

Shared Parenting

Building Familial Foundations During and After Foster Care

Agenda

- Introduction
- Defining Shared Parenting
- Shared Parenting Practices in Chatham County
- Research on Shared Parenting
- A Parent Attorney's Perspective
- Shared Parenting Examples
- Questions

How Should
We Be
Thinking
About Child
Welfare
Cases?

Many Legal Approaches Fall Short



Rescue

Criminal

Property

The Juvenile Code acknowledges the need to consider both children and parents

Chapter 7B.

Juvenile Code.

SUBCHAPTER I. ABUSE, NEGLECT, DEPENDENCY.

Article 1.

Purposes; Definitions.

§ 7B-100. Purpose.

This Subchapter shall be interpreted and construed so as to implement the following purposes and policies:

- (1) To provide procedures for the hearing of juvenile cases that assure fairness and equity and that protect the constitutional rights of juveniles and parents;
- (2) To develop a disposition in each juvenile case that reflects consideration of the facts, the needs and limitations of the juvenile, and the strengths and weaknesses of the family.
- (3) To provide for services for the protection of juveniles by means that respect both the right to family autonomy and the juveniles' needs for safety, continuity, and permanence; and
- (4) To provide standards for the removal, when necessary, of juveniles from their homes and for the return of juveniles to their homes consistent with preventing the unnecessary or inappropriate separation of juveniles from their parents.
- (5) To provide standards, consistent with the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, P.L. 105-89, for ensuring that the best interests of the juvenile are of paramount consideration by the court and that when it is not in the juvenile's best interest to be returned home, the juvenile will be placed in a safe, permanent home within a reasonable amount of time. (1979, c. 815, s. 1; 1987 (Reg. Sess., 1988), c. 1090, s. 1; 1998-202, s. 6; 1999-456, s. 60; 2003-140, s. 5.)

Shared Parenting:

North Carolina Administrative Code 70 E .1104 requires that foster parents shall develop partnerships with children and their parents or guardians, help children maintain and develop relationships that will keep them connected to their pasts, and help children placed in the home build a positive self-concept and positive family, cultural, and racial identity.



Shared Parenting Policy:

A Shared Parenting Meeting must occur within 7 days of the child being placed out of the home.

Foster parents must engage in shared parenting by:

- Developing partnerships with children and their parents or guardians;
- Helping children maintain and develop relationships that will keep them connected to their pasts;
- Helping children placed out of their home build a positive self-identity and positive family cultural, and racial identity.
- Implemented in 2006 with MRS policy for all 100 counties

Shared Parenting Practices-Chatham County DSS

- **Pre-Service Training:**
 - Expanded discussions with potential resource families while attending training.
 - Panel night to include experience families to discuss shared parenting.
- **Licensing Interviews:**
 - Discussions specifically around shared parenting and how they will enact this practice.
- **Shared Parenting Meetings:**
 - Licensing Social Workers provide additional support before, during, and after the shared parenting meeting.
 - Encouraging resource families to obtain an email and google number specifically for shared parenting interactions.
- **Court/Team Meetings:**
 - Encouraging resource parents to attend court hearings & permanency planning review meetings to continue relationship building with birth families.
 - Court Notification Form: Resource Parents can share with the court how shared parenting is going.
 - Licensing Social Workers attend court to support resource families and assist in relationship building with the birth family.
- **Quarterly Licensing Home Visits:**
 - Shared Parenting is discussed at every quarterly home visit to determine status and if improvements can be made.
- **Resource Buddy Program:**
 - Connecting new resource families with experienced resource families to help motivate strong shared parenting relationships.
- **Continuing Education:**
 - Encouraging continued education around shared parenting as part of the required continue education for Relicensure.
- **Expansion of Kinship Licensure:**
 - Focus on offering kinship licensure to all kinship providers offering a variety of training modalities to accommodate the kinship family.

Research on Shared Parenting

“Surprisingly few studies” have examined impact of contact with birth parents on children in foster or adoptive care (Ruiz-Romero et al., 2022).

