As a foster parent or relative caregiver, you play an essential role in the life of the child in your home. Kindering is privileged to walk alongside as you cherish your child! Young foster children are particularly vulnerable and may need special support to get the right start in life