

Department of  
Job & Family  
Services


28th Annual  
Celebrate Kids!  
CASA Conference

**Strengthening  
Relationships Between Primary  
and Resource Families**

September 20, 2023  
1:45 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

ODJFS – Office of Families and Children: Children Services Training and Development Team

Mike DeWine, Governor | Jon Husted, Lt Governor | Matt Damschroder, Director



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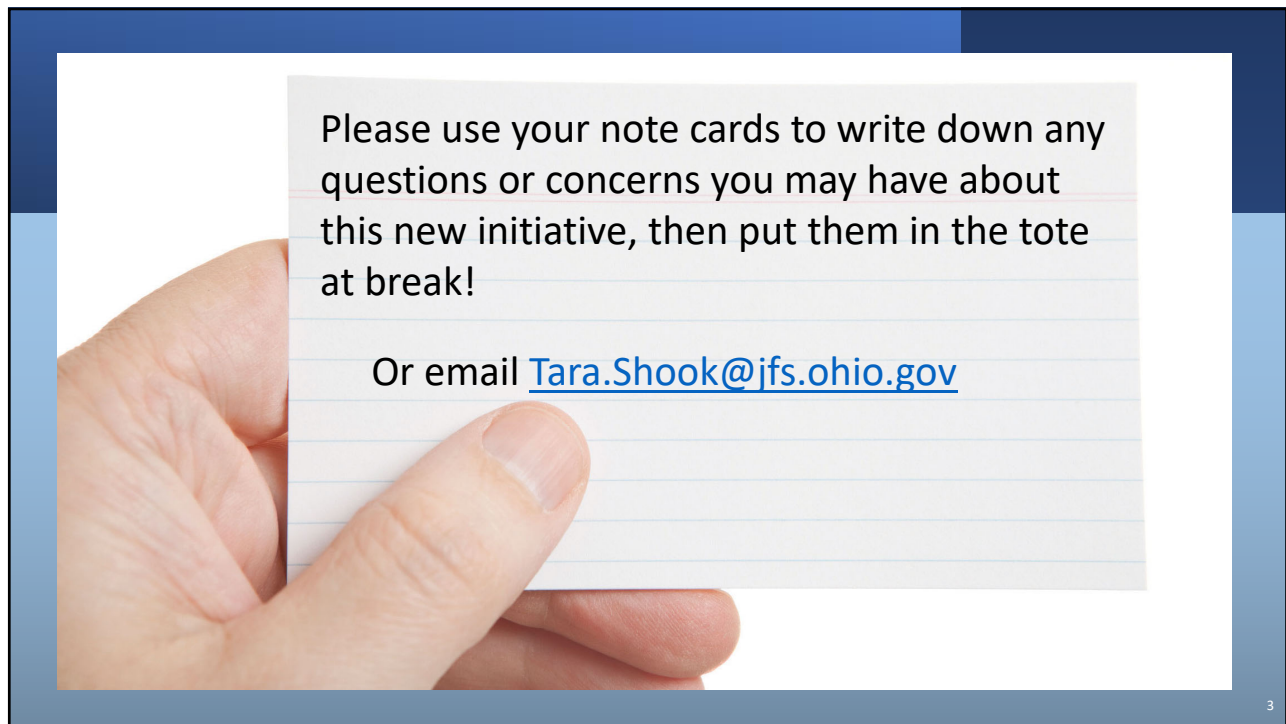
<https://forms.office.com/g/hAV9dUFRkz>





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# Agenda

Ohio's Approach to Co-parenting

What is the C.A.R.E Guide?

Testimonials

Ongoing Connections

Reunification & Permanency

Resources



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## Background

- November 2019 CST Advisory Council
- November 2020 CST Report
  - 37 Recommendations
- "Refocus foster care recruitment, training, and rules to develop relationships between birth families and foster parents"
- Public and Private agency stakeholders, Primary parents, Resource caregivers, Ohio Youth Advisory Board

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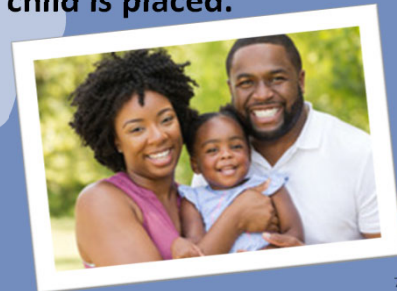
HWO

# Primary Family

Who the child was living with prior to placement and who they plan to reunify with.

