



PROJECT

„CONSCIOUS PARENT ACADEMY – REPLACEMENT PARENT URGENTLY NEEDED!”

Project „Conscious Parent Academy – Replacement parent urgently needed!”, number: 2020-1-PL01-KA204-082283 is funded by the Erasmus + program.

The foster care-themed project will help to raise public awareness of foster care and encourage people to consider becoming a foster family. The project will help build positive values that will contribute to the chances of children finding a safe and loving home.

Title: How to be prepared to become a foster parent?

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What do foster parents need to know about themselves?

Before becoming guardians, candidates must assess themselves whether they have lack patience, have enough emotional resources, time for a new family member. Caregivers need to understand that the next child cannot be someone's substitute, but a full member of the family. On the other hand, one cannot take all the attention away from the biological child or spouse and concentrate only on the foster child. The well-being of the caregiver is very important, which affects the life of the whole family, so you should not forget to take care of your own needs – health, free time, hobbies, time spent with your spouse, friends. The ability to take care of oneself helps the child develop a sense of security. The child observes it, analyses it and understands that taking care of itself is very normal. By losing the ability to take care of ourselves, we risk losing authority in the eyes of the child, on the other hand, when we become „self-sacrificing“, we expect the same from the child. (Z.Giedrimas ir kt., 2013).

Motivation and expectations: Why do we want to raise a child?

Becoming a foster parent is determined by internal motivation – value beliefs and emotions.

The main reasons why caregivers decide to foster children are:

- altruism,
- desire to share,
- a need to give the best of themselves,
- social responsibility for children who have lost their parents,
- compassion and empathy,
- reducing loneliness and boredom, financial benefits.

Other motives may be the inability to have children, the feeling of „empty nest“ syndrome. The motives of relative and non-relative guardians of a child may differ. Relative guardians usually choose to foster children because they feel a sense of responsibility and duty to help their relatives, while non-relative guardians usually choose to foster a child because they want to help a child left without parental care, do not have their own children, or have biological children who have already grown up.

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The ability to be positive about a child's biological family, the importance of being open.

One of the main responsibilities of the foster family is to keep the child in contact with the biological parents and other close family members. This is considered one of the most difficult tasks for foster families.

Contacts may be stopped only if the court decides otherwise. Thus, an integral part of successful foster care is the caregiver's attitude toward the child's biological parents.

How the ward's self-esteem will be formed, the attitude towards the guardians themselves and, accordingly, the quality of the relationship with them, and the child's behavior during and after the guardianship largely depend on this attitude. How children perceive themselves depends greatly on how they perceive their biological parents. If children are convinced that their biological parents are great, they will have a strong reason to think the same way about themselves, it's the same the other way around. A positive attitude of the guardians towards the biological parents forms a positive self-esteem of the child, and a negative one - a negative one.

Sometimes it is not easy for guardians to name the positive qualities of a child's biological parents. The guardian must acquire this skill, otherwise the guardianship may not meet all the needs and interests of the foster child. It is only a matter of time before such guardianship fails.

Faced with similar difficulties, caregivers may benefit from the help of a psychologist. It is important for the guardian to learn to see the whole picture of the life of the biological parents, and not only the negativity. They must be guided by the whole of experience when evaluating biological parents, and not focus on the mistakes of a loved one, even if they have fatal consequences.

1. How to be a prepared person?

Personal skills (soft skills) that foster parents should possess.

Personal skills play a key role in a person's life, both in a personal and professional environment. In recent years, emphasis has been placed on the important role played by „soft skills“ in dealing with challenges. Caring for a child in a family inevitably comes with challenges. Therefore, „soft skills“ that can be improved at any time are also important for caregivers (foster parents). Below are the personal skills that can make a difference to successful (foster) childcare.

