



## Benefits and Challenges

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Benefits likely to result from primary families and foster, adoptive, or kinship families working together in a collaborative manner:

- Separation trauma and anxiety are reduced.
- Continuity of care and attachments are maintained for the child.
- Planning and implementing visits are simplified, making it possible to visit more frequently and helping to assure more productive visits.
- Reunification can occur more quickly, or an alternative plan for permanence can be made in a timelier manner.
- Primary parents can look to caregiving parents as role models and can be mentored to make changes that enhance their personal development and parenting skills.
- When the two families work collaboratively, loyalty issues for the child are reduced and the child is less likely to create divisiveness and resentment between the two families.
- Caregiving families can maintain contact with the child after reunification, which prevents additional separation trauma.
- Caregivers can become a permanent support system for the child and family.
- Challenges likely to result when primary families and foster, adoptive, or kinship families work together in a collaborative manner.
- Families may have different values, backgrounds, cultures, parenting styles, beliefs, knowledge, and skills. This may create disagreements, particularly on the best means of caring for the child. These disagreements may need to be negotiated before the families can work together successfully. The families may not like one another. This may interfere with the establishment of a relationship.
- The caregiving family may be fearful of primary family members. Some families who have had their children removed may behave in a hostile, sometimes irrational manner. Primary parents may at times have substance abuse problems or mental illness, which may make it difficult to predict their behavior. Parents may have been convicted of serious offenses or crimes. It may be difficult for caregivers to discern when primary parents are simply acting out their anger or frustration or when they are dangerous. This must be fully discussed with the caseworker.
- The primary family's presence may, at times, interfere with the caregiving family's schedule, habits, traditions, or decisions. This may increase the difficulty of caregiving and contribute to disruption.
- The primary family may be jealous of the foster family and may believe the foster family can offer their child more than they can. The primary family may feel embarrassed and ashamed and may worry that the children won't want to return home. They may respond by competing with the caregiving family for the children's attention and affection.



## Myths and Realities

Myth	Reality
Parents who abuse, neglect, or relinquish their children do not care about them.	Parents do not plan to abuse or neglect children. Maltreatment of children usually occurs following overwhelming stress. Parents who maltreat their children love their children but may not be able to cope with circumstances or may not know how to parent successfully. Furthermore, parents who voluntarily relinquish their children usually do so with reservations; they do not walk away from these relationships without significant, lifelong grief.
Myth	Reality
Most primary parents are violent, dangerous people who pose a threat to the foster families caring for their children.	Some primary parents have a history of violence or mental health problems that indicate risk for caregivers. Most primary parents, however, can build a collaborative relationship with foster or kinship parents that can be invaluable in the rapid reunification of the family. When the caseworker or foster parent is unsure about the level of risk posed by a primary family, relationships should be built with deliberate care along a continuum of openness, with the safety of the foster caregivers of paramount concern.
Myth	Reality
Foster families are expected to function as caseworkers or therapists for primary families.	Foster families may serve in key roles as mentors with primary families. When foster and primary families develop a partnership, this will be part of a total intervention plan developed by the child welfare team. The intervention planning will involve the foster parents and will spell out the expectations for the foster parents, when interventions will occur, and why they are planned.
Myth	Reality
The agency is “setting up” foster families to be hurt by dangerous primary parents.	The agency will not expect foster families to place themselves at risk in working with primary families. The agency will always consider risks when developing a partnering plan for primary and foster families, and foster families will be involved in the development of the plan. Communication between foster and primary families may, at times, need to occur through an agency intermediary, usually the caseworker, to protect the safety of the child and the foster family.



<b>Myth</b>	<b>Reality</b>
Foster families are expected to work with all primary families of children who come into their care.	Foster families are expected to communicate with the primary parents of all their foster children. That communication may take many forms, depending on the characteristics of the primary family, and the stage of the developing relationship between the foster and primary families. Relationships may begin with a journal of the child's progress, move into telephone calls between the primary and foster parents, meetings during supervised visits at the agency, and eventually evolve into unsupervised visits at the foster or primary family's home prior to reunification.
<b>Myth</b>	<b>Reality</b>
Foster parents will be responsible for caring for the primary parents as well as the child.	The role of the foster parent is to provide a safe, temporary home for children who are unable to remain with their primary families. Foster parents are part of a team whose primary goal is reunification. Visitation and communication are essential to achieving that goal. However, caring for the primary parents is not an expectation of the foster parent; it would actually be counterproductive to the development of adult, responsible behavior by the primary parents.