# Resource Family

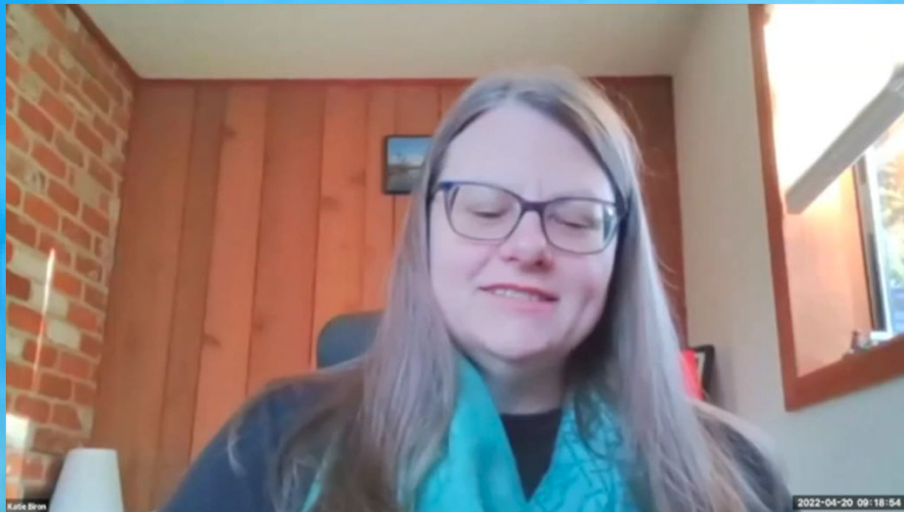
The kinship or foster family where the child is placed.



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## Please Meet Katie Biron



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## Slide 7

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**HWO** side question: do you know if they plan to align OAC with this terminology? just curious

Hite, Wendy, 2022-07-01T18:18:58.311

**STO 0** I had a similar question!

Shook, Tara, 2022-07-07T17:32:49.977





## What are your thoughts?

- On Katie's perspective?
- On primary family Involvement?
- How did her testimony make you feel?
- Are you working with any families now that are open to working on these relationships?

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## Impact on Children and Teens

- Child and Teen Perspective
- Importance of Child and Teen Involvement
- Youth Resources


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## Child and Teen Perspective

- Where are my brother and sister?
- Will I get to see my friends from school?
- Will I have to quit the football team?
- When will I see my parents?
- Kids in Foster Care don't need to be saved, they just need to belong...
- I didn't have any resources when I was reunified with my biological family and foster care was over...
- We want to feel safe with our biological families and in foster care...

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## Ohio Youth Advisory Board

### What You Need to Know

- Build a good relationship with the youth you are working with
- Let kids have contact with siblings and people they have for support
- Ask about me like I'm a human instead of worrying about your checklist
- We just want to be NORMAL
- Foster youth need to be able to spend time with friends
- We want to be able to do sports and clubs with our friends
- Young people, especially in foster care, need to know that people are there for them. The world has changed. The streets are different. Having friends and relationships help us heal and grow

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## Importance of Child and Teen Involvement

- Every child and teen deserves a voice in their safety.
- Every child and teen deserves to be physically and emotionally safe.
- Every child and teen has rights, and it matters if those rights are violated.
- We must remember youth and teens need to be asked and heard when adults make decisions about their lives.

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## Foster Youth Bill of Rights

- 5101:2-5-35
- JFS form 08064
- JFS form 08069\*



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## Introduction to the Co-parenting and Reunification Efforts (C.A.R.E.) Guide

