

Dearest Reader, Apologies for the late blog. As you know, if you have experience with an older youth, then you know how life can throw them a curveball when they least expect it. But we're back, and as always, if you're a foster parent, kin caregiver, DSS or CASA worker, whatever your role or title might be, thank you for taking the time to read this. Now stay buckled in and grab a pen and paper to take some notes.

Welcoming a teen into your home takes more than standard qualifications—it requires intentionality and lived-experience insight. Here is a practical guide for foster parents, kin caregivers, and support workers on how to effectively welcome a youth.

Understanding the Placement Context

Every youth arrives with a unique history that shapes their initial reactions:

- **Hospital Settings:** Be mindful of specific, high-alert triggers.
- **Prior Resource Homes:** Expect potential defense mechanisms (e.g., *"They're going to be just like my last caregivers"*).
- **Group Homes:** Youth are often eager for family life, but transition adjustments take time.
- **First Placements:** Navigating the child welfare system for the first time brings intense uncertainty.

Regardless of where they came from, your focus should be making them feel like they belong.

Creating a Truly Safe Space

A safe space extends beyond a furnished bedroom. It is defined by supportive adults who consistently model patience, love, and unconditional positive regard.

- **Emotional Safety:** Model healthy responses, offer choices, reinforce positive behaviors, redirect negative ones, and maintain trustworthy boundaries.
- **Personalized Comfort:** If possible before arrival or on arrival, ask about their preferences. Accenting their room in their favorite colors and stocking the kitchen with their preferred snacks and meals signals immediate care.

Navigating Arrival Day & Household Integration

- **The First Interaction:** Greet them at the door with a smile. Introduce yourself, ask for their name and age to start a conversational flow, and always **ask permission** before offering a hug.
- **Household Merging:** Help bridge connections between existing household members by highlighting shared interests (e.g., matching a mutual love for reading with a plan to visit the library together).

First-Day Best Practices

Do:

- Give a tour of the home, pointing out essential living spaces.
- Outline core household rules, but save chore assignments for later.
- Clearly communicate meal schedules and provide open access to food and drinks.
- Share basic details about yourself (hobbies, work, interests) to foster mutual connection.
- Plan an inclusive, low-pressure family bonding activity.

Don't:

- Expect instant adjustment; allow grace for initial mistakes during the transition period.
- Pass judgment or make casual critical comments.
- Speak negatively about previous (youth) placements or families.
- Violate privacy. Keep personal disclosures confidential unless safety requires reporting—in which case, inform the youth directly before talking to their caseworker.

By centering patience, clear communication, and respect for a youth's individuality, you set the foundation for a lasting, meaningful connection. Building trust takes time, but every thoughtful gesture on day one helps ease the transition and signals to a teen that they are truly safe and valued.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting young people—we'd love to hear your thoughts and what topics you'd like us to cover in the future.

Stay tuned for next month's blog Topic: Why a Teen in Foster Care May Push You Away (Even When They Need You).