



NYS Citizens' Coalition for Children, Inc.  
410 East Upland Road • Ithaca, New York 14850  
(607) 272-0034 • [www.nysccc.org](http://www.nysccc.org)

## **The Importance of Birth Parents to Children in Foster Care**

1. The separation process causes children to have many painful feelings (anger, guilt, sadness, frustration, etc.). Sometimes these feelings are "acted out." Contact with the birth parents helps children get out some of their feelings, so it should be expected that children will seem more upset before, during or after a visit with their birthparents. "The short-term disadvantage of the child being upset by the visit is outweighed by the long term benefit."
2. If children are allowed to have contact and express all their upset feelings, then they will be less likely to take out or "displace" these feelings on the foster parents. They will be able to develop a positive relationship with the foster parents. A good attachment to their foster parents will help them with other relationships.
3. Regular contact with birth parents gives the child several important messages: (1) the child can see that the parents care enough to visit, and the child can see that all the adults-- birth parents, foster parents and social worker -- are working together; (2) children can see for themselves how much progress their parents are making toward getting them home. Research in the child welfare field consistently indicates that regular visits between children and birth parents is the strongest indicator of family reunification. In some ways, children can sense what this research has demonstrated. If their parents don't show up for visits, and don't follow through with plans, it helps the child to be able to see their limitations better.
4. Contact also is helpful for the parents. Just as the child may fantasize about "ideal" parents, the parents may forget how difficult parenting is. Regular contact with their child helps them measure their own ability and interest in parenting and family reunification.
5. Contact between children and birth parents helps foster parents too. It keeps them from becoming overly attached to the child, because they can see that this child and the child's parents belong together. Foster parents, by getting to know the birth parents, can better understand the child's behavior.
6. Contact between the birth parents and child also helps the social worker. Because visits are the primary indicator of family reunification, visits are the main tool used by the social worker to assess: (1) how responsible and consistent the parent is; (2) the quality of the relationship between the parent and the child; (3) how much the birth parent is learning from the appropriate parenting skills modeled by the foster parents; and (4) how much progress is being made toward the case plan goal.
7. One of the most important benefits is that regular contact helps all the adults -- birth parents, foster parents, and social worker-- practice partnership in assuring permanence for children.

*\*Adapted from "The Importance of the Natural Parents to the Child in Placement" by Ner Littner in Parents of Children in Placement: Perspectives and Programs, Child Welfare League of America, 1981, p. 269-276.*