### Ohio's Co-parenting Approach



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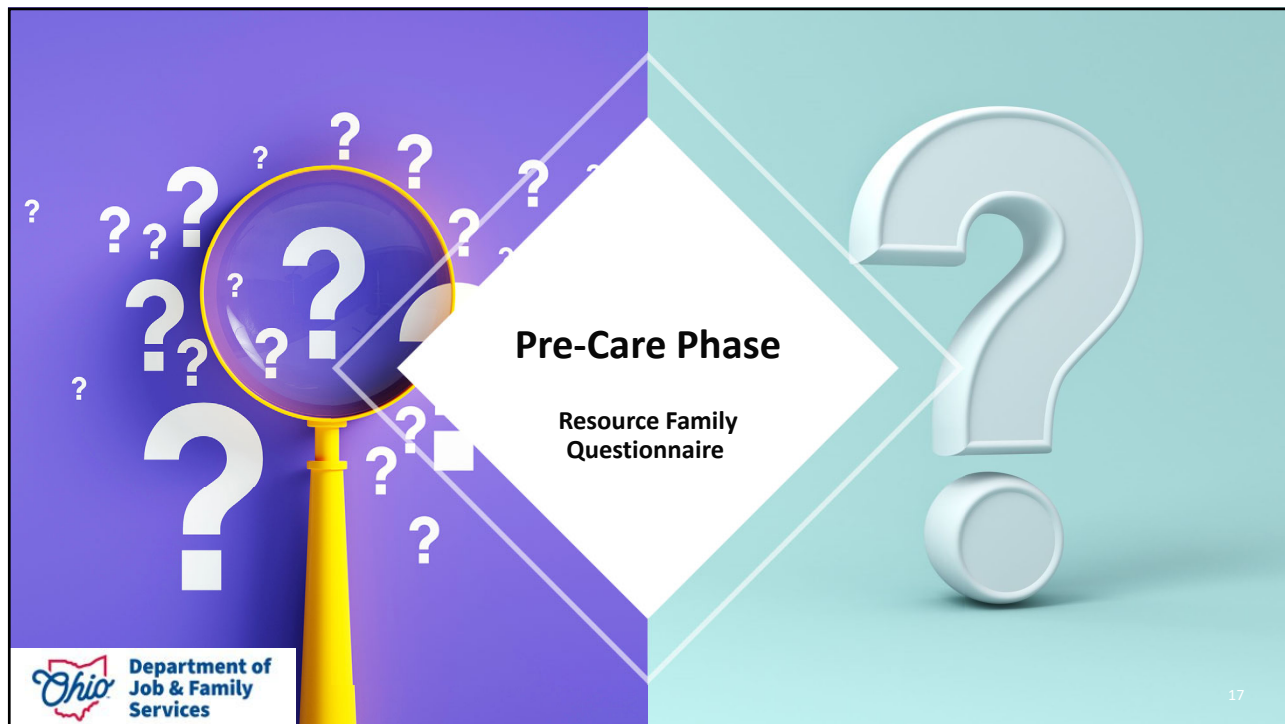
## Introduction to the C.A.R.E. Guide Phases

Pre-Care Phase

Care Phase

Post-Care Phase

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**Resource Questionnaire**

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**What is your comfort level with...**

- Having direct contact with primary parents
- Transporting children to and from visits or facilitating visits
- Involving primary parents in school activities
- Involving primary parents in celebrations
- Helping the child maintain important relationships and contact with siblings
- Having primary parents attend medical appointments or taking the lead when appropriate

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## Resource Family Bill of Rights

- 5101:2-42-20
- JFS form 08065



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**Working with Primary Families is always a risk, but of the very best kind. When you reach out and strive for an open, honest relationship with them, you risk a child being connected to multiple caregivers who will fight for them. You risk being a part of a story of continued relationships that were once threatened. You risk your own family being exposed to a person instead of just "the problem" and that makes your own fight against adverse circumstances in your community intensely personal. You risk a new perception of what it means to be a family and expanded family boundaries far greater than you could have ever dreamed. Our own family's experiences with primary families have profusely changed the way we will forever serve and be a part of our local community. I'm so thankful we took the risk.**

**Emily O.- Summit County foster and adoptive parent**



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## Care Phase



**Comfort Connection**  
**All About Me Connection**  
**Ongoing Connections**

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## Inclusive Language Examples


**Let's work together to make sure your child is safe and cared for until they come home with you.**

We can't go back and change all the reasons your child was removed however, we can move forward and connect you with the family caring for your child. That way you know they are safe and cared for while you focus on resolving those concerns that brought us here.

**We're on the same team.**

I want to make sure that you can meet with the resource family as soon as possible so that you know how your child is doing.

