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# Supporting Birth and Resource Parent Partnerships to Improve the Lives of Children

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## **- Workshop Topics**

- 1) Quality Parenting Initiative as model for child welfare culture change**
- 2) Benefits of parent partnerships**
- 3) Practices and policies that support partnerships**
- 4) Barriers to partnerships and strategies to overcome them**

# What is QPI?

The [Quality Parenting Initiative](#) is an approach to strengthening foster care, by refocusing on excellent parenting for all children in the child welfare system.



# What QPI sites do:

Bring together CW leaders and staff, resource parents, birth parents, foster youth, court personnel, and other partners to figure out how to ensure quality parenting for foster children.

→ **Develop a quality parenting brand**

What should quality parenting be in your county and how will you get there together?

→ **Identify barriers to living the brand**

What system challenges make it hard to ensure quality parenting for foster children?

→ **Create action plans to solve barriers**

What steps can the group take to implement practices and policies that support parenting?

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A key strategy QPI sites use  
to support excellent  
parenting for foster children:  
**strong birth and resource  
parent partnerships.**

# Why are birth and resource parent partnerships important?

For the children?

For the resource parents?

For the birth parents?

For the case workers and agency?

For a good case outcome?

## Tip:

Birth and resource parent partnerships can also be called co-parenting.



## Birth and resource parents say that partnerships help:

- Facilitate information sharing
- Make transitions smoother
- Ease children's worries
- Support the birth parents
- Increase resources for all
- Keep people who love the child in that child's life
- Allow better family visits
- Support normalcy
- Help reunifications succeed



## What the research says about benefits of co-parenting :

Children need safety to work through the grief that the separation from the birth parents has caused. Partnerships support early contact with the birth parents and create safety so that the grief doesn't linger and cause lasting harm.

- **Healthier relationships**
- **Better outcomes for children**
- **Better case plan outcomes**
- **Timelier permanency**
- **Quality parent-child contact**





# — How to Co-Parent



“I’m not here to take your children. I’m here to care for them until you can get them back.”

# – What supports strong birth and resource parent partnerships?



- Early connections thru comfort calls, ice breakers, CFTMs, visits
- SW support and trust
- Communications plan
- Reassurance from resource parents
- Mentor programs for resource parents and birth parents
- Court support

# Ice Breaker Meetings

A chance very soon after placement for the birth parents and resource parents to meet and get to know each other, exchange information, and plan how they will work together.



# LA icebreaker brochure

## What is an ice breaker meeting?

An icebreaker meeting provides an opportunity for birth parents and foster parents or other relative caregivers to meet each other and talk about the needs of the child. The birth parents and foster parents are able to share information about themselves and their family routines and traditions.

How can we have a good meeting?

- Arrive on time.
  - Focus on the child's needs and how you can work together to meet them.
  - Respect the feelings, opinions, cultural differences, and ideas of others.
  - Recognize the important role that each person has in the life of the child.
  - Keep what is said in the meeting private
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Comfort calls happen right as the child is placed, to share information and to reassure the birth parents.

## Tips



Social workers can use their phone to call the birth parent.

Foster parents can ask the birth parent about the child's immediate needs re food, sleep, comfort.