Self-awareness. Being able to observe yourself and understand your feelings and impulses to act is a key skill in mindfulness. This skill is important as early as the decision to become a foster carer. If the foster parents are conscious and clearly answer the questions:

- „Who am I?”,
- „What is my purpose?”,
- „What I want?”,
- „What can I give?”,
- „What do I commit to doing?”,

The ability to self-awareness is also very important for children. Teach your child to assess their condition throughout the day. How to stop, take a breath and ask yourself:

- „What do I need now?”,
- „How can I get it in the best possible way?”,

This will help develop self-control and introspection skills. It is important to remember that these skills are best developed in a state of rest, when physical and psychological needs are met.

Active listening. The skill of active listening is a key communication skill. In the family, being able to listen actively is especially important. Active listening means focusing your attention on the child and really understanding them. We use the skill of active listening when the child is experiencing unpleasant feelings: being upset, hurt, angry or sad. The goal of active listening is to show that you understand your child's feelings and experiences and that what they are feeling is normal. It is important for every child to feel accepted, and for a child in care it can be a new experience.

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Empathy is the ability to empathize with the experiences of another person, to understand what they feel. Empathy is an especially important skill for caregivers. It is very important to be able to understand what a child feels after losing parental care. It is important for caregivers to remind themselves that the child may have experienced frightening things. So let it grow at its own pace, don't rush or encourage it, but watch carefully as it develops gently.

Problem solving. Being able to solve problems effectively is an extremely valuable skill. There are always problems in life, one problem is replaced by another. Therefore, this skill can help in all areas of life, including parenting. Children learn problem-solving skills by watching adults solve problems. It is also possible to pass on skills to children by allowing them to practice the skill. It is possible to organize family meetings, during which problems relevant to family members are raised and resolved. You can prepare for this in advance and determine the order.

- Focus on one problem at a time,
- Brainstorm various possible solutions,
- Choose the ones that seem most suitable,
- Decide which solutions will be tested in practice,
- Set a time when you will check to what extent the problem has been resolved.

Conflict management. Conflicts are an integral part of life. When every family member can express their opinion in the family, conflicts are inevitable. Conflicts in the family are not to be feared, they can even be beneficial. The positive thing is that children learn this life skill by watching how the caregiver deals with a given conflict. Therefore, it is wrong to constantly avoid solving problems and running away from conflicts. The child should observe and learn from the caregivers that despite different opinions and views, people can still communicate and be good to each other. Of course, conflicts also have their negative side. It is very important that children don't become permanent observers of conflicts. Constant arguments have a negative impact on children's mental health. That's why healthy conflict management skills are essential in every family.

Simple steps for conflict management can include:

- Listen to your partner without interruption,
- Paraphrase in your own words what you heard,
- Try to understand the other party's point of view and feelings. This doesn't mean that you have to agree or disagree with what the person says,
- Use „I“ sentences to express your feelings without an accusatory tone,
- Try not to use abstract words like „never“, „always“, „forever“.

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Cooperation. Cooperation is especially important in family life, it includes the ability to share duties and responsibilities, as well as the ability to solve problems. In the family, we prepare children for the future life, for independent life in society. A child will never live alone without interacting with others, so it needs the ability to cooperate. Let's teach children to talk and listen to others, express their opinions and understand that other people can have different opinions, and this is worthy of respect. Let's teach them responsibility for their actions and teamwork for a common goal. It's not always easy for adults either, so first let's improve these skills ourselves.

Consistency. Consistency in caring for a child is especially important. Consistency is important in plans, words and deeds. In this way, the child will know what to expect from the guardian, and this will give the child a sense of security. Let us remember that safety is a basic human need, and given the experience of these children, this need is often violated and extremely needed.

To ensure consistency:

- Stick to a constant, unchanging routine,
- keep your word and follow through on your promises,
- adhere to agreements,
- use a consistent incentive system,
- respond to repeated situations in the same way.

How do you learn to cope with loss and how can you help your foster child?

