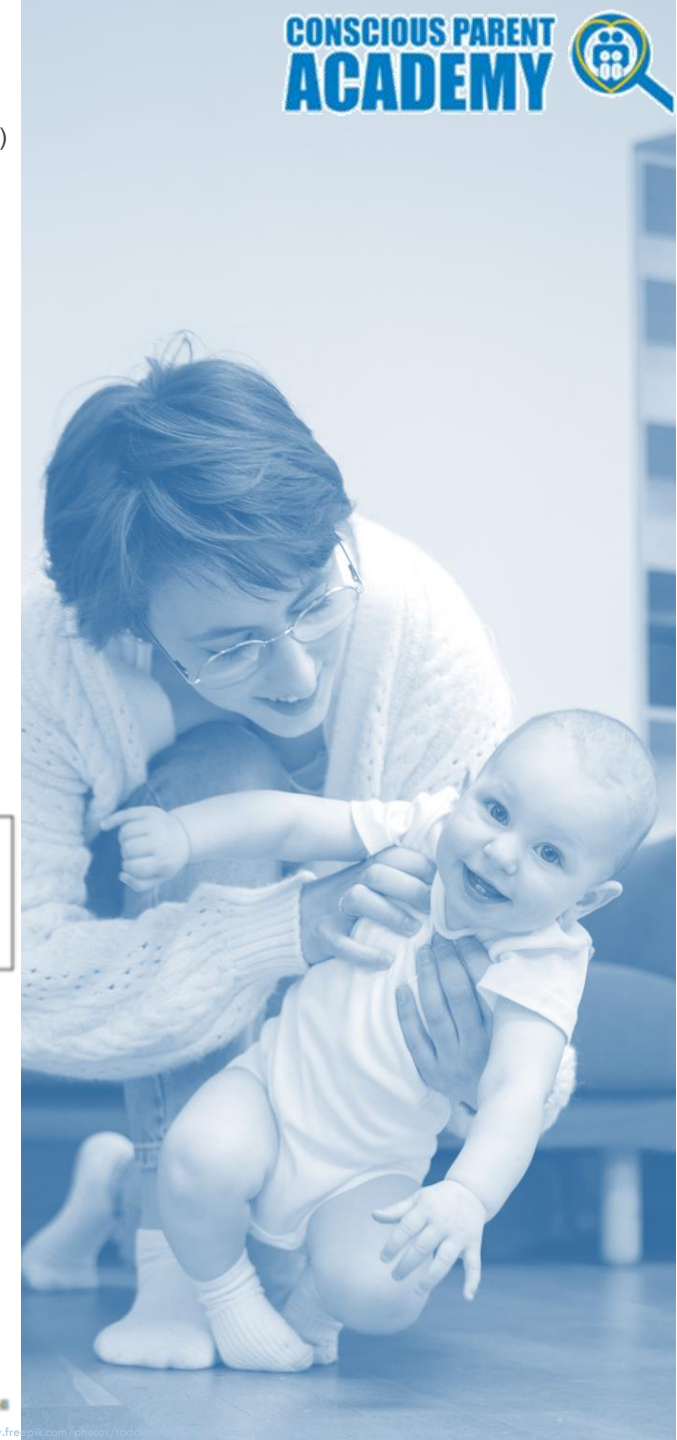
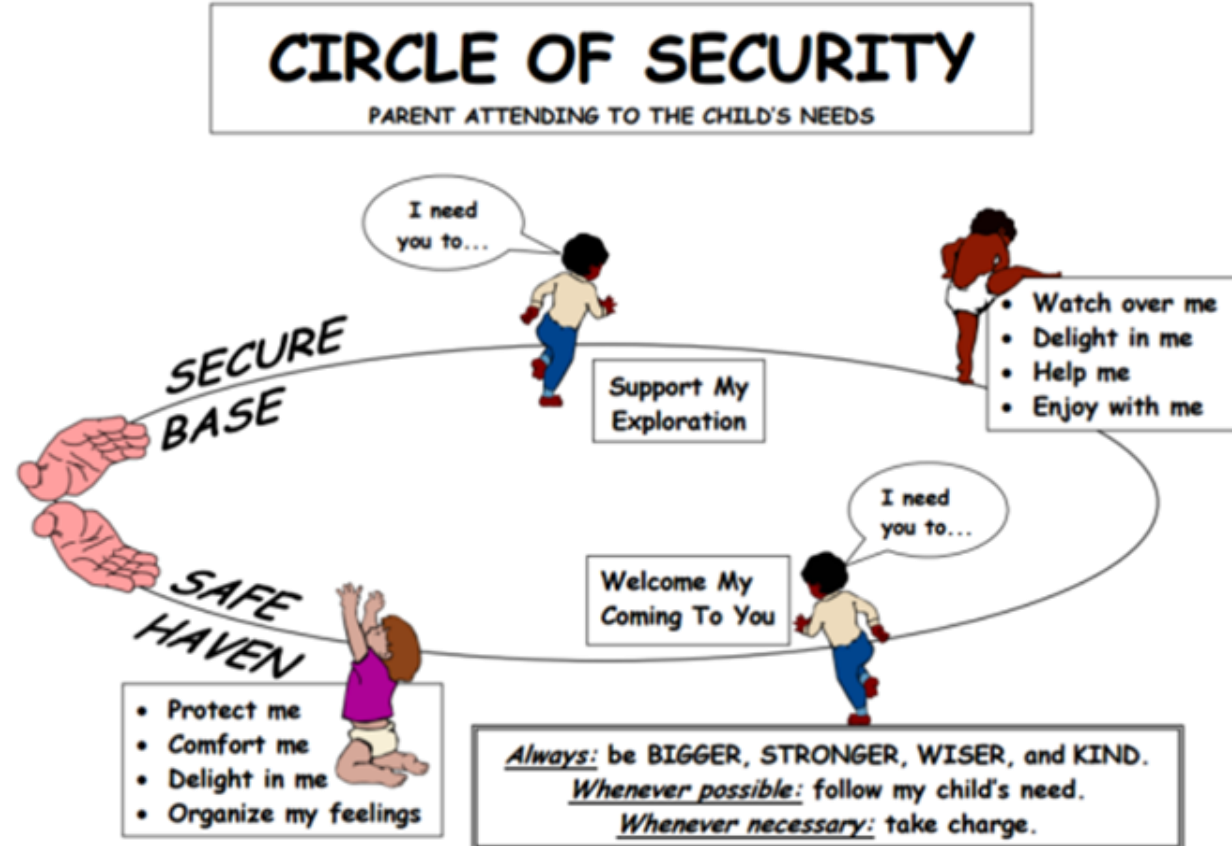
- It is the **first relationship** that the baby forms with its main caregiver.
- The object of this attachment is **the attachment figure**, which **is the person who usually reciprocates the child's feelings**, creating a **strong bond in both directions**.
- Most often, this figure **is the mother**.
- **It is selective and consists** in seeking physical proximity, comfort, and security.
- **The quality of the first child/attachment-figure relationships has a strong influence on the child's development**, on the organization of their attachment system, and on their ability to establish affective attachments then and throughout their life.



