

How to prepare a child for the return to the biological family. Who are the family assistants?

THE TEAM FROM LITHUANIA

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Emotional security

- ❖ **Lifelong relationships** are important to all of us. Both we and our children have important bonds that last a lifetime and that we can rely on.
- ❖ The most important aspect of safety for children, as it is for us, is a sense of emotional safety. **Emotional security** occurs when another person to whom we are attached proves that this person can be trusted, is consistent, and is reliable over a long period of time.

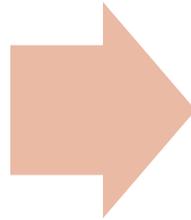


Children in foster care

- ❖ In cases where it is not possible to protect children at home, short – term foster care is established for them. To the guardians on duty, the child is protected, but **separation from the biological family can lead to a loss of the feelings of safety, belonging and continuity.**
- ❖ Children usually maintain strong bonds with their biological families, even though they may have experienced abuse and neglect. **Returning to the biological family is the most important goal ensuring permanence for a child in temporary foster care.**

Children's emotional state

Children who are returned to their biological family **experience many conflicting feelings**: hope and fear, sadness and joy. These feelings can be accompanied by regressive behavior.



In addition, breaking up with caregivers **often reminds of previous breakups and feelings**. As a result, the child may seem to lose what is learned and normal, as old feelings are awakened (reactivated).

Loyalty conflict



- ❖ Foster family must help the child avoid a conflict of loyalties. Children sometimes feel that they are pushing away their biological parents by attaching themselves to other individuals.
- ❖ Returning to their parents or being adopted, children can feel that they have betrayed their caregivers. Guardians must let such children understand that it is good that they have attached themselves to other adults.

Important aspects of communication with the child



As the child's return or leave to the another family approaches, **it is useful to fill the child's memory book.** It can include photos of the guardians, house or even pets. Items that remind the time spent in this family are also important. Each family member can write a letter to the child.

Older children must **be thoroughly discussed on a daily basis about their feelings,** return to the family, its timing and conditions. With younger children, you should talk more generally, without going into detail. It is important to consider the child's age and level of understanding.

Important aspects of communication with the child

Openness and sincerity are the two most important rules. Start calmly and simply about child's returning to the biological family: "Today, social worker contacted me and said..."

Speak directly, use simple words that the child can understand. If the child was very happy to hear that he will return to his biological family, celebrate with him.

However, the news can also **give the child a lot of anxiety** - he may be afraid of experiencing painful events again in his parents' family or in a new adoptive family.

Important aspects of communication with the child

Caregivers will need patience and understanding to help the child cope with their feelings about the separation. The child's feelings may depend on his previous experience, the losses he has experienced:

- ❖ **Feelings and memories may surface.** The child can talk about it or show it in his behavior. He can be angry, provoke or annoy the caregivers.
- ❖ **He can deny the separation to himself,** act as if nothing is happening, as if he does not care at all;
- ❖ **The child may blame himself,** try to reject the foster family;
- ❖ **He may be overly affectionate,** as if clinging to caregivers as if begging to be kept. You can name it in words;
- ❖ **The child may have questions** that he did not dare to ask before.

❖ The child's biological parents, guardians and social workers **should foresee in advance** what steps the caregiver will take to ease the child's return to the parents.



❖ A child who lived in a biological family, then in a caregivers family, had to **constantly adapt to all new conditions and demands made by adults**. Adults need to share information on a regular basis – guardians can tell about their family habits that could be adapted to the child's biological parents. It is especially important for young children to maintain a normal daily routine, food and sleeping schedule.

Important aspects of communication with the child

Last step – saying goodbye

❖ Saying goodbye to a foster child is one of the most difficult steps for caregivers. **All members of the guardians family must say goodbye to the child.** You should not avoid the child, distance yourself from him, be afraid that your tears or anxiety will upset the child. Otherwise, the child will think that he was not loved and important to the caregivers.



Last step – saying goodbye

- ❖ The child's caregivers and social workers that make the most important decisions regarding the child, **do not avoid various emotions**. Decisions are often made without all the necessary information.
- ❖ Thus, guardians experience a wide range of emotions, but they do not have to influence their behavior. **The most important thing is to consider the child's interests**, not your own emotional needs, and clearly understand and recognize your feelings.

Continuity

❖ In almost all cases, guardians **should maintain contact with the children.** During the transition period, you can keep in touch by phone or letters, sometimes organize meetings, participate in events together.





Thank you