A child can leave the guardian's family for various reasons:

- return to biological family,
- adoption,
- age of majority,
- refusal to live with a guardian,
- abandonment of the child by the guardian,
- unfulfilled duties by the guardian.

The caregiver may then feel a variety of feelings from: sadness, anger, relief if the child has had serious behavioral problems; joy if the child is adopted by another family, to anxiety if the child is returned to the birth family. It is important to have time to prepare for the moment of separation. After learning about the breakup, the first thing the caregiver needs to do is deal with their feelings. Then talk to children and it doesn't always matter what age they are. It is necessary to tell them where they will travel, to familiarize them with the current situation. Speak calmly and benevolently. Don't promise a child something they're not sure about, find positive things. The caregiver should share their fears and feelings with the professionals they work with. Allow themselves to experience those emotions, open and talk, understand that these feelings are normal and understandable. If you succeed - change the environment at least for a while. Another way to overcome the loss of a guardian is mutual support groups, where like-minded people meet to share good experiences not only about the child's social and psychological needs, how they met them, but also how they overcame the loss, the period of adaptation, how they solved the difficulties that arose. Support groups have one thing in common - they are unstable, i.e., members are constantly changing. Another feature of these groups is that they are chosen when there is a need. Therefore, meetings are not forced, they are organized out of necessity. Also, these groups perform educational, therapeutic and recreational functions. During the meeting of the self-help group, guardians improve their professional competences, gain knowledge, sharing not only their own experience, but also that of the child. They learn to solve difficulties related to caregiving, they consult and advise each other, there is a kind of continuous training, thus strengthening their psychological resilience. Another important function of a self-help group mentioned is therapy. The guardian can talk, express their opinion, make themselves calm down. A person seems to get rid of an excess of information and problems, pours out their emotions (S.Kirtiklienė, 2021).

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1. How to be a prepared person?	<p>What are the responsibilities of foster families?</p> <p>First, foster families must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure the child's physical and mental safety by creating safe environment, • meet the physical and emotional needs of the child, • take care of the child's health, education and proper upbringing, • take care of the child's free time, considering their age, health, development and preferences, • be open-minded because the child needs to know his or her story, • prepare the child for independent life and work in the family, civil society and the state. <p>In addition, guardians must cooperate with state and local government institutions in resolving matters related to the child's interests. And most importantly: do not make it difficult for the child to communicate with the biological parents, if this does not harm the interests of the child.</p>
	<p>Is it possible to choose a child for foster care?</p>
	<p>Caregivers can choose the gender and age of the child they want to care for, but the family is chosen for the child according to the needs of a specific child. Guardians can't choose a specific child unless a relative is taken into care and the child has close emotional ties to the caregivers. The guardian is selected considering his motivation, values, strengths of the guardian.</p>
	<p>Why can guardianship be terminated?</p>
	<p>The guardian may be relieved of his duties if he is unable to properly perform his duties due to his or her relatives' illness, deterioration of the financial situation or other important reasons. The guardian may be dismissed from his duties if he performs his duties improperly, fails to protect the rights and interests of the child or uses his powers for selfish purposes. Both the guardian-natural person and the guardian-legal person may be dismissed or removed from their duties. (reference number 1)</p>

The most common myths about being a foster family? And how to overcome them?

A decision to become a foster parent can be negatively influenced by the still-established attitude in society that child guardianship is an extremely controversial area. The media and any other means of publicity emphasize the complex behavior and problems of foster children, the inability of guardians to raise such children, and sometimes even abuse of parental authority and exploitation by guardians. There is still a lack of information, the dissemination of good experiences, what exactly families who care for children go through and what benefits they themselves receive.