# Mentor Programs

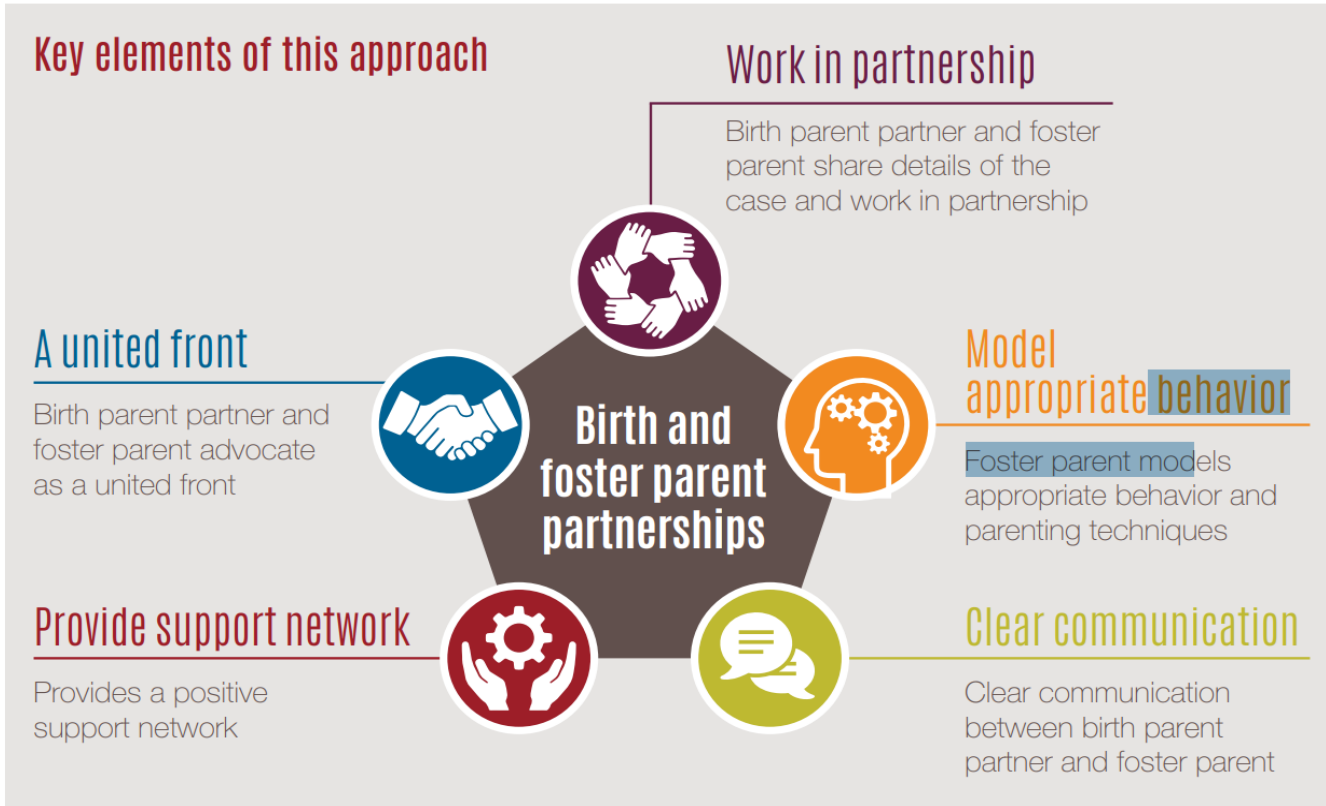
Resource parent mentors can help caregivers navigate their relationship with the birth parents and give them tips about how to build a good co-parenting relationship from the start.

Birth parent mentors can work with resource parent mentors to help birth parents and resource parents figure out how they want to work together.





# Sonoma County's Parent Partnership Pilot Program



# More ways to support co-parenting:

Resource parents need clear expectations about working with the birth parents.

→ **Recruitment**

In 1<sup>st</sup> contacts, make it clear that working with birth parents is expected, unless unsafe to do so.

→ **RFA Trainings**

Bring in birth parent/resource parent pairs to talk about why and how they partner in caring for the children.

→ **Agreements**

Co-parenting agreements create an opportunity to discuss expectations.



# Ventura County Partnership Agreement

## CO-PARENTING AGREEMENTS

As Co-parents who are part of a Safety Network of Support, Birth Parents and Resource Family Caregivers will

- Work together to compile and maintain a life book to keep a record of the child's successes, milestones, memories, and important connections. This will be provided to the child.
- Collaborate on and participate in services and resources to meet the child's needs.
- Strive towards addressing partnership challenges with each other in a respectful and solution focused manner.
- Provide positive coaching to each other and share information about what they have learned is supportive to the child.
- Strive to keep visitation schedules to ensure consistency and predictability for the child.
- Share transitional and other important objects/items to increase child comfort in out of home care.
- Seek feedback from each other about the care being provided to the child and will work through concerns together.
- Respect each other's right to some privacy, but will share relevant family and child history in order to provide high quality care.
- Collaborate together about food and snacks during visits for consistency.
- Respect each other's boundaries and develop mutually agreed upon plans for communication and information sharing.
- Speak positively about each other in front of the child and will model partnership to decrease confusion and anxiety for children.

