

TOPIC:

The First Meeting between Birth Parent and Foster Parent

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Micro Training Course Developed

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT:

**Read through this self-study.*

**Fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire*

**Return to ACRF for 1.0 hour of training credit.*

Many foster parents may have concerns about the first time they will be introduced to birth parents. The first meeting is important not only for you as parents, but it's crucial for the children you are caring for. Children need to see that the adults caring for them can work together. This training aims to look at some ways to build a professional and working relationship with birth parents starting with the first time you meet them.

First meetings should ideally be scheduled shortly after the youth is placed in your home. If you are part of a two parent household, try to schedule the meeting when you are both available to meet the birth parent. OCS social workers may be able to help with these meetings, but many times they will not be available to help facilitate.

Some things you can do to help the first meeting go well:

- Try to meet in a neutral place. If you can avoid the lobby at OCS, please do. You also want to try and meet some place that allows for some privacy as you do not want a family's business to be overheard by others. A park or a quiet conference room are good places. Ask the child's caseworker if they have a quiet room you can meet in if you need help.
- As foster parents, we often want to scrub children clean and provide new clothes to show the parent and OCS we are taking care of them. Ask the child what they would like to wear and bring to the meeting. If a child is more comfortable in the clothes they came to your home in, allow them to wear those clothes. They may have more of a significant meaning than you are aware of at the time.
- Be a role model. Come prepared for the meeting with pencil and paper to take notes. Be patient, kind, and respectful. Dress comfortably but nicely. Bring an activity for the child to be engaged in while the adults talk.
- Answer questions honestly. When you first meet a child's birth parents, many emotions may be going on for that parent and they have legitimate concerns about who is caring for their children. Discuss with your partner or close friends what information you are comfortable with sharing initially and what information will require more relationship building before you share. Practice your responses with them. If the birth parent asks for information that you're not ready to share, be kind, but honest in that you'll need some time to develop a relationship with them before sharing too much information, just as you'll want them to do the same with you.
- Ask a lot of questions about their child. Birth dad and mom know their child best. Take your first meeting as an opportunity to learn as much about their child as you can so you can provide the best possible care for them. Here are some example questions:
 - Can you share how you do homework together? I'd like to incorporate as much of your routine as possible to help Billy.

- Are there any favorite foods or meals that Sally prefers? Anything I should avoid making?
- Do you have any family photos we can copy so the kids can have pictures of family in their bedrooms?
- Who is Michael's primary care physician? We want to ensure he stays at the doctor you have him established with already.
- Is there anything about Tilly you want me to know so I can best take care of her?
- How do you take care of Melissa's hair? She said you have a special way of braiding her hair.
- Ask what you can do to help the family contact go successfully. "What would you like for me to make sure Louis has for your family contact time? Homework? A snack?" "Can I provide you with a sharing journal so I can send you messages of how your child is doing and you can respond if you like?"

Some things to avoid during the meeting:

- Judging the parents.
 - Regardless of the circumstances that led to the situation the family is currently in, foster parents are here to support reunification. We need to be aware of what our body language, tone, and facial expressions say to birth parents when we first meet them. Keep a neutral stance (hands by your side, arms NOT crossed) and a gentle smile.
- If the child is present, stepping in and parenting over top of the parent.
 - Unless the parent is causing harm to the child, allow dad and mom to handle their children's behaviors. You can learn how their child responds and better support the parent in their interactions in the future.
- Not giving your full attention to the meeting.
 - Make sure you're on time and have some wiggle room at the end. This is not a meeting you want your cell phone out for, so let friends and family know you'll be unavailable during that time. Simply having the cell phone out of your pocket or purse sends the message that at any moment there will be something that is more important than the meeting you are currently in.

Options if a face-to-face meeting is not possible:

There are circumstances where face to face meetings can't happen or aren't appropriate/safe. Check with your OCS Caseworker about setting up a phone call to meet the birth parents. When the call begins, try saying something along the lines of: "Hi, I'm Kimberly. I'm the gal who is taking care of Billy until he can come home to you. I felt you would want to know who was taking care of your son. Do you think you could share with me how you help him get ready for school in the morning so I can help him feel more comfortable?" Or, "Would it be alright if I emailed you at the end of every day for the first couple weeks so you know how Sarah is doing? I'd like your help in making her more comfortable until she can come home with you."

To Earn 1.0 Hour Foster Parent Training Credit (Alaska Foster Parents Only) COMPLETE [QUESTIONNAIRE](#)