The most common myths in society:

The child inherits bad genes

A child's personality is mostly shaped by upbringing and the experiences gained during the first three years. In the first years of life, a child's worldview is shaped by parents/caregivers, later, friends, school and the extracurricular environment have an increasing influence. There is no behavior and character gene. However, if those around you constantly emphasize the child's bad behavior and expect only the worst, eventually the child will unconsciously try to live up to these expectations. Abandoned or abused, children are much more sensitive and vulnerable because of their traumatic experiences. Therefore, there may be more problems in adolescence. However, it is not really „bad genes“ that are to blame, but bad experiences in childhood. Abandoned or abused, children are much more sensitive and vulnerable because of their traumatic experiences. Therefore, there may be more problems in adolescence. However, it is not really „bad genes“ that are to blame, but bad experiences in childhood.

Teenagers are fully formed personalities

Teenagers growing up in foster care are at the age when they still need a lot of help, care and support. A good routine and a loving and nurturing environment can have a huge positive impact on young people facing life-changing decisions. The latest research shows that the human brain continues to develop until the age of 20. Behavior is changed by the social environment. When children are cared for at home, they feel safer, so their brains are ready to change their behavior.

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You will not be able to love a foster child as a family member

Altruistic personalities usually make decisions to care for children, which means a natural ability to love and help others. Research has shown that love and attachment are not necessarily based on biology. When a child moves into a foster home, it is undoubtedly stressful. In addition, the child also experiences the loss of his former environment – teachers, friends, school, his yard, etc. The guardian needs patience, attention and understanding at this moment. The caregiver must know that it will take time for the child to overcome the unpleasant feelings of being part of a new family. People who take on the life-changing task of caregiving have big hearts and know that love begets love.

Guardianship of older children can negatively affect the biological children of the family

When discussing the prospect of foster care, many people worry about the potential negative impact on biological children. Studies have shown that siblings, both step and biological, have less influence than their peers at school, friends in the playground or on social networks. Young people prone to commit crimes or break the law are not provided with foster care in the family, so such a child will not be placed in a foster family. Guardians are offered care for teenagers who urgently need a caring family that will show them what love, security, stability looks like and how valuable the human-to-human bond is.

The child can be picked up by the biological parents at any time

People who want to take care of a child are often afraid of possible contact with the child's biological parents and the fact that the child may be taken away at any time. By law, guardians must provide biological parents with information about their children and allow them to see them. Above all, however, it is considered whether meetings with parents will not harm the child. It is not enough for the biological parents to simply want their child back and assert their rights. First, they must prove that they can properly care for the child. However, even in this case, the court grants custody of the child if the child has established strong emotional bonds with the guardians over many years. Stability is extremely important for children. Myths are dispelled as the public gains more knowledge and information about the foster care process. The causes and nature of the difficulties faced by children left without parental care and the availability of services for each foster family. (Rugilė Ladauskienė, 2021).

How to deal with stress and worries? Social and emotional skills.

It is important to remember that adults are children's role models. You can see how the skills that parents have are passed on to their children. The development of social and emotional skills has recently received a lot of attention. Social emotional skills include the ability to understand and regulate one's own and others' emotions. These skills also include the ability to make responsible decisions and set goals and systematically pursue them. (CASEL, 2017)

Tools suitable for stress management:

Mindfulness has already been proven to be an effective stress management tool. Schedule time for mindfulness practices. You can use various apps or online posts to help you develop this skill or sign up for group classes in your city. Tools suitable for stress management:

Breathing exercises regulate the vegetative nervous system and allow you to calm down. Breathing correctly not only increases energy, but also clears the mind. There are many breathing exercises: diaphragmatic breathing, controlled breathing or breathing with affirmations. It is recommended to practice breathing exercises for 1-2 minutes several times a day. Various mobile apps, recordings or courses can be used for this.

Positive thinking. It's a mistake to think that positive people don't experience stress - everyone does. However, positive thinking makes it easier to cope with stress. Psychologist and lifestyle coach Elizabeth Anne Scot notes in her book „8 Keys to Stress Management" that calm and happy people can look more broadly, to perceive life's troubles and tension as a surmountable temporary or unpleasant situation that will pass. It has also been observed that happy people have extremely strong and unchanging values that provide peace of mind. Every day, think about what you are grateful for, what good things you have in yourself and in your environment. This will help promote positive thinking.

