

FAMILY-CENTERED PRACTICE

Co-Parenting

What is co-parenting? Co-parenting is a key component of concurrent case planning (see previous section) and family-centered practice. Research defines co-parenting as an arrangement under which the normal duties of parenting a child are shared between the caregiver and birth parent, allowing the child to develop significant relationships with and attachments to both parties. [1] Co-parenting can occur between birth parents, foster parents, relatives, non-relatives, and case workers.

Collaboration. An essential element of successful co-parenting is collaboration, because it allows the parties to have equality in the parenting process. [2] The caregiver for the child and the parent need to establish a basic premise of care, contact, and communication so that the child is able to adjust in a physically and emotionally supportive environment. In order for collaboration to occur in a non-threatening and supportive environment, the following needs must be met:

- Caregivers should be provided with all pertinent information relevant to caring for the child including medical records, school records, nutritional preferences, and allergies as well as mental health information. Caregivers should also be provided with all the necessary court documentation and any other pertinent information that can affect or influence the care of the child.
- Birth parents should be allowed reasonable access including telephonic and written communication with the child unless a safety concern has been raised and addressed by the court. Birth parents should be consulted regarding the day-to-day care of the child and should be included in all school-related activities, physical health appointments, and mental health appointments.
- Case workers should assist in facilitating the overall co-parenting process by ensuring that all of the parties are communicating in an appropriate and effective manner in order to provide comprehensive care for the child. [3]

Transition. Another component of successful co-parenting is the development of a transition plan with the caregivers and the parent. [1] The transition plan should be incorporated into the case plan when applicable and should include tasks that allow for the newly reunified parent to have a support system with the child's previous caregiver. The transition plan should also take into account the child-specific knowledge and experience of both the caregiver and the birth parent. [3] Research shows that newly reunified parents are more successful when they are able to establish positive and nurturing relationships within the context of a mutually beneficial relationship. Co-parenting is beneficial for all of the parties involved, including fathers, so case workers should make reasonable efforts to locate and incorporate missing or absent fathers in the process. Birth parents provide support and comfort to the child, and they can assist with making the transition to out-of-home care a much smoother process. Visitation, communication, and other forms of contact should be addressed on an ongoing basis with the parties to ensure that a commitment to care for the child during and after the out-of-home period is made.

Court practice.

- Judges can encourage caregivers to ask the parent questions about the child (What is his favorite food? What is he afraid of? How do you help him to go to sleep?). Judges can also make sure that caregivers are available to answer any questions that the parent may have.
- Judges can ensure that the caregivers have all of the necessary information and court documentation to care for the child (medical records, school records, court orders).
- Judges can review the visitation plan to ensure that parents attend medical appointments, school activities, birthdays, and other events in the child's life.

REFERENCES

1. (2010) [Co-parenting: The Key to Reunification](#). *The Reviewer*. Foster Care Review Inc.
2. Fitzpatrick, D. Should Birth Parents Be Involved with Foster Children: Accessed December 2010. <http://www.life123.com/parenting/adoption/foster/should-birth-parents-be-involved-with-foster-child.shtml>
3. Foster, D. (2008). [Building a positive relationship with birth parents](#). *Foster Perspectives*, Vol. 13 No. 1