# The Circle Of Security

The relationship that is established with the caregiver is fundamental for the child's development, both in terms of their physical and emotional safety, as well as in encouraging the exploration of the environment and the promotion of their autonomy.

- The child explores the environment, if they feel that the caregiver acts as a “secure base” - they support the exploration and are involved in that experience, being present and available in case of need.
- When the child feels the need to approach the caregiver (e.g., because they are scared, distressed, or hurt), they expect the caregiver to be a “safe haven” - welcomes, comforts, and organizes their feelings, preparing them to resume exploration.





# How can it be promoted in the relationship?

The quality of care determines the organization of the relationship, through its effect on the level of trust in the caregiver's availability, that is, the security that the caregiver transmits.

## Sensitivity and Responsiveness

- Caregiver's ability to detect the signals implicit in the child's behaviors and communications, interpret them correctly, and respond to them appropriately, satisfying their needs.

- Establishment of a secure attachment.
- Development of language and cognition.
- Development of the child's socio-emotional skills.

## Intrusiveness

- Behaviors on the part of the caregiver that interfere with the child's activity and that show disrespect for their autonomy, desires, interests, and behaviors.
- Less involvement of the child with the caregiver.
- Insecure attachment pattern.
- Difficulties in the child's cognitive and socio-emotional development.
- Lower academic performance at school age.



# Video feedback Intervention in Foster Care

(Moss et al., 2014; Oliveira et al., 2021)

Video feedback Intervention is used for promoting conscious parenting in both biological parents/families and carers of children in foster care.

**This is an attachment-based intervention.**

For maltreating parents (e.g., negligence, physical abuse...)  
(of children from 1 to 6 years)

This intervention aims to:

1. Enhance parental sensitivity and competencies.
2. Promote child attachment security.
3. Reduce disorganized attachment.

For foster caregivers  
(of children from 11 months to 6 years)

This intervention aims to:

1. Promote conscious parenting and caregiving.
2. Encourage sensitive discipline.
3. Help restore attachment disfunctions.



# Video feedback Intervention: Characteristics of Biological Families

Maltreating parents are mostly described as:

Highly insensitive to the child's distress.

Have difficulty in responding to their cues and needs.

Demonstrate repeated episodes of hostile intrusiveness and/or emotional detachment.

Traumatic experiences and frequent exposure to high levels of stress and other risk factors may lead to:

Restrictions, mismatches, and hostility in interactions.

Less reciprocity, open communication, and ability to repair conflicts.

This leads to fear, uncertainty, and insecurity in the child, as they don't know what to expect from interactions with the adults.

(Moss et al., 2014)





# Video feedback Intervention with Biological Families: Why it works?

Why video feedback works with these parents:

Viewing one's own behavior, while being guided by an experienced and sensitive professional may help the parent reshape distorted perceptions and representations, that often maltreating parents have of themselves.



Video feedback and trained professionals can help parents recognize and interrupt role reversing, insecure, controlling, and intrusive parent-child interaction styles and reshape them into healthy, conscious, and positive interactions that promote the child's overall well-being.



# Video feedback Intervention with Foster Families: Why is it important?

Looked after children have been more exposed to harmful experiences, such as abuse, neglect, and disruption of parent-child bonds, which makes them vulnerable to suboptimal and disordered patterns of attachment\*\*.

Reactive Attachment  
Disorder

Disinhibited Social Engagement  
Disorder

Disorganized  
Attachment

**Almost exclusively in children subjected to:**  
extreme neglect and  
repeated changes in caregivers.

**More common when there was:**  
abuse, neglect, and highly  
insensitive/atypical parenting

**However,** this can be improved, meaning that  
children can become securely attached...



**When parental sensitivity and  
responsiveness is enhanced.**

\*\*These patterns can aggravate the risk for negative emotional and social outcomes for the child.

# Video feedback Intervention with Foster Families: Why it works?

- In foster care, children's **attachment cues are more subtle, highly distorted, or absent** (e.g., not crying when they hurt themselves because they're not used to being comforted).
- Making it **more difficult for caregivers to recognize, understand, and respond to them.**

So foster carers need to be:

More sensitively attuned to the child's cues and respond to them consistently and appropriately  
**(sensitivity and conscious parenting)**

Assertive, but affectionate and understanding, when disciplining unwanted behaviors  
**(sensitive discipline)**

This intervention provides a way for foster carers to be better equipped to identify and respond sensitively to support the child's secure attachment to them.



With observation and consecutive training in how to identify, interpret, and respond to challenging cues and emotional needs of their foster children.

(Oliveira et al., 2022)





# Video feedback Intervention with Families: Testimony



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiC-3uxwgDM&t=86s>

# Video feedback Intervention with Families



Thank you for your attention!

Dėkojame uŹ jūsų dėmesį

Dziękuję za uwagę



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