Physical activity and proper nutrition. A person's physical health and well-being have a lot of influence on the prevention of stress. It is important to eat properly, drink enough fluids, and sleep well. Getting enough exercise is important for maintaining good health and reducing stress. You can go for a walk every day for 30 minutes. or choose your favorite sport and practice it consistently. In the family, it is a great way for everyone to move physically together - go out with the children to play football, basketball, ride bicycles, go hiking. In this way, you will form a healthy lifestyle for children from an early age.

1. How to be a prepared person?

Social support. Man is a social being; he does not live alone. Therefore, it is very important to create a social environment that nurtures and provides a positive atmosphere. Research confirms the importance of social support for human well-being: social integration is associated with better physiological human functioning and lower risk of physical disorders (Yang and other, 2016). Social relationships have been proven to be a significant part of a person's life, acting as a protective factor against the negative effects of distress on mental and physical health. (Cohen and Wills, 1985).

Therefore, it is very important to pay attention to your social connections and, if necessary, adjust them:

- Establish and maintain relationships with benevolent and positive people,
- Join an association, a society that connects people with common interests (the Association of Foster Care in your country),
- Help people who have less,
- Avoid toxic relationships,
- Make time to be with friends and loved ones.

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How to effectively communicate with your children? Why it's important to speak openly to be honest with each other.

In parenting, it is very important to treat children with respect. A relationship based on mutual respect creates a safe and loving family atmosphere. All children have basic psychological needs. When those needs are met, a psychologically healthy personality develops. Effective communication with children means open, sincere and empathetic communication. By communicating in this way, we teach children this communication and they transfer it to their environment.

How to help a child cope with difficult experiences and help enjoy childhood?

Understand the child's needs and respond to them. Caregivers are like a haven for a child, where the child knows they will get support and help if they need it. It is especially important that these children firmly know that there is at least one adult in the world who will accept them unconditionally. Research shows that this is one of the conditions for children to thrive. Thus, caregivers must have a basic knowledge of child psychology in order to understand what needs are behind the appropriate behavior of children. According to schema therapy (C. Loose, 2020), every child has basic psychological needs, no matter where they grow up or what age they are. Just as plants need water, sun, soil and proper care to grow, children need certain things to grow up happy, confident and successful.

The basic needs of children are love and secure attachment, safety, authenticity, play and pleasure, clear boundaries. Caregivers must understand that a child in care may have unmet needs or some need that is violated. It is possible that a child who has lost parental care will have his need for safety, love or secure attachment violated. Therefore, these needs will require more attention and efforts to fill these gaps.

Develop psychological resilience. Psychological resilience in children is the ability to deal with life's challenges and difficulties with hope and positivity. It is also the ability to recover from difficult experiences or crises. Research shows that all people are born with some level of resilience, but this skill can be developed at any stage of a person's life. By fostering children, families can provide children with the knowledge and skills to strengthen their psychological resilience. In the book Building Resilience in Children and Teens, 2020, Kenneth R. Ginsburg presents a 7-component model of resilience education that includes the following skills: competence, character, control, engagement, coping strategies, connection, confidence. To assess how much resilience a child has, one can use this model to assess each component and then develop them.

Develop positive thinking. Positive thinking is one of the characteristics of successful people. If adults want to give children more, they can form positive thinking in children from an early age. For children in foster care, this can be more difficult because of the children's previous negative experiences. This can be a serious challenge for caregivers, but consistent efforts will pay off. Changing children's attitudes and developing positive thinking can be done in many ways: reading and discussing stories, watching movies, discussing real life stories, playing and modeling situations in games and from your own examples.

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Training for foster families:
1. Does it really help to be prepared?
2. What is the training about (substantively)?