**You didn't invite me into this, but we are here, and I would like for us to work together.**



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## Preparing Primary and Resource Families for Connections



### Introduce

Introduce the concept of these connections immediately - during removal/placement process



### Assess

Assess primary family willingness  
Assess resource family willingness  
Assess child or teen willingness



### Engage

Answer questions  
Connections Tip Sheet



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## Use naturally occurring events to complete these connections

Pre-placement meetings

First parent-child visitation

FTDM/TDM

SAR

Court proceedings



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## Phase One- Comfort Connection

- Within 72 hours of placement
- Placing agency staff would initiate
- Include the child, when possible
- This can occur in person, via phone, text or even virtually
- Agency staff should document efforts in SACWIS case notes
- AKA Comfort call or icebreaker

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## Tips to Support Primary and Resource Families during Comfort Connection

### Custodial Agency

- Allow for open dialogue.
- Be mindful about jumping to conclusions.
- Create opportunities for connections.
- Families are experts on their own families.
- Make no assumptions.
- Be transparent and share information when you can.

### Resource Family

- Allow for open dialogue.
- Be mindful about jumping to conclusions.
- Keep emotions in check to alleviate tensions.
- Provide an update on child's adjustment.
- Inquire about child's likes and interests.
- Inquire about the child's routines.

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## Phase Two- All About Me

- Within 7 days of placement
- Includes the child whenever possible
- Agency staff initiates, guides and keeps the conversation focused on child/teen
- Can occur in person, via phone/text, or virtual platform
- Agency staff should document efforts in SACWIS case notes.
- Primary parent and resource caregiver lead the discussion

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**Please Meet Judith  
Padua – Lorain County  
Supervisor**



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## Tips to Support Primary and Resource Families during 'All About Me'

- The meeting doesn't have to be formal
- Allow for open dialogue.
- There should be space for the conversation to happen naturally
- Let the primary family share anything they want. They are the expert on their child!!
- There should be **NO JUDGMENT** ever

**REMEMBER:** Resource families may have unrealistic fears about engaging in a relationship with primary families.

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## Tips for Resource Parents during the All About Me Connection

- Take time to learn about the child from the primary parent.
- Let the primary parent lead the conversation
- Take a listening approach
- Do not jump to conclusions
- Minimize the fear
- Shift to a *partner relationship* rather than a power relationship

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## Break Time!!! 15 minutes



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## What did you do on your break?

- Did you call or text someone on your break?
  - A child
  - A family member
  - A coworker
  - A friend
- Did you make a social media connection?
- Did you make a connection with someone at the conference?



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## Group Activity “Who am I?”

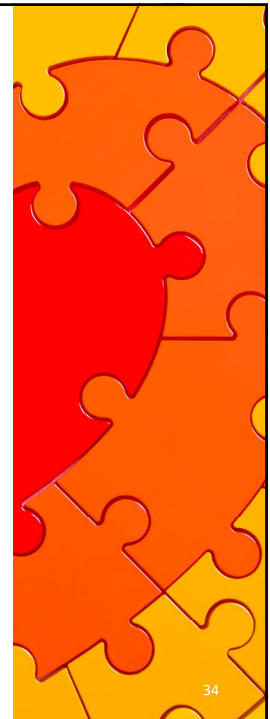


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## Maintaining Connections to Build the Ongoing Relationship

- Nurturing and continuing these ongoing connections is critical to our work.
- Positive ongoing connections directly relate to positive outcomes for children.
- Having these ongoing connections can have lifelong effects for children and families.

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## Think about this...

- Who would you call if you had a flat tire?
- Who will walk you down the aisle at your wedding?
- Who will your children call grandma or grandpa?
- Who would you call to talk to after a long day at work?
- Who would be there to support you if a loved one passed away?

**What if you had....**

**NO ONE.....**

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## Please Meet Lindsey Nelson – Summit County Ongoing Caseworker



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## Slide 35

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**HW0** I like this content but don't understand the placement within the presentation.

Hite, Wendy, 2022-07-14T18:46:43.669

**BC0 0** Added in a segue

Billman, Chelsey, 2022-07-15T16:10:06.128



HW1

## Phase Three - Ongoing Connections

- Activities for the child to engage with important family and friends
- Activities to help maintain a familiar routine and schedule
- Activities to promote reunification



ST0

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## Activities to Engage Loved Ones

- Health appointments
- School meetings or events
- Milestone events and holidays
- Engage in extracurricular activities or volunteer positions (PTA, field trips, etc.)
- Summer activities or family-themed nights
- Seek opportunities for ongoing connections in the community



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## Slide 37

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**ST0** From Wendy- perhaps a transition to say this is the 3rd phase?

