

FAMILY DYNAMICS RIGHT TIME VIDEO

Key Points

General Information:

- Family dynamics as defined in this video refers to interactions and relationships between members of a family. It refers to roles, attachment and loyalties.
- Fostering and adopting can change relationships within the home, with extended family and with friends. Understanding this and anticipating these changes can help prepare families.

Part I: Roles and Relationships

Fostering or adopting will impact all members of the family individually but will also impact the relationships between family members. Some of the impacts can be seen with:

- Spouses or parenting partners
 - Need to think about how it will impact you as a parent as well as you as a couple.
 - Need to figure out a way to share the responsibility of caregiving so that one parent does not feel like it all falls on them.
 - Need to ensure both parents are involved and engaged with the parenting.
 - Need to have frequent conversations.
 - Need to check in with each other and make sure the other parent is getting his/her needs met.
- Children already in the home
 - Need to look at the children already in the home and the dynamics that exists.
 - Need to recognize that this will have an impact on all children in the home (birth as well as children in foster care or who have been adopted).
 - Need to include children in the process- find out what is important to them (i.e. staying the oldest, being the only girl in the home etc.) and take this into consideration.
 - Need to discuss how daily routines and family traditions may change.
 - Need to ensure that the parents continue to spend one-on-one time with each child in the home and make sure every child feels like he/she is important and gets time with the parent.
 - Need to build in one-on-one time with each child. This can be done through routines or things that are already being done in the house (shopping, cooking, setting the table etc.)
 - Need to ensure that you build in fun family time on a regular basis.
 - Need to develop family routines and traditions that include all members of the household.
 - Need to think about age of the child you will bring into the home. This can very important especially if there are other children in the home. For some children birth order is important. For example bringing an older child into the home could impact the identity and the place of a child in the family who is used to being the oldest child. Think about how the birth order feels for children already in the home and plan accordingly.

- Biological siblings who come into care together
 - Recognize that the siblings had dynamics before they entered your home which will impact how they relate to each other and to you as the parent.
 - It is not uncommon for a child in a sibling group that has experienced trauma, separation or loss to become the caregiver for other children. In this type of situation it is important to acknowledge the child's caregiving role, allow the child to continue in this role in some manner (find a way to enlist his/her support and acknowledge the role the child played as caregiver to his/her siblings), reassure the child that you can parent both of them and give the child time to redefine their role with their sibling.
 - For children who assumed the caregiving role in the home with their siblings, this can be a hard role for them to relinquish, even when there are capable adults in the home. It is important to not cut these children off from their parentified role too soon or too abruptly.

- Extended family
 - Engage family members in the process at the start of this journey.
 - Talk to your family members so that you can get an idea of where your support will come from as well as where your challenges might come from.
 - It is not unusual for parents who are fostering or adopting to feel judged by other family members. Often times this is caused by the family members not understanding how trauma, separation or loss impact children and how they need to be parented.
 - You might need to set boundaries and expectations for family members. Especially those that seem to be critical or want to tell you how to parent or even discipline your children themselves.

- Friends and others
 - Friends and family members may not understand what you are going through on a daily basis.
 - It is not unusual for some friends and family members to have a difficult time with your decision to foster or adopt and may ultimately not be as involved in your life.

Part 2: Managing Challenges

There are some things that parents who are fostering or adopting should do to ensure that their family dynamics remains healthy:

- Adapt expectations of how children should behave, especially when they first move into your home
 - Children who have experienced trauma, separation or loss may feel like they don't have a voice or their voice has been taken away. It is important to find ways to give them an opportunity to have a voice so that they are less likely to exhibit this need through behaviors.
 - Parents need to be aware that children can show both externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Parents need to be aware of both so that they can watch for signs with the children and get support and services in place.
 - Parents need to be open and ready for the unknown.

- Parents will need to become knowledgeable about the impact of trauma, stress and loss on children and help family members to also become more knowledgeable.
 - It is important to remember that building attachment and trust with the child is more important than focusing on the child's behaviors. As a result, you may need to let some behaviors go initially so that you can first focus on the building the relationship with the child.
 - Redefine how you define success and be prepared to celebrate the smaller accomplishments.
 - Learn to be flexible and allow things to go a different way than you had planned.
- Show unity with your parenting partner as to how you discipline and make decisions related to the children.
 - It is important for the children to see the parents as being on the same page.
 - It is important for children to see how healthy relationships can have disagreement and solve them in healthy ways.
- Make time for self-care
 - Go into this journey thinking of how you can manage your own stress as well as the things you can do to continuously prepare you for this journey.
 - Be mindful of self-care and ensure you build it into your life on a daily basis.
 - Daily moments of self-care will help you let off steam and allow you to have more capacity to parent.
- Prepare children in the home for changes to the family dynamic. Having a new child move into the home either through birth, foster care or adoption can be a trigger for children already living in the home who have been exposed to trauma. The children already living in the home may assume that there will not be enough to go around or that their place in the family will be in jeopardy. During this time period, parents should anticipate that children already living in the home may exhibit some developmental delays, regress in their behaviors, and have spikes in behaviors that have not been present for a while. It is important to remember that these behaviors will likely not stay forever but instead are a reaction to the stress caused by a new child moving into the home.
- Tips for helping children already living in the home feel comfortable as other children move into the home:
 - Ensure that you spend one-on-one time with each child and also one-on-one time with their biological sibling groups (if you are parenting siblings). This will help the parent to establish a relationship with the individual child but will also help the siblings to establish and/or repair their relationships.
 - Create separate places in your home so that children can have alone time and feel safe.
 - Communicate openly with the children and ensure that they have a voice and that you listen and try to address concerns that they express.
 - Reassure children already living in the home that they will be safe and that there will be enough to go around of toys, love, parental time, and food
 - Remember that it is normal for children living in the home to have some changes in their behaviors during stressful times (such as when a new child joins the family) but these behaviors will not last forever.

- Temporary placements of children in your home
 - Temporary placements can be hard on children. It is important to prepare all children in the home and to provide them with an idea of what to expect moving forward.
 - Make sure children understand what temporary means.
 - Answer the children's questions as honestly as possible based on their developmental age .

Unique Aspects of Family Dynamics in Kinship Care:

- There are some additional considerations regarding family dynamics due to the changing roles of relatives:
 - Changes family roles and responsibilities.
 - The child's line of accountability, responsibility and respect changes
 - Shifting the caregiver role can create conflicts of loyalty and authority.
- Recognize that taking on the role of caregiver for a child in your family does impact the entire the family unit. Because the caregiver takes on a different role to the child as their caregiver, this results in other roles within the family shifting. These changes can create conflicts within the family related to loyalty and authority.
- It is important for the caregiver to help define the new roles and communicate them with the child, the child's parent and other relatives.
- Sometimes family members think they have the same rights and privileges as before the child was moved into kinship care. In these situations, the kinship caregiver may have to set new boundaries or explain to family members what is and is not ok now that you have assumed the caregiving role.