Lithuania

**2. How to prepare
for being a foster
family as a
couple?**

The family taking care of the children must be fully prepared, because the guardians are the child's educators, therefore special preparation is necessary. Until 2008, the training of tutors was unregulated and chaotic. Each municipality used its own methodology and methods. GIMK trainings are organized in two stages. In the first stage, conditions are created for future foster and adoptive parents to self-assess their choices and motivation. Through groups during sessions, individual conditions are created for conversation, sharing experiences, openly revealing one's feelings. Participants of the program seek answers to various care questions themselves. During the training, knowledge and skills are transferred, such as:

- work in a team to ensure the child's stability:
 - the need to talk openly with the child,
 - getting to know the stages of child development,
 - patterns of behavior,
 - the ability to recognize his development needs.
- how to mitigate the effects of losing parents:
 - how to raise his self-esteem and strengthen family ties,
 - how to properly educate,
 - how to prepare for changes in life,
 - how to help you make informed decisions.

During the second GIMK program, help is provided to people who have already become carers. They receive constant support and advice on care issues and everyday challenges. The GIMK program develops five groups of abilities, according to which caregivers are evaluated:

1. Providing a safe environment and meeting physical needs – shows whether the person/family can provide the child with a safe home environment, provide the child with a safe home environment, a positive psychological environment and can meet the child's material needs.
2. Satisfying the child's developmental needs and compensating for developmental difficulties – conditions are created to learn about the way of life of the family, habits, approach to the development of the child's personality; whether the foster parents can understand the child's loss/going through; how attachment and social skills should be strengthened; how to nurture mutual relationships based on trust and develop the child's ability to live independently.

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3. Ensuring the child's bond with the biological family – explaining the relationship of the family to the child, the biological family to the child, his history, communication, relations with family members, relatives, helping the child to understand his identity.

4. Helping the child establish safe and durable relationships – individuals are trained to help the child establish safe and trusting interpersonal relationships with the new family and environment.

5. Cooperation in solving child and family problems – learns how a person is capable to cooperate with competent authorities and specialists in dealing with the child and the family problems.

The discussed five skills are developed so that future guardians understand what awaits them when caring for a child taken in care, showing that such upbringing of a child is different from raising a biological child. There is a trend that potential caregivers idealize the care process and expect the child to be very good and without defects. Therefore, during training it is emphasized that a child who has lost parental care may feel shame or anger, which the caregivers will face. There is a trend that potential caregivers idealize the care process and expect the child to be very good and without defects. Therefore, during training it is emphasized that a child who has lost parental care may feel shame or anger, which the caregivers will face. The candidates must understand well the needs of the child, orientate oneself in the lived experience and emotional world, and be able to be open to accept the child's story, be able to understand the consequences of one's behavior on the child's development and emotional development, recognize the feelings of the foster child and help them live with them. On the other hand, future guardians on duty guardians, adoptive parents must be ready for change.

During the training, by interviewing the participants, the opinion is formed that the training is useful because it encourages the development of individuals: updates knowledge, changes attitudes, acquires new skills in conflict situations to decide how to help the child resolve arising internal conflicts, overcome losses; so provides personal benefits because it satisfies psychosocial needs (Vilnius, 2018).

Training for foster families:
1. Does it really help to be prepared?
2. What is the training about (substantively)?

Poland

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Candidates for a foster family who meet the requirements, after passing the qualification procedure (individual interview, checking the social and living conditions, psychological opinion about their predispositions and motivation to perform the function of a foster family as well as their upbringing competences) are referred to training in order to obtain qualifications. Training for non professional foster families lasts 62 hours and for professional foster families an additional 18 hours. Training for candidates for foster parents or managing family children's home is conducted by external entities or by the foster care organizer. The training program must be approved by the Minister of Family and Social Policy. Training activities are conducted based on the „Family" training program licensed by the Association of Adoptive and Foster Families „Pro Familia" in Krakow and approved by the Minister of Labor and Social Policy. The „Family" training program is a nationwide educational program. In our Centre (in Żory), we do not conduct this training, but it is commissioned to other entities (as above). In opinion of employees of the Foster Care Department in MOPS Żory and foster families who have completed such training, it is very useful and helpful. The training shows both the positive and negative sides of being a foster family. For many people, training is a confirmation of whether they really want to perform this function. It happens that after completing the training, people give up this intention, because they become convinced that it is not an easy work.



