

# FOSTER, KINSHIP & ADOPTIVE PARENT MENTORING PROGRAMS



Project **1.27**

Fostering and Adopting in Faith

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Fostering is challenging and families providing a home for someone else's child need support in navigating the complexities of foster care. Being able to talk with someone who has travelled this road before them is very helpful. In this community, mentors are seasoned foster, kinship or adoptive parents willing to share their experiences and learning with less experienced comrades.

The purpose of a mentoring program is to support and encourage new parents and to keep seasoned parents engaged and active. Both purposes encourage stability for the child and the family.

New parents dealing with a challenging child, biological parents, new family dynamics or an unresponsive caseworker may easily become overwhelmed and decide to discontinue parenting. When that happens, the child in their care is moved to yet another home. When parents have mentors providing wisdom and support, the child has stability and the new parent finds solutions to parenting challenges.

## STEPS TO STARTING AND MAINTAINING A STRONG MENTORING PROGRAM

- Check to see what types of mentoring programs your church or community already has in place. It may be possible to work with existing programs to build one for foster, kinship and adoptive parents. This will also provide great insights in developing a new program. Mentoring for you as you develop a new mentoring program!
- Schedule time to talk with the foster, kinship and adoptive parents in your church. Hosting a dessert or a pizza night with childcare is one way to bring them together. During your time together, determine what these families are looking for in a mentor and which parents might have the experience and band-width to serve as a mentor. Asking attendees to fill out a short information card or online survey might be helpful.
- Determine the mentoring needs, expertise and needed resources to start a mentoring program. This might include a list of families desiring a mentor, a list of potential mentors, and what types of organization and training you think will be needed to provide excellent ongoing mentoring.
- Develop a Mentor Ministry Proposal and present it to the appropriate church leader for input and approval.
- Provide training for potential mentors. This should include training on confidentiality, setting boundaries, active listening, asking good questions, how often to meet and when to suggest additional help. It is also helpful to set a time frame for this commitment; six or twelve months are common. The pair can always continue the relationship if desired. Some will become life-long friends!

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- Match mentors and mentees. It is best to match moms with moms, dads with dads or couples with other couples. It is also important to match foster families with those who have fostered, kinship families with other kinship families as much as possible.
- Provide a way for mentors to connect with mentees. This might be as simple as sending an email to both with contact information and suggestions for meeting together.
- Schedule ongoing mentor check-in opportunities, possibly every three months. This can be done via phone, email or in a casual meeting when all mentors can share with the program leader and each other.
- Evaluate the mentoring program each year. Modify based on this input to ensure the program continue to meet the needs of your foster, adoptive and kinship families.

Project 1.27 is available to work with your church to develop a foster parent mentoring program. There is no “one way” and no one “right way.” To begin this process, you must have at least one experienced foster family in your church willing to encourage and support a new foster family through visiting the new foster family in their home once a week for a minimum of three months. The new foster family assigned to them may be from your church or may be from the nearby community. During those weekly check-ins, the new foster family will share their challenges and their successes and receive new strategies and ideas from the experienced foster family. Just having someone to talk to who “gets it” has proven to be very helpful for new foster families. The seasoned foster parent must be positive about their fostering experience and solution focused regarding the certifying agency. The goal is to maintain the child’s foster placement and to retain the new foster family through their first foster placement.

If you would like to support Project 1.27 in developing a mentoring program for foster parents in your church, please email [info@project127.com](mailto:info@project127.com).