

Treat Them Like



GOLD

*A Best Practice Guide to
Partnering with Resource Families*



North Carolina Division of Social Services
Child Welfare Services Section
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Introduction

Treat your resource families like gold.

Though this guide provides many specific strategies that have proven effective in North Carolina and elsewhere, at its heart is one basic rule: if you want to successfully recruit, retain, and partner with resource families, ***treat them like gold***. This rule must be the foundation of your resource family recruitment and retention (R & R) efforts.

Why should we treat foster, adoptive, and kinship families like gold? Because without them, life is harder for the families and children we serve, for individual workers, and for our agencies. Without them, we have a much more difficult time keeping siblings together and placing children in their communities. In truth, good foster, adoptive, and kinship families are worth more than gold—they're priceless.

This is strangely easy to forget. In child welfare we face a host of legal and policy mandates, complex procedures, and the ongoing challenge of discerning and pursuing the best interests of each individual child and family. Specialization helps agencies manage these challenges, but it can also obscure the connection between resource families and our ability to ensure the safety, well-being, and permanence of children. When this happens, some of us begin to see support and development of resource families as “someone else’s job” and resource families themselves as almost a nuisance.

Recruiting, supporting, and partnering with foster parents and other resource families is a responsibility shared by everyone in the agency, from the director on down to transportation aides. We must all understand our responsibility to ***treat them like gold***.

Treating resource families like gold can take many forms, including taking the time to get to know them, treating them as peers on the team serving the child and family, helping them develop their skills and knowledge to care for children, and simply showing them the respect they deserve for the pivotal role they play in our system.

This guide, developed by the NC Division of Social Services and the Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work, seeks to give you tools and strategies you and your agency can use to build, refine, and sustain partnerships with resource families. We hope you find it useful.

WHY WE SAY “RESOURCE FAMILIES”

Foster families. Adoptive families. Relatives who provide kinship care. Legal guardians. In this guide and in an increasing number of agencies, all these are referred to as “resource families.” The term refers to anyone who provides a safe, stable, loving home for a child when the child’s birth parents are unable to provide one.

Why use this term? We need to think more broadly about potential families and children’s needs. All kinds of families are needed for children in foster care. Sometimes children need families who can play multiple roles over time.

Instead of dividing families into categories, we are choosing to use a term that leaves the possibilities as open as possible.

About this Manual

In fall 2007 the NC Division of Social Services launched a resource parent recruitment and retention project based on the strategies recommended by best practice and research. This project concentrates on the application of broad but concrete steps that individual agencies can take to meet their specific needs, and it builds on the success of the North Carolina's Multiple Response System and reinforces the strengths of our state's child welfare system. Because recruiting and retaining resource families is fundamentally a community responsibility, counties or clusters of counties are encouraged to use existing interagency committees, collaboratives, and other groups to lead this effort on the local level. The Division has asked the Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work to help implement this project.

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