Portugal

Training for foster families: 1. Does it really help to be prepared? 2. What is the training about (substantively)?

2. How to prepare for being a foster family as a couple?

In Portugal, there are three informative/formative moments mandatory for candidates and foster families. The first one is an informative session, directed to candidates, aiming to clarify their questions related to foster care and take an informed decision on whether to continue the process and what to expect. In this session, several subjects are addressed:

- Requirements and necessary conditions to apply as a foster family,
- Formalize the application process,
- Stages in the foster care process,
- Rights and responsibilities of foster children/adolescents, biological families, and foster families,
- Training process,
- Nature of the supports and incentives,
- Common profiles and characteristics of the foster children,
- Necessary conditions from the foster family and the importance of safeguarding children's well-being and protection,
- Main challenges of the foster care process,
- Importance of the biological family in the fostering process.

After the informative session, the candidates decide if they want to continue the process. If so, follow an assessment phase and if candidates are accepted as foster families, initial training takes place, before their selection as a foster family.

Initial training gives information about:

- Promotion and Protection System of Children's Rights,
- Legal and social framework of foster care (including ethical guidelines and principles),
- Previous situations and concerns associated with children in the system (e.g., neglect, physical/psychological abuse, sexual abuse, dysfunctional families...).

Role of foster care and the importance of foster families:

- Impacts on family life dynamic due to child's integration into the foster family,
- Main characteristics and needs of foster children and youth,



Portugal

2. How to prepare for being a foster family as a couple?

- Psychosocial development of the child and the role of the foster family in its stimulation,
- Emotion and conflict management,
- Importance and promotion of the involvement of the biological family in the process of foster care,
- Basic principles of childhood and youth health (safety, health, and nutrition),
- Prevention of domestic accidents and first aid,
- Competencies of the foster institutions and the technical teams that accompany foster families and foster children.

Articulation/communication between institutions that work with foster care (e.g., courts, Local Commissions for the Protection of Children and Young People...). If foster families have previous experience in foster care (up to two years before the application) or if the institution that manages the foster care perceives the family as already competent, foster families may be dismissed from this training. Next, at least once a year, continuous training takes place to tackle specific training necessities of each foster family, that can be identified by the institution or solicited by foster families. These sessions can take several forms: individualized training, group training, informative sessions, workshops, and discussion groups with other foster families. The subjects addressed in continuous training focus on the specific needs of the foster children, such as children with special needs or challenges that the family faces regarding child-rearing tasks. Some examples of the topics covered are:

- Child development (physical, psychological, emotional, social...),
- Parenting styles,
- The role of school in personal and social development,
- Intimacy experience in adolescence,
- Importance of the peer group in adolescence,
- Strategies for preparing and supporting the transition of youth to an active and autonomous life,
- Strategies for functional and adaptative support and reorganization of the biological family.

The training is provided by the Foster Care management institutions (Social Security Institute, Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa, and other Private Social Solidarity Institutions) and is free of charge for the families (Decree order no. 278-A/2020; Instituto de Segurança Social, I.P., 2011, 2022). Both foster families and professionals consider the training relevant, helping them prepare for Foster Care and its challenges (Carvalho, Delgado, & Pinto, 2019).

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couple?**

How effectively communicate with your partner during the educational process?

The ability to cooperate effectively is important because it determines the emotional state and mental climate of a person. First common goals must coincide, both family members must want to become guardians. Therefore, it is necessary to be completely open with each other, share your aspirations, values, and doubts. Discussions and deliberations, discussing information with each other help to deepen the learning material. Good mutual relations and education will provide pleasant mutual emotions, because it is a joint activity of partners.