- Ruiz-Romero reviewed 22 studies in 2022
- Huseby-Lie reviewed 37 studies in 2024



Children Want:

- Some control, consultation, or influence about placement, visitation, and their own best interests (Festinger, 1983; Collings, Wright & Spencer, 2019).
- To understand why decisions were made and for contact to be normalized (Selwyn & Lewis, 2023).
- Contact with specific people important for them (siblings, grandparents, mom/dad, cousins, pets) (Boyle, 2017).
- A contact arrangement that is “just right” for them (flexible rather than inflexible/formulaic, meeting their needs rather than agency’s) (Selwyn & Lewis, 2023). For some, a “just right” arrangement could mean no contact.



MOST Children Want:

- More time/contact with birth relatives overall (Collings, Wright & Spencer, 2019; Selwyn & Lewis, 2023).
- More **frequent** contact (Selwyn & Lewis, 2023).
 - Infrequent contact increases anxiety for **children** (who worry about their birth parents and feel more apprehensive about visits) and **birth parents** (with more time between visits, parents start to feel they have no role, visits become difficult, relationships deteriorate).



About Contact

Contact can involve **difficult, painful feelings**, even when desired and even when going well, and it can **exacerbate problems** (Chapman, Wall, & Barth, 2004; Boyle, 2017; Ward, Moggach, Tregeagle, & Trivedi, 2022; Huseby-Lie, 2024).

- Birth parents bring painful emotions to visits; child removal may be a source of trauma that impacts trust with carers/caseworkers (Collings, Wright & Spencer, 2019).
- Visits can be problematic because of birth parents' adverse behaviors (substance use, abuser present, undermining, making promises, inducing guilt) (Boyle, 2017; Ward, Moggach, Tregeagle, & Trivedi, 2022).
- Birth parents often lack skills to interact with their child and/or to manage their own behaviors (Ruiz-Romero et al., 2022).
- When planned contact does not occur, children feel rejection and anxiety (Boyle, 2017).
- Foster parents raise concerns that contact could disrupt placement, and many factors can indeed undermine a placement and/or a child's well-being (Ruiz-Romero et al., 2022).

However...

Contact with birth families does **not** necessarily lead to destabilized placements (Ward, Moggach, Tregeagle, & Trivedi, 2022).

- In a longitudinal study that followed children for an average of 18 years, adoptive parents who discouraged contact with birth parents had the least successful relationships with their adopted children.
- Over two thirds (69%) of adoptive parents and adoptees ultimately thought that face-to-face, post-adoption contact had been **beneficial**.



Quotes from Open Adoption in Australia

“[Open adoption] gives that sense of belonging and feeling of being in their family, being in both families, alongside each other.”

- Adoptive parent of young woman permanently placed at 3 years

“So most of the time she’s stressed and anxious when I see her. Therefore, the contact isn’t enjoyable for me. But I still want to see my mum. She’s still my mum. So even though it’s not enjoyable I wouldn’t not want to see her.”

- Young man, permanently placed at 10 years

Contact does:

- Come with **both good and bad feelings** – before, during, and after a visit (Huseby-Lie, 2024).
- Help children form new attachments with caregivers, because they have **less anxiety or guilt** about the safety and wellbeing of their birth family (Boyle, 2017; Ward, Moggach, Tregeagle, & Trivedi, 2022).
- Help children “reconcile being part of two families” (Boyle, 2017), develop an identity (Ward, Moggach, Tregeagle, & Trivedi, 2022), and contribute to **well-being** (Ruiz-Romero et al., 2022).
- Help children **come to terms with loss** (Boyle, 2017; Ward, Moggach, Tregeagle, & Trivedi, 2022). They can know their birth family still cares about them, not feel forgotten, and understand more about the reasons they were removed/placed/adopted.
- Increase the chances of reunification (Ruiz-Romero et al., 2022).

Quotes from UK Survey (Selwyn & Lewis, 2023, 9316 kids)

- “I don’t want to see my dad or my brother. I want to see my mom and granddad, grandma, uncle, my dog.”
- “When I meet my mum and dad it is a very happy thing and gives me a positive feeling that they are still there for me even though they can’t look after me.”
- One child wanted more contact “so that I don’t feel butterflies when I see them.” Another asked for photos so they could remember what family members looked like.
- “I don’t know why I don’t see my dad. I worry about it because he might be dead.”
- “I want to see more of them, but my family don’t really want to see me.”

