



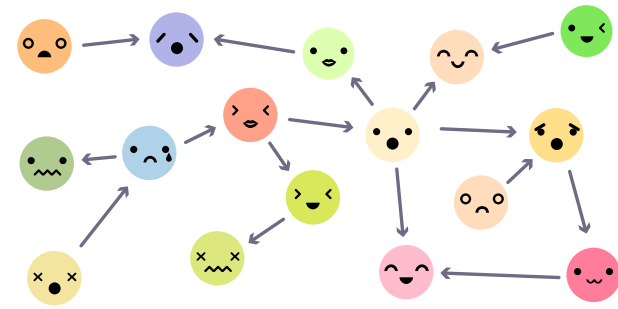
Kinship Know-How

Information and Strength-based Strategies that Promote Family Safety and Well-being



Family Dynamics: ***Additional youth in your home***

Family dynamics change for all families. New babies, extended family moving in, a grandparent joining the home, children moving out. In kinship care, there are times when another youth comes into the home as well.



Emotions and Reactions: Things to know about family dynamics.

When we talk about how families interact, we call it family dynamics. All families are different so all families have different family dynamics. There are two dynamics that all families cope with - sometimes they get along and sometimes they don't.

If you think sibling rivalry is challenging with birth siblings, add in the mix of foster or kinship, and you will find that rivalry takes on new heights. Think about a baby that requires a lot of care. That dynamics shifts your attention. Older children will definitely have more to lose or gain, as they try to fit into the family.

While you clearly want to spend time with your new youth when they arrive, you also need to consider the needs of the child(ren) already in the family. It may take some coordination, but you need to ensure that you devote intentional time with all the children already in your home.

The dynamics will change.

All the children will be watching for alliances, and for parents to pick sides. Even very attached children can feel threatened by the new child, and regress in their behaviors. Eventually, you will be able to ignore the arguments that your children have as typical sibling behavior.

It's important to watch and listen to youth's interaction. Although the need will vary depending on the age of the child and their previous experiences, you should be prepared for the changing dynamic.

If you are a two-parent family, you can work this out between parents. If you are a single parent, you may want to think about how you will do this before the placement actually happens.

If the child being placed is younger, you can plan sometime after he or she is in bed to hang out with the other child.

If the child joining the family is older, you may need to plan some time during the day. However, you do it, plan some intentional time with the old kid(s).

Having a strategy can help, so think STAR!

By having a strategy, you build structure. This structure is important because individual needs affect family dynamics. A structure provides a pro-active measure to address changing family dynamics. STAR is a strategy to assist you in creating structure.



CREATE SPACE

ALLOW A SAFE SPACE FOR ALL FEELINGS.

No one likes to hear that their older child "hates" the new child. Or that he or she wishes the new child "would go back where they came from." Or that you, the loving caregiver, have "ruined" your child's life. Those things aren't easy to hear, and you're allowed to feel sad or annoyed or disappointed (or all three at the same time) when you hear your child say them... but it's completely normal, healthy, expected, and OKAY for children to have negative feelings about their new addition.

Make your home and your relationship with your child a safe environment. Wherein to express these feelings, the quicker he or she will be able to sort through them, release them, and move on towards love and acceptance. You might feel like screaming inside, but remind yourself that this is SO normal, and try to reflect, empathize with, and allow the negative feeling.

VALUE TIME

GIVE IT TIME.

Your older child will adjust eventually, we promise. Each child is unique in how they'll navigate this process, but they will all navigate it, and they'll be most successful with your acceptance and support. Keep in mind that, much like any adjustment, the process of accepting a new child in the home isn't straight forward. Expect negative emotions around this new person to surface intermittently, and interrupt—the older sibling's world in new ways. But over time, you'll see a trend of more positive interactions and more time spent being together.

CARVE OUT SOME POSITIVE, ONE-ON-ONE TIME WITH THE NEW CHILD.

It's so true that the love you have seems to grow exponentially when you introduce a new child into your family. Unfortunately, though, your time doesn't grow; it gets divided, more so with each new child you welcome into your family. We can't change this reality, and we do the best we can to meet everyone's needs within the time that's available—but this now-divided time can be stressful for both parents and children. One way to help ease this stress is to create some time to be alone with your older child. This time together doesn't need to be anything fancy; you can take a walk around the block, or you can play a game or read books.



BIG TIP: HOW YOU SEE IT REALLY MATTERS!

STAR is a **strengths-based** model. This means we are not looking to see what's wrong. We are looking at what is strong, what's going on that good and how can we use it to face a challenge. Negative approached often lead to negative outcomes!



BE REALISTIC THERE WILL BE GOOD BUT EXPECT SOME TURMOIL.

THINK AND ANTICIPATE

If you expect only love and cuddles you'll have a more difficult time rolling with the inevitable challenges than if you go into this transition knowing that it's brand new territory. It's okay not to have a road map for this new family dynamic just yet. You're all

adjusting. Everyone needs kindness, love, empathy, and probably some forgiveness right now—yourself included.

RESPOND TO ANY PHYSICAL AGGRESSION WITH AS LITTLE ALARM AS POSSIBLE

REMEMBER TO REFLECT

It's going to happen—your older child's frustrations toward the new child are going to leak out, sometimes in the form of negative physical behavior. Children often have anxiety about these conflicted feelings and are unsure how to express them. When you see this happen, it's so important to intervene calmly and with as little

alarm as possible. (If you're feeling anything but calm, ground yourself in the present moment; remember that this is a normal response from your older child, and it has zero bearing on the future relationship.)

BIG TIP: FAMILY MEETINGS DO WORK!

- Meetings are away to make a family feel close and they are practical too! At family meetings you make plans and discuss problems.
- Both older youth and smaller children can take part in some family decision- making and problem-solving.
- When all family members feel that their voices and feelings matter, they are more likely to cooperate with each other.
- Spending time together, creates shared experiences. These shared experiences help create a sense of family.
- When families engage with each other, it helps to create a sense of belonging, respect, and dignity. This assists in reducing conflicts and resolving conflicts more successfully.