How do you learn to let your foster child go their own way and have their own experiences?

For a child to be independent on his/her adult path, first he/she must be allowed to make mistakes. This doesn't mean that failures should be ignored or that good results should not be encouraged. We must inspire a child to seek challenges, not be afraid of them, but at the same time teach to appreciate and be proud of efforts, not results. The results, even when we try, are not always great because they depend on many other factors, often beyond our control. And here, effort guarantees a feeling of success, because everyone can try. Of course, adults could help focus on things that the child is good at, rather than on activities that are beyond the child's abilities.

It is also important to help a child learn to be happy with a good result rather than a perfect one. Perfectionism promotes competition, envy, disappointment, inability to rejoice not only in other people's achievements, but also on its own achievements. And what is a pretty good result? Any result that a child has achieved through desire and effort. It may not look perfect to an adult, but it shows what the child is capable of at that time. Constantly commenting, demanding more than the child can do at the moment, can cause feelings of helplessness, lowered self-esteem and loss of self-confidence.

It is necessary to show the child that it's valued and loved not for what it can do, but for what kind of person it will grow up to be. It is necessary to praise beautiful character traits, noble deeds, interesting thoughts, fun fooling around. Help the child understand that mistakes are a normal part of learning. A child needs to understand that the goals are achieved step by step, within a certain period. Appreciate your child's efforts, especially when it takes risks, tries something new, or overcomes obstacles.

Do not protect children from making mistakes, because in this way they will simply not gain the experience of what to do when they face difficulties, from which life is inseparable. It is better to help stay with the emotions that have arisen and give advice on what to do next. Such lessons will be useful for a lifetime. Teach by example! Rethink how your own characteristics influence upbringing and your relationship with your child.

2. How to prepare for being a foster family as a couple?

How to manage the presence of biological children in foster families?

The appearance of a child in a foster family can have a significant impact on the well-being of biological children and the life of the whole family. Therefore, it is very important to properly prepare not only caregivers, but also other family members, including biological children. It is very important that you explain to your children your values, which guide you in wanting to care for a „new" child.

- First, it is important to discuss with the biological children the issue of custody of the child taken into custody, to analyze all the pros and cons. See if biological children really understand how family life can change. Getting their consent is very important at this point,
- Involve your children in the caregiving process, ask how they would like and be able to contribute. Respect their choices,
- Make sure your biological children's needs are met. Respect their personal space and belongings. Discuss these issues as a family,
- Leave personal time only for your biological children. Set a specific time when you and your child will be alone without other family members. Plan possible activities,
- Keep agreements with biological children. Keep your word, try to deviate as little as possible from your usual routine. Of course, understand that change may be inevitable,
- Use the usual incentive system and connection strengthening methods. Continue with your normal rituals and activities.
- Accept your child's feelings about custody, whatever they may be.

3. How to prepare as a foster family?

How to include a child in family life?

A sense of belonging is very important for a foster child. When you find yourself in a new, unfamiliar environment, it can be difficult to adapt, especially if you have to deal with unpleasant feelings and sadness caused by being separated from your family. Caregivers at this point can facilitate the child's inclusion in the family by empathically accepting the child. Warm emotional connection and trusting relationships help the child feel a sense of belonging.

- First, introduce the child to the home environment and ground rules. Clarity makes children feel safer,
- Show the child his personal space in your home (room, bed, table),
- Establish a regular daily routine and stick to it,
- You can use various methods to strengthen safety and connection: a bedtime talk, a discussion of the day over tea, a story, etc.,
- When possible, ask the child's opinion, let him choose and decide,
- Give the child responsibilities for household chores so that he feels like a member of the family just like everyone else,
- Hug (if possible), encourage, praise and notice positive behavior.

3. How to prepare as a foster family?

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