



Tip Sheet

## WHEN TO SHARE PARENTING IN KINSHIP FAMILIES WHO HAVE ADOPTED OR OBTAINED GUARDIANSHIP

In the context of kinship care, shared parenting is defined as the sharing of roles and responsibilities for raising and meeting the needs of a child. Shared parenting is beneficial to the birth parent, caregiver and the child as it maintains the parent/child connection, minimizes loss, grief and separation, assists the child with the transition and adjustment.



When assessing whether shared parenting is a viable option for the birth parents and kinship caregiver as well as for the child, consider the questions and criteria listed below. They apply to both biological and non-biological kin from the child's maternal and paternal extended families (e.g., aunt, siblings, grandparents, etc.) who may be physically living with the child as well as those who are not living with the child.

1. Can the **birth parent** accept the role of co-parent and follow the guidelines for being a partner in shared parenting?

**Criteria:**

- ✓ Accept the sense of loss and grief associated with the new role of co-parent.
- ✓ Give priority to the child's needs over one's own needs and comfort.
- ✓ Avoid making the child feel guilty or obliged to console the birth parent for the change in role to that of co-parent.
- ✓ In the new role of co-parent, maintain boundaries with the child.

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2. Is the **birth parent** emotionally and physically stable enough to be a co-parent?

**Criteria:**

- ✓ Physically accessible, approachable and not an embarrassment to the child
- ✓ Able to keep appointments
- ✓ Lucid, communicative and able to interact with the child

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3. Does the **birth parent** acknowledge and respect the kinship caregiver's relationship with the child?

**Criteria:**

- ✓ Avoid undermining and competing with the caregiver's authority.
- ✓ Avoid sabotaging the child's relationship with the caregiver.
- ✓ Be willing to learn how to use one's influence to minimize the child's confusion and triangulation.

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4. Can the **caregiver** accept a shared parenting relationship with the birth parent?

**Criteria:**

- ✓ Avoid undermining or competing with the birth parent.
- ✓ Accept that the birth parent and the child have the right to explore and to establish a relationship with each other.
- ✓ Be willing to learn how to partner with the birth parent, to build on each other's strengths and to manage the challenges lingering from past relationships.

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5. Are **caregivers and birth parents** able to follow legal guidelines and to abide by stipulations of the post-adoption contact agreement, if applicable?

**Criteria:**

- ✓ Frequency of contact
- ✓ Type of contact
- ✓ Length of post-adoption contact agreement
- ✓ Act in good faith

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6. When necessary, will **caregivers and birth parents** be able to attend joint meetings with the child that provide an emotionally safe space for the child, the birth parents and the caregivers?

**Criteria:**

- ✓ Compartmentalize preexisting and current personal feelings.
- ✓ Let the child feel valued as the focus of attention.
- ✓ Be willing to learn behaviors, communication techniques and problem-solving approaches that will create safe spaces for the child.

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7. Has a **plan** been developed to prepare the child for shared parenting?

**Criteria:**

- ✓ Parental responsibilities: What will be different when these are shared?
- ✓ Hierarchy: Who will tell whom what to do?
- ✓ Authority: Who will have the final word?
- ✓ Where, when and why will parenting be shared?
- ✓ What will be the guidelines for managing confusion, disagreements, questions, feedback and inputs related to shared parenting?

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8. Is the **child** emotionally ready for shared parenting?

**Criteria:**

- ✓ Does the child show any indications of trauma prior to, during or after contacts with birth parents, siblings or other family members?
- ✓ Does the child show any indications of resistance to or hesitation about contacts with birth parents, siblings or other family members?
- ✓ Is the child sabotaging contacts and shared parenting?

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9. When private, face-to-face communication between the child and the birth parent is not feasible, have alternative methods been considered and established?

**Criteria:**

- ✓ Supervised
- ✓ Telephone
- ✓ Via text messaging
- ✓ Facilitated (by a therapist, mediator or facilitator)
- ✓ Indirect (birth parent input without visual or audio contact with the child)

**When considering whether shared parenting is appropriate, post-permanency professionals need to ensure proper preparation and intervention, separately and individually, with the child, the birth parent and the caregiver.**

**To delve further into this topic, check out the Post-Adoption Center Resource Library:**

[www.postadoptioncenter.org/resource-library](http://www.postadoptioncenter.org/resource-library)



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