Why or How Does Contact Help?

Contact led to a “painful transparency” (Ward, Moggach, Tregeagle, & Trivedi, 2022):

- Reminds adoptive parents they are not the birth parents
- Demonstrates birth parents’ issues/problems to children
- Prevents children from fantasizing about their birth families
- Dispels myths held by both sets of parents





Case-by-Case

Individualized, case-by-case assessment needed regarding contact.

- Contact helps some but not all children (Boyle, 2017; Selwyn & Lewis, 2023).
- Pre-existing relationship with birth parents is important (Boyle, 2017; Huseby-Lie, 2024).
- Identify key relationships and wishes/feelings about contact for a child and avoid a formulaic, inflexible approach (Selwyn & Lewis, 2023).
- Forced contact can lead to negative impacts (Huseby-Lie, 2024).
- Most children should be as informed as possible about when they will see their parents again and how their parents are doing (Huseby-Lie, 2024).

Key Points



- **Children can want relationships with their birth family AND have close relationships with their foster family** (Chapman, Wall, & Barth, 2004). Emphasis should be on developing children's relationships with caregivers and on continuing relationships with birth family.
- Children more likely to benefit when:
 - Foster parents have an open attitude and birth parents accept the new arrangement, in a "collaborative relationship" (Boyle, 2017).
 - Birth parents accept a new parenting role, and carers recognize that birth parents have a legitimate emotional investment in the child's life (Collings, Wright & Spencer, 2019).
- Families need **substantial assistance** developing trusting, collaborative relationships that benefit children (Collings, Wright & Spencer, 2019; Ruiz-Romero et al., 2022).
 - Caseworkers and professionals need skills, training, and resources to encourage collaboration.

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SHARED PARENTING

Parent's Prospective

SHARING MEANS

Partnership

The cookie divided in half or “the largest half”

Benefit and burden running both ways



PARENTS WANT

- Their Child Back Home
- The Foster Parent to Provide **Temporary** Loving Care
- Respect
- Some Control
- **Recognition**
 - I Know the Child Best
 - I Am More Than My Worst Mistake
 - I Am More Than a Diagnosis: I Have... I Am Not...

ASSUMPTIONS & FEARS

- My Child Will be Abused/Mistreated (I Was Mistreated/Abused in Foster Care)
- Foster Parents are In It For the Money
- Fostering is a Short Cut to Adoption
- The Social Worker Wants the Placement to Be Permanent
- The Child's Cultural, Racial Identity Won't be Respected and Nurtured
- Foster Parents will "Buy" My Child's Love
- I Can't Compete with Trips to Disneyland, Riding Lessons, Etc.
- My Child Won't Want to Come Back Home
- I Will Be Replaced

BENEFITS OF CONTACT

- Meet/See the Foster Parents
- Parents Can Ask Questions (ex. why are you fostering?)
- Foster Parents Can Ask Questions
- Jointly Decide What the Child Will Call the Foster Parents
- Parents Can Provide Information (ex. Child's likes/dislikes, fears)
- Demonstrate They are Human & More Than Their Worst Mistake
- Establish Boundaries and Expectations
- Plan Method of Future Communication and Sharing

BENEFITS OF CONTACT, cont.

- Parents can Share Skills (ex. hair braiding)
- Promote Relationship that Continues After Reunification, Adoption, Guardianship, or Custody
- Children Usually Want Continued Contact

Obstacles

- Distance & Logistics
- It Takes Time
- It's hard and Can be Emotionally Exhausting
- Proceed with Caution When Safety is an Issue

Shared Parenting-Reunification

Shared Parenting- Guardianship

Shared Parenting-Kin-Gap

Shared Parenting- Custody

Shared Parenting-Adoption

SHARED PARENTING CAN LEAD TO UNEXPECTED PERMANENCE

Sometimes the Parent and the Placement Provider Come Up With a Better Plan than
the Professionals

Thank
you

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