

# Special Foster Care & Therapeutic Respite Care

## Tips, Tools & Resources

### Bridging the Gap

Bridging the Gap is not a new concept. Foster parents have been doing it for years, but it did not have a name. It is an essential function of being a foster parent. It is not always easy to bridge the gap but, it is in the best interests of the child to help them adjust to foster placement and their permanent goal.

#### Definition

Bridging the gap is the process of building and maintaining relationships and communication between the birth and foster families involved in a youth's life, or between the foster and adoptive families, with the goal of supporting family reunification or another permanency plan.

#### Characteristics of a Successful Relationship

1. Work as a team
2. Develop and maintain a positive, trusting relationship
3. Set clear boundaries
4. Establish ground rules
5. Reassure the birth parent that the goal is reunification
6. Encourage the birth parent and acknowledge the progress that they have made
7. Collaborate with the social worker

#### Continuum of Contact

Relationships and connections between foster families and birth families cover a varying amount of contact. The amount of contact with a birth family depends many factors which include the circumstances of the placement; the attitude of the birth family; the needs of the child; and the availability of the foster parents. The amount of contact can also increase or decrease throughout the placement. Bridging the Gaphas four categories of contact: supporting; helping; teaching; and participating. The categories vary from little contact to personal visits.

**Supporting** – Providing the child's family with social and emotional assistance, which encourages and aids the family's progress toward reunification.

**Helping** – Actively and concretely assisting the child's family with tasks that will improve the family's level of functioning and move the family closer to reunification.

**Teaching** - Providing the family with knowledge and skills that will enhance their ability to care for their children.

**Participating** – Involvement of the foster family with the agency and the child's family in the case plan activities.



#### Applying Bridging the Gap to School

School is a significant part of a child's life. As such, birth parents need to know how their child is doing in school, including academic performance, social interactions, and extra-curricular activities. Foster parents, in collaboration with their social worker, should consider how they can "bridge the gap" when it comes to school.

Here are a few examples:

**Supporting:** Share copies of homework and report cards with family.

**Helping:** Attend school meetings with foster parent.

**Teaching:** Invite child's family to attend school programs.

**Participating:** Work with the birth parents to solve a school problem.

If you have questions or concerns about Bridging the Gap and how it applies to your situation, contact your caseworker.

Adapted from Denise A. Goodman, Ph.D.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Parent Training Exercise

What is Bridging the Gap?

What are three characteristics of a successful Bridging the Gap relationship?

Describe the four categories of contact in Bridging the Gap.

Describe three ways that Bridging the Gap can occur in the context of school.

Return to your caseworker for evaluation. Accurate answers can result in a training credit of 1/2 hour.