

Building Trust After Placement

A Foster Parent's Guide to Creating Safety, Connection, and Belonging

When a child enters foster care, they are often carrying grief, fear, confusion, and uncertainty. Behaviors that may appear defiant, withdrawn, angry, or disconnected are frequently rooted in loss and trauma rather than intentional misbehavior.

Trust is not built through rules alone. It is built through safety, consistency, and connection.

This guide provides practical strategies foster parents can use to help children feel secure and begin building trusting relationships after placement.

What Children Need Most After Placement

Children entering a new home are asking themselves:

- Am I safe here?
- Can I trust these adults?
- Will I be accepted?
- Will I have any control?
- How long will I stay?

While foster parents may not have all the answers, they can provide reassurance through their actions and responses.

1. Prioritize Connection Before Correction

Children who have experienced trauma often need connection before they can respond to correction.

Instead of asking:

"What is wrong with you?"

Try asking:

"What happened to you?"

Focus first on understanding the child's emotions before addressing behavior.

2. Create Predictability

Predictability creates emotional safety.

Simple routines can reduce anxiety and help children understand what to expect.

Examples include:

- Consistent meal times
- Bedtime routines
- Family traditions
- Weekly schedules

Children do not need a perfect home. They need a predictable one.

3. Give Choices Whenever Possible

Many children in foster care have experienced situations where they had little control.

Offering appropriate choices can help restore a sense of autonomy.

Examples:

- Which shirt would you like to wear?
- Would you like to shower before or after dinner?
- Would you like to read or draw before bed?

Small choices can have a big impact.

4. Expect Testing Behaviors

Children may test limits, push boundaries, or reject affection. These behaviors are often not signs that trust is failing. They are frequently signs that trust is being evaluated.

The child may be asking:

"Will you still care about me when things get hard?"

Respond with consistency and calmness whenever possible.

5. Build Trust Through Everyday Moments

Trust is usually built through ordinary interactions.

Look for opportunities to:

- Share meals together
- Play games
- Read books
- Take walks
- Laugh together

Connection grows through repeated positive experiences.

6. Separate the Child from the Behavior

Children need to know that mistakes do not determine their worth.

Communicate:

"I didn't like that choice."

Rather than:

"You're being bad."

The goal is accountability without shame.

7. Celebrate Progress, Not Perfection

Healing takes time.

Notice and celebrate small victories:

- Asking for help
- Expressing emotions
- Following directions
- Trying something new
- Recovering from disappointment

Progress often comes in small steps.

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Reflection Questions

- How can I create more predictability in my home this week?
- What behaviors might be communicating fear, grief, or uncertainty?
- How can I prioritize connection before correction?
- What opportunities do I have to build trust through everyday interactions?

Final Encouragement

Children in foster care do not need perfect foster parents.

They need adults who show up consistently, respond with compassion, and remain committed through both the easy and difficult moments.

Trust is built one interaction at a time.

Your steady presence may become one of the most important parts of a child's healing journey.

Want to keep learning?

Fostering the Connection provides education, training, speaking, consulting, and resources to help families, professionals, churches, schools, nonprofits, and communities better understand foster care, trauma, and the power of connection.

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