



The Reimagining Indiana Foster Care Action Statement

Vision:

To reimagine the relationships between foster and kinship parents, referred to collectively as “resource parents” in this document, and the parents of the children or youth in their care as ones based on mutual support and respect.

Problem Statement:

Too often Indiana resource parents are perceived as being on the opposite side of the parents of the child(ren) or youth in their care. This leads to a lack of two-way communication, information sharing, and respect and decreases the strength of the community supporting our children and youth.

Child welfare stakeholders have unintentionally contributed to these perceptions.

Principles:

Children and youth benefit when their parents and resource parents strive to work together to support them. Working together includes honoring different perspectives and cultures, communicating honestly and in a timely manner, and striving for shared decision making when possible. The benefits of collaboration can multiply if the relationship continues beyond the child’s time in care.

When a positive relationship between parents and resource parents is not immediately possible, concrete steps will be taken to build trust, improve communication, and foster a healthy relationship in the future.

Collaborations are strongest when they acknowledge and account for differences between parents and resource parents in religion, race or ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, age, disability, and/or socioeconomic status.

Collaborations work best when professionals, families, parents, and youth are open to having difficult conversations when needed.

Professional and informal supports should include supporting collaborations between parents and resource parents as a part of their support of the child or youth.

All those involved in a child’s or youth’s life (including the child or youth) has a seat at the table and should be acknowledged and heard.

System reform:

The current low rate at which resource parents and parents collaborate is not their fault. Over the years, Indiana's child and family welfare community has not always encouraged collaboration or removed barriers to collaboration. In order to increase the rates of collaboration, Indiana's child and family welfare community needs to adopt proactive system reforms that will transform the relationship and change expectations for families.

Action steps:

1. **Reframe role of resource parents:** In all recruitment, training, and support, potential and current resource parents should be educated on the benefits and expectation of collaboration with a child's or youth's parent(s). Training and support should include proven techniques for building relationships, and establishing healthy boundaries with a parent/parents, suggestions for effectively maintaining two-way information sharing, and – when appropriate – guidance on making decisions as shared parents.
2. **Support staff and volunteers in making the culture shift:** Create and distribute written policies or practice expectations centering DCS, private agency, and CASA staff and volunteers' role in encouraging and supporting collaborative relationships. Make clear that your agency/department supports communication and collaboration between a parent/parents and resource parents at the outset of a case, when possible. Create opportunities for staff and volunteers to talk through any concerns with this change in practice. Train and support your staff and volunteers in strategies and tools to support this relationship. When that isn't possible, provide staff with ideas for building the relationship over time.
3. **Provide meaningful support to a parent/parents on how to collaborate:** Help a child's or youth's parent/parents understand the role of a resource parent. Provide them with training and coaching on building a collaborative relationship and establishing healthy boundaries with resource parents, suggestions for effectively maintaining two-way information sharing, and – when appropriate – guidance on making decisions as shared parents.
4. **Adopt information sharing process:** Implement practices for early communication between parents and resource parents (start small if necessary). Create expectations for relationship building and track a collaboration-based outcome for each case. Identify various ways that parents and resource parents can share information or seek input from each other. Adopt practices that are trauma-informed and resilience-building.
5. **Separate the foster and adoption paths:** In all areas of recruitment, make clear that foster care is not a path to adoption. Clarify for current foster parents that reunification or matching with a kinship family is the goal for all Hoosier children. Create mechanisms to redirect parents who want to adopt away from the foster care system. Create a clear path for recruiting, training, and supporting parents who want to adopt children and youth for whom reunification or placement with a kinship family is not possible.