Shook, Tara, 2022-07-07T20:40:57.586

**HW1** seems that 29 and 30 would belong after this slide  
unless you are using them to build up to this content...if so, then  
maybe a segue on 29?

Hite, Wendy, 2022-07-14T18:48:50.827

**BC1 0** I added a segue in there

Billman, Chelsey, 2022-07-18T15:11:46.433

## Maintaining a Familiar Routine and Schedule

- Virtual Bedtime Story
- Bedtime calls/video
- Bedtime routine
- Morning call to start the day
- After school call or check-in
- Lifebook
- Homework
- Meals
- Haircuts



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KT0

## Tips to Build Ongoing Connections

### Professionals

- Be mindful of child's feelings and input - navigate accordingly.
- School/Work items they need/or left behind
- Comfort items at home they want with them

### Resource Family

- Being mindful of child's feelings and input - navigate accordingly.
- Comfort items at home they want or would like
- School items they need/or left behind
- Favorite family time activities; wishes/wants
- Nighttime routine
- Things/foods from home they would like to have



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## Slide 40

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**KTO** made an alternative infographic for consideration on next slide  
Krueger, Tina, 2022-07-01T16:01:28.441

**BCO 0** The CST team made several comments about liking this slide  
Billman, Chelsey, 2022-07-12T14:54:26.845



HWO

## Activities to Promote Reunification

Semi-Annual Administrative Reviews

Court Hearings

Increased Visitation

Support family with case plan goals

Provide Transportation

Support parenting skills

Support parent with self-improvement goals



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ST1

## Tips to Support Primary and Resource Families during Ongoing Connections

KTO

### Professionals

- Don't cancel meetings if the families can still meet together.
- Facilitate relationship building by supporting both the resource and primary family.
- No one needs permission to have a relationship with another human being.

### Resource Family

- Empathize! It's a difficult situation to navigate, we are all working toward a solution.
- Find a connection or something in common to talk with the primary family about.
- Be transparent in your role – do not keep secrets, do set boundaries, etc.
- Ask how you can help with their goals, case plan, etc.



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## Slide 41

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**HW0** the words on the colored part of the slide go in and out of starting with caps

Hite, Wendy, 2022-07-14T18:51:01.828

## Slide 42

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**KT0** made another infographic slide that may be easier to read, on next slide. up to you if you use it or not.

Also, it should say "family case plan"

Krueger, Tina, 2022-07-01T15:42:38.080

**BC0 0** Side note [@Krueger, Tina] how do you make those infographics, those are cool!

Billman, Chelsey, 2022-07-11T12:01:29.106

**ST1** I think this slide is easier to read than the infographic- maybe we can tweak the slide to lessen the words?

Shook, Tara, 2022-07-07T18:41:06.869

**ST1 0** I tried :)

Shook, Tara, 2022-07-07T20:45:56.858



Please Meet  
Teri DeVoe


Ongoing connection  
after adoption

**Fairfield County Resource and Adoptive Parent**

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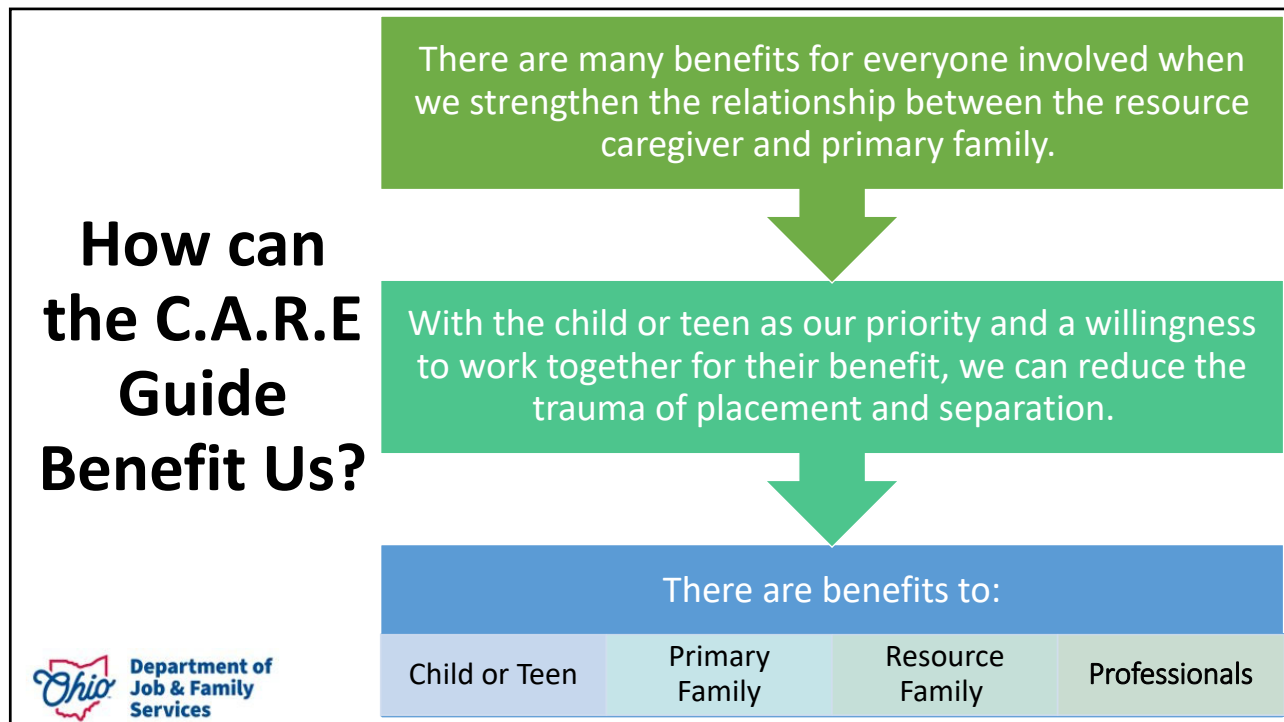
## Phase Three - Post-Care Phase

- Follows the reunification of the child with their primary family
- Supports the transition back to family through celebration and partnership
- Supports primary parent in self-improvement and sustainability
- Also applies to situations when a child is unable to reunify


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## Benefits to the Child

- Reduce trauma and anxiety
- Provides continuity for the child
- Increases chance / timeliness of reunification
- Easier transition home
- Improves connection
- Continued support after reunification
- Expands family's support system
- Reduces re-entry into care

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## Benefits to the Primary Family

- Provides additional support
- Reduces sense of loss and separation anxiety
- Empowers the primary family
- Meaningful visitations
- Strengthens parenting skills
- Enhances self-esteem
- Remain involved with child
- Easier transition home
- Provides continued connections after reunification



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## Benefits to the Resource Family

- Better understanding of the primary family
- Reduces anxiety
- Reduces judgments
- Unified parenting approach
- Child will have less trauma
- Continued connections after reunification
- Increases resource caregiver skill sets
- Increases resource caregiver confidence
- Increases acceptance of diverse lifestyles, cultures, and individuals



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## Benefits to the Professionals

- Reduces workload
- Saves time
- Increased chance of reunification
- Quicker reunification
- Easier transition home
- Reduces trauma of separation for the child
- Reduces re-entry into care
- Continued connections after reunification
- Increases acceptance of diverse lifestyles, cultures, and individuals

## Alternate Path if Safety is a Concern

- Limit exposure to an at-risk parent
- Make a communication plan
- If visits must be supervised, choose a location that promotes comfort to the child/teen
- Allow the child/teen ongoing connections with other familiar safe individuals



**HWO** some bullets have 'youth or teen' instead of 'child or teen'  
Hite, Wendy, 2022-07-14T18:56:55.379

## Barriers/Challenges

- Safety of all parties
- The removal reason
- Distance and/or transportation
- Work schedules
- Child's comfort level
- Lack of trust
- Custodial agency concerns
- Concerns about what happens after reunification



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KT0

## Solutions to Barriers

- Change meeting location
- Use virtual communication methods
- Be mindful of primary parent's work schedule and child's school schedule when scheduling services/meetings
- Offer virtual options for child's activities- facetime soccer game, p/t conferences
- Use positive reunification language
- Continue building the relationship
- Continue developing the comfort level of the resource family
- Strengthen the relationship to build a strong support system for ongoing connections when child returns



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## Slide 52

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**KT0** There are a lot of words on these slides. options include having them float in on click to break them up or do an infographic  
Krueger, Tina, 2022-07-01T16:04:50.366

**ST0 0** I tried to bring it down some  
Shook, Tara, 2022-07-07T18:52:35.157

**BC0 1** Added in transitions  
Billman, Chelsey, 2022-07-12T15:43:13.740

## Positive Reunification Efforts

- Barriers to reunification may arise and that is normal!
- Collaboration is critical!
- Always keep the best interest of the child or teen first!
- What may work for one family may not work for every family!
- Shift from a power relationship to a partner relationship!



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## Positive Reunification Language

When you get your child back...

When your child comes home...

I'm caring for your child until she comes home with you...

We're in this together. I get to work with you and care for your child for this moment until he comes back home to his family...

You're the expert about your child...

I'm so proud of you for all the work you are doing to heal for yourself and your family...



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## Reunification Safety Considerations

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Best interest of  
child/teen

2

Be mindful of  
child/teen  
opinion

3

Allow  
children/teens  
to express their  
feelings

4

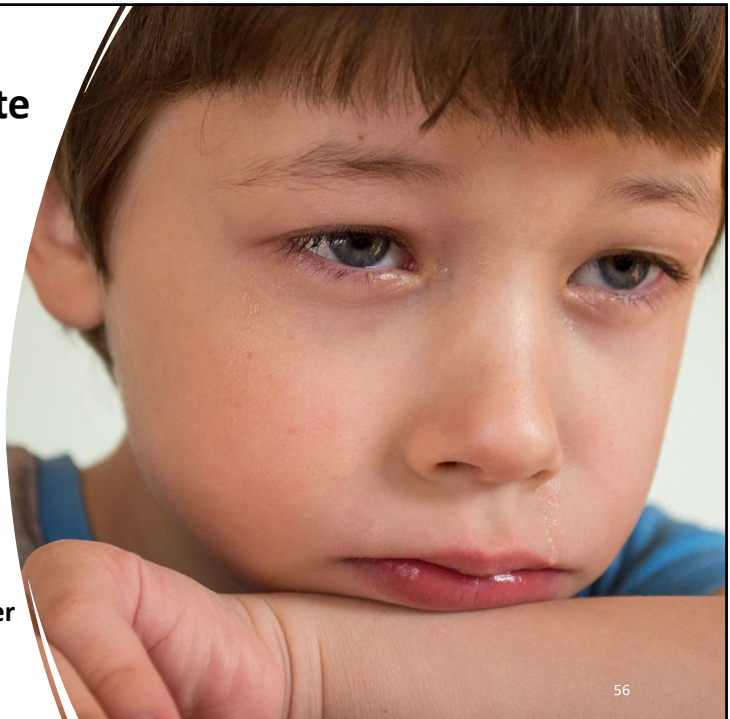
See the big  
picture

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## What if we don't incorporate this initiative into our daily work?

- Enhances anxiety of children
- Increased unhealthy behaviors
- Possible physical health indicators
- Increase in prescribing psychotropic medications
- Increased chances of child maltreatment
- More likely to re-enter care
- Greater responsibilities for the caseworker

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## Best Practice vs. Rule



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## Popular Quotes and things to think about....

- "Family is more than DNA"
  - But it's not less than DNA!!
- "Love makes a family"
  - And so does biology!!
- "Adoption is when a child grows in mommy's heart instead of her tummy"
  - And also, that child grew in their mommy's tummy!!



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## Resources

**Located on Forms**  
**Central:** [www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/](http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/)

- JFS 08106 "Resource Parent Questionnaire"
- JFS 08107 "Quick Tips to Support Resource Families and Primary Families in Strengthening Relationships"
- JFS 08108 "Care Guide Resource Tool"
- JFS 08110 "Care Guide"
- JFS 08074 "Poster"

**The Strengthening Relationships Toolbox is here:**  
<https://fosterandadopt.jfs.ohio.gov/foster-care/currently-a-foster-parent/interacting-with-primary-families-fostering>

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## Contact Information

**For questions about this initiative please contact:**

Stevie Romano, Foster Care  
Licensing Bureau Chief

[Stephanie.Romano@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:Stephanie.Romano@jfs.ohio.gov)

**For questions about training please contact:**

[OFCTraining@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:OFCTraining@jfs.ohio.gov)

[Tara.Shook@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:Tara.Shook@jfs.ohio.gov)



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## Post-Test

**To ensure transfer of learning please take the post-test by following the link or QR code**

<https://forms.office.com/g/Dxx3fh7Stn>



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