



Tips for Family Connection After Adoption or Guardianship

“Ongoing contact can lessen the loss and grief associated with separation, support children’s identity development, and help them prepare for adulthood.”

Helping Your Adopted Children Maintain Important Relationships With Family, Children’s Bureau (2026)

Why are Connections Important?



Youth naturally wonder about their past
Connection can help answer questions and build a clearer understanding of their life story.



Supports identity and belonging
Knowing their roots can help youth feel more grounded and secure in who they are.



Reduces worry and unknowns
Connection can bring reassurance and clarity.



Gives permission to love all parts of their family
Youth benefit from knowing it’s okay to care about their birth and adoptive families.



Maintain important relationships
Connections, especially with siblings, can be meaningful and lasting.

What is Contact?

Contact after adoption or guardianship can look different for each family, from in-person visits to occasional updates between adults. Plans may change over time based on the youth’s needs or family circumstances.

Types of Contact



Letters



Emails



Text Messages



Social Media



**Phone or
Video Calls**



**In-Person
Visits**

Frequency



Flexible



Weekly



Monthly



**A Few Times
a Year**



Yearly



Milestones



Youth Focus

Contact with family works best when focused on the youth. It can support their wellbeing, sense of self, and their connection to family and culture.

How Adults Can Support Youth

Create a safe space by:

- Asking open, non-judgmental questions
- Checking in regularly
- Following the youth's lead
- Listening without trying to fix



Center contact on the youth.



Listening builds trust & connection.



Avoid making promises about the future.

Talking with Youth about Family

Every youth is different. Some talk about family often, and some do not. Even when the youth is not talking or asking about their family members, they may still be thinking about them. Talking openly in a developmentally appropriate way and being curious about the youth's thoughts, feelings, and experiences can help them feel more **safety, connection, and confidence** in all their family members.

1. Start the Conversation

To create a safe and inviting atmosphere, proactively check in with the youth about their thoughts, feelings, and needs. Asking in an open, non-judgmental way can help the youth feel safe to share.

Have you had any thoughts about [family member] lately?

No worries if you don't want to talk now. I'm here if you do.

2. Give Space

If the youth says no or is not ready to talk, let them know that is okay and that they can talk as much or as little as they choose. Check in again in a couple of days or weeks. It might take a few tries for the youth to feel ready to share more.

3. Show Support

If they do open up, just **listen, thank them** for sharing, and **reassure them** that you are supportive of them.

Thank you for telling me. It sounds like some [hard, happy, etc.] thoughts or feelings are coming up. I'm here with you no matter what.

Each young person is unique, so it may be helpful to get input from a **social worker, therapist, counselor, or mentor** who knows the youth or has experience with foster care, adoption, or guardianship.

Nurturing Connections

Even in the time between in-person contact, or when in-person contact isn't possible, there are meaningful ways the adults can work together to keep the connection.

Share Pictures and/or Videos



Photos or **videos** can be shared between the youth and family members. Adults can check in ahead of time about how things will be shared and any boundaries, like about social media.

Mail



Cards and **letters** give the youth something to hold onto and can become keepsakes. If needed, adults can use a P.O. Box or an intermediary for privacy.

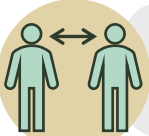
Gifts can also be sent by mail. Adults can coordinate ahead of time about the youth's interests, size, and what feels appropriate.

Virtual Visits



When in-person visits are not possible, **video calls** or **online games** can offer the youth opportunities to share time with family.

Electronic Messages Between Adults



The adults can share updates by **email**, **text**, or another agreed method. This helps everyone stay informed and better support the youth's connection to family.

General Tips to Help Contact Go Well

1. Be Consistent

When contact is consistent, it can help the youth feel safe and build trust. Lots of contact followed by silence can trigger anxiety making the relationship feel unstable.



2. Follow Through

Do your best to follow through on set plans and communicate as soon as you can if plans need to change. Unexpected changes or missed plans can feel especially hard for youth and family members who have experienced loss.



3. Quality Over Quantity

Having a good visit, call, or contact, even if less often, is better than frequent contact that does not go well.



4. Adult Cooperation

How adults speak about and to each other matters. Avoid disagreements or making negative comments about family members in front of the youth. Respectful communication and interactions can help youth feel at ease.



Helping Conversations Go Well During Contact

Whether talking in person or virtually, here are some tips to help conversations between the youth and their family members go well:

Focus on the Present

If the youth asks about the next visit or contact, let them know plans will be shared with them once the adults have been able to discuss.

Clarify Boundaries

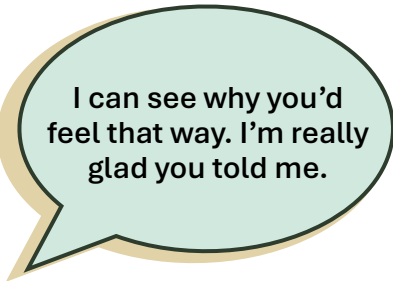
The adults can talk together ahead of time about any topics that are not appropriate to discuss with the youth.

Ask Questions About the Youth's Current Life and Experience

- What's your favorite activity/show/toy/game right now?
- What's something new you learned recently?
- Have you had any hard projects at school you were able to figure out?



Have you tried anything new lately?



I can see why you'd feel that way. I'm really glad you told me.

Listen and Validate the Youth's Feelings and Experiences

Even if they express hard or challenging feelings sometimes, it's okay and helpful to repeat back what they've said they are going through.

- "It's great to hear that you're feeling excited about that."
- "It sounds like that was really hard."
- "Feeling happy/sad/mad makes sense right now."

Helping Visits Go Smoothly

If visits are a part of your contact plan, here are some tips to help them go well:

1. **Check in before the visit** so the adults can share updates on the youth's interests and plan meaningful activities together.
2. **Confirm the visit beforehand by text or phone.** A quick check-in by text or phone, the day before or the day of, can protect the youth from confusion or disappointment.
3. **Pick a location** that offers plenty of opportunities for age-appropriate interactions, such as a park, zoo, library, museum, etc.
4. **Plan to arrive a little early** so the visit can start calmly and without stress. Taking time to be ready helps the youth feel more at ease and supports a positive visit for everyone.
5. **Put phones and devices away** during the visit. Limiting phone use can help keep the focus on time together, unless the device is part of a shared activity.
6. **Bring age-appropriate non-digital activities** such as:
 - Cards, board games (travel games work well outdoors), or sports equipment
 - Books for reading together
 - Paper, crayons, or pens for drawing or simple games (e.g., tic tac toe, snowperson)
 - Ideas for other games/activities that need no materials, like charades



Ask the youth if there are any activities or games they would like to share or teach.