Foster 

VC Kids

## How California statutes support parent partnerships:

- [CA Welfare and Institutions Code §308](#)
- [CA Welfare and Institutions Code §16010.4](#)
- [CA Welfare and Institutions Code §16501\(a\)\(4\)\(B\)\(i\)\(I\)](#)





## CA WIC §308

### When a child is taken into custody:

- SW must take steps to notify BP, guardian, relative
  - SW shall provide BP w/phone # to reach child
  - Judge can order disclosure of RP address
  - RP can authorize release of address anytime
  - Initial phone call w/in 5 hrs of child in custody
  - Agency must ensure regular phone contact
  - Agency must tell older child (10 yrs+) w/in 1 hr of custody that can call parent and an attorney
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## **CA WIC § 16010.4**

**(b) It is in the children's best interests that their caregivers are privy to important information about them.**

**(d) Caregivers should have certain basic information in order to provide for the needs of children placed in their care.**

## **CA WIC § 16501(a)(4)(B)(i)**

**The child and family team shall also include representatives who provide formal supports to the child or youth and family when appropriate, including:**

**(I) The caregiver**

## What other states are doing to support parent partnerships:

- [NC child welfare shared parenting policies](#)
- [IL Procedures §315.30 - Shared Parenting](#)
- [WA RCW 13.34.260 - Foster parent contact with birth parents encouraged](#)



# NC shared parenting

- Parent and caregiver meet the day the child enters custody
- Shared parenting meeting w/in 14 days of placement, where parents plan family time, communication, sibling visits
- Caregivers support parents' connection to the children
- Workers help parents understand cultural differences
- Caregivers are encouraged to bring birth parents to doc appts

## Quotes from the practice manual:

“Preparation is the key for shared parenting to succeed.”

“The shared parenting meeting is first and foremost about creating the best possible transition for the child.”

“Sharing parental responsibilities can be enjoyable activities such as working on the child’s life book together, exchanging pictures, reading with the child, etc.”

# IL shared parenting

- W/in 72 hours of placement, worker meets with caregiver re their role in shared parenting
- Parent, caregiver, and worker meet (introductory meeting like an icebreaker) w/in 7 days of custody
- At 14-day CFT, parents, caregivers, and worker discuss the child's needs, the partnership, visits, desired case outcomes
- Efforts to establish a partnership are required and must be ongoing

## Quotes from Procedure § 315.30:

“Shared parenting links parents and caregivers in the development of an actual partnership focused on the well-being of the child.”

“Within the shared parenting framework, permanency workers, parents, and caregivers work as a team.”

“Players have different roles, but each team member has the same goal: to preserve or rebuild the family around the long-term welfare of the child.”

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## – **WA RCW 13-34-260**

When a child is placed in out-of-home care, relatives and foster parents are encouraged to:

- a) Provide consultation to the team based on their experiences with the child placed in their care
- b) Assist the birth parents to understand appropriate parenting responses to their children's needs
- c) Participate in activities with the birth family
- d) Transport children to visits, help parents and children make the most of their family time



# What are some barriers to strong birth and resource parent partnerships?

- Misconceptions by resource parents about birth parents
- Misconceptions by birth parents about foster parents
- Discouragement from CW agency workers and leaders
- Practices that keep birth and resource parents apart
- Focus on birth parents' past problems, not strengths
- Confusion about information-sharing policies



Agency workers and leaders, resource parents, birth parents, foster youth, court personnel, and other community partners working together to address system barriers to quality parenting for children.



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Supporting co-parenting is part of shifting child welfare agency culture to:

**Value parent expertise and involve parents in decision making and policy making.**

### **Tips**

Bring birth parents and resource parents to the CW agency table to hear their ideas about how agency practices can better support excellent parenting for children in foster care. Be open to their feedback.



**Birth parents and resource parents  
want to be valued as partners.**

# Leadership Support

Leadership sets the tone for valuing birth and resource parent partnerships.

→ **Clear expectations of social workers**

Make it part of the job description for case workers to facilitate birth and resource parent partnerships

→ **Support for the extra work**

Leaders must allow case workers the time to support co-parenting. It will be more work upfront but less work down the line and better case outcomes.

→ **Clarity around information sharing**

Support birth parents and resource parents sharing information for the wellbeing of the children.

# What can you do?

**Communicate support for practices that facilitate parent partnerships.**

Agency leader

**Encourage parents to work together for the wellbeing of the children.**

Court personnel

**Help parents connect and plan their interactions & communications with each other.**

Social worker

**Agencies and courts can and should support birth parents and resource parents working together whenever safe, for the sake of the children.**

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