



Snyder County Children and Youth Services

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My Children Are In Care

When Your Children Are First Placed...

It is natural to feel angry, hurt, or ashamed. You may feel it is not your fault, or that you were treated unfairly by the child welfare system. Perhaps you feel your children are now safer than they had been, and you are grateful for the intervention. Whatever the situation, some things that can help you are:

- Understand how the system works.
Under the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, parents are required to take responsibility for changing their situation within a limited amount of time. Children and Youth Services is required to arrange for regular hearings in family court to determine if child will be returned to the birth parent(s) or another permanency option should be considered, such as adoption and permanent legal custodianship. Ask for written information on your rights and responsibilities while your children are not in your care. Contact a legal aide office or law center in your community for help.
- Ask for help.
This is a difficult time for you and your children, and you will need lots of support. Seek out counseling, anger management classes, or other supports available to you and utilize stress reduction techniques to improve your coping skills. Ask your caseworker for information on services and supports available to you.
- Be respectful with caseworkers, supervisors, and others who work with your family.
It may seem like they are not as helpful as you would like, but remember that they have a difficult job to do. You and they both care about your child. It might be hard to do, but try to work together for your child. Communicate calmly and know what you are talking about. Keep appointments and answer questions honestly. Keep a written record of contacts with your caseworker and any services that you use.

Parents with limited income seeking legal counsel/advice may apply for legal representation by completing an application available at the Snyder County Prothonotary's Office, located within the Snyder County Courthouse. Parents with resources should contact private counsel.

While Your Children Are Living Away...

- Remember that you do not have much time to show that you have resolved, or nearly resolved, the issues that led to your child's placement in the first place. Children and Youth Services will work with you to address these issues and arrange needed services, but only you can make changes in your family life. Don't wait to get started!
- Work on your goals. You must work with professionals to solve the problems that led to your child going to live with a foster family or kinship caregivers. Drug and alcohol abuse, neglecting a child's physical or medical needs, and injuring a child are common reasons that children are placed in the Agency's custody. No matter what the reason, you will need to make changes in the way you care for your child, and in the way you live your own life.
- It is important that you remain involved in parenting your child through visits. Be on time, and consistently attend visits with your child. Ask about whether you can write to your child, call your child, speak to his/her foster parents, etc.
- Reassure your child, but be honest about what you are working on and what the future may hold. Don't make promises you are not able to keep. Let your child know you are doing your best, and then do it.
- Let your child know where you are living, since children often worry about where their birth parents are when they are in placement. If possible, give your child photos of your living space or describe it to him/her.
- Show your child that he/she is important to you. Listen to what your child tells you during visits. Take an interest in their school, friends, and activities.
- Children often become close to their foster families. This is not meant to hurt you or punish you for past mistakes. Try to keep a positive attitude toward your child's foster family. They care about your child, too. If you feel your child has been well cared for while in foster care, compliment the foster parents or their agency.
- Be positive. Visits with children are not the time to talk to caseworkers, criticize services or foster parents, or react negatively to the situation. This will only upset your child, and will not improve your relationship with child welfare systems. Use the time to talk with, read to, and play with your child. Enjoy the time you have and practice what you are learning in classes and support groups.

When Your Children Are Returned...

This is an exciting time, but it is important to reunify your family slowly, as you and your child get to know each other again.

- **Be consistent.**
Follow the rules that your child is used to from foster care. Find out about his/her routine, likes and dislikes, rules and consequences, school performance, special needs, etc.. Maintain the same routines, rules, etc. as much as possible, especially during the first few weeks that he/she is home with you.
- **Get support.**
Everyone is overwhelmed with the changes in your family - you, your child, your extended family, and your partner. Get support to deal with the stress you are under. Reach out to a clergy member, neighbor, friend, or other supportive person. Seek professional counseling before things get out of control.
- **Learn as much as you can about child development, communication skills, and discipline techniques.**
Your child may have entered a new developmental stage while he/she was away, and you need to know how to deal with him/her effectively. If you took parenting classes while your child was in care, review the materials you received, or take another class. Libraries have lots of books on parenting.
- **Listen to your child.**
Make time to give each child attention each day. Resist the urge to substitute giving "things" for giving "time."
- **Start with today.**
You can't change the past, so start today as the new and better parent you are NOW! Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your own needs for rest, proper nutrition, adult relationships, and respite from your child.
- **Give yourself and your child time to adjust.**
You are forming a new family, with healthier lives than you had before your child was placed in foster care. It takes time, love, and patience to put all the pieces together.