

ACCESSING SERVICES AND SUPPORTS- RIGHT TIME VIDEO

Key Points

General Information:

- All parents who foster or adopt may need services and supports because all children, even those you've been parenting from a very young age, will have experienced some level of separation, loss and grief.
- Even if things are seemingly well in the home, children may need extra supports with social skills, emotional development, cognitive ability and/or their physical abilities. Parents who foster or adopt will oftentimes need to seek out services.
- You are not in this alone. It will be important to know what services and supports are available in your area, from the very beginning of your journey.

Part I: Key Strategies to Advocate

- Partner with providers of care:
 - Don't make demands, come with solutions;
 - Schools are often places where advocacy is needed to make sure the educational and behavioral needs of children are being met;
 - Inform yourself of where your child's development should be and what is needed to help them achieve that. Advocacy can help children reach their full capacity;
 - Be present and helpful in locations children may need support, such as school settings;
 - Try not to be intimidated by professionals and remember that your voice is equally important in regards to the child's needs and;
 - Keep advocacy efforts focused on the child's needs and not how the issues impact parents.
- Keep records of everything including:
 - Child's background information;
 - Medical records;
 - School report cards and educational information and;
 - Any information you receive about the child;

There may be little information currently available, especially for children adopted internationally, in which case, it is critical to partner with a pediatric clinic that specializes in international adoption.

Write everything down/document as much as possible (such as a log of medication names, doses, dates and the child's reactions to medication).

Keep your documentation all in one place, such a notebook. This will be especially helpful when you are thinking of what you might want to ask professionals or strategies that they give you.

- Be proactive in seeking services:
 - Proactively seek our services and supports in your area and get connected to groups such as support networks and do it long before there is a crisis.
 - Every child who has been adopted or in foster care has experienced loss, which may result in the child or parent needing some level of extra support. It is important that families do not wait until the child or family is in crisis to seek out support.
 - If possible try to predict and meet the child's needs before they become visible.
- Become a lifelong learner:
 - Recognize that as the child grows or as children move into your home you will need new strategies. As a result, it is important to continue to expand your skills.
 - Issues that may surface as children grow include loss and grief, attachment and identity. As children encounter some of these issues, it may result in the need for new skills, resources, and support.
 - As part of your learning, you can refer to books, magazines, conferences, workshops, videos, support groups with other parents, and advice/guidance from professionals.
 - Learn all you can about children's development, yet remember these developmental milestones are not always hard and fast but instead suggested guidelines. Use them to know what services you may need for the child.
 - Research services and supports before a child comes to live with you, including support groups.
- Self-Care:
 - Don't forget about yourself.
 - If you are at the end of your rope, you will not be an effective advocate for the child.
 - Self-care is critical for you to be an effective parent. Self-care includes getting enough sleep, exercise, and healthy food. It also means paying attention to family relationships, like marriage.
- Create a group of family and friends who understand the child's needs and can provide support.

Part 2: Your Therapeutic Network

- The therapeutic network is made up of everyone that can be of help in caring for a child who is being fostered or has been adopted. These networks can be made up of formal or informal supports.
 - 1) Formal support includes all the professional supports you can access:
 - Professionals working with your family should understand trauma, loss and grief, identity development, and parenting in racially and culturally diverse families.
 - They should help everyone in the family know how to respond when different issues, challenges and opportunities come up.
 - Formal supports include things such as counselors, therapists, doctors and support groups. All should be trauma informed and knowledgeable about foster care/adoption.
 - Solidify your network by partnering with other adults in your child's life, like teachers, coaches and mentors who feel like the best fit for you and your family.
 - 2) Informal supports are those that start informally, as the title suggests:
 - You might find connecting with other parents who are fostering and adopting is helpful. They will help you to know when what you are experiencing is typical.
 - You might find these groups online or through local support groups. If you can't find any, ask professionals like child welfare staff, counselors and pediatricians for their suggestions.
 - If you are connected with a local parent group or religious institution, there could be a sub-group on fostering/adopting.
 - It will make a big difference if you share the information and education that you are receiving about how to parent children who have experienced trauma, separation and loss with your friends and family so they can support you and the child.
 - Kinship caregivers in particular can benefit from finding people in similar situations and specialized support groups:
 - These groups may be helpful to share resources, recommend professionals and help you feel that you are not alone.
 - Kinship caregivers may need specific support due to the complexity of relationships with the child's birth parents- both formal and informal support groups can be helpful to give advice and support.
- Just as it is important to find supports for parents who are fostering or adopting, it is important to find peer support for children:
 - Groups can also be available to children in foster care and those who were adopted through the internet, blogs, social media and local groups that take place in your area.
 - There are many ways to find these services. You can talk to the local child welfare agency, professionals, other parents who are fostering or adopting, and schools.
 - Even after a child is adopted, services and supports are available. Make sure you ask the local child welfare agency about services and supports that continue to be available to you and the child you are caring for.

- Sometimes for children, the need for support is associated with specific events or times of the year- these are called “triggers.” Parents should be aware of and plan for these in advance. These events could include: birthdays, anniversaries of placement, holidays/ceremonies, school projects, births or deaths of family members or pets, divorce, contact with birth parents/relatives, or if/when the child and/or family members move in or out of the home.

Part 3: The Types of Services Available

- Be sure to look for organizations and providers that have experience and understanding with:
 - Separations, grief and loss
 - Trauma
 - Foster Care and Adoption
- There are many different types of services and supports including:
 - Mental health services including counseling and psychiatry
 - Health services
 - Academic assistance
 - Occupational therapy
 - Support groups
 - Training for yourself and others in your informal network
 - Respite - Important to remember that both you and the child can benefit from a break
- Make a written list of who you can call for support and be sure to have their phone numbers saved and/or posted for easy access.
 - Being prepared in advance will give you one less thing to worry about if/when a crisis is actually occurring
 - Anticipate that the people on your list have some training and information about your child’s needs
- Adoption and foster care is a commitment that you do not have to make alone. Services can help to meet challenges, solve problems, and preserve your family. Services can bring positive results, promote healthy family relationships, and resolve issues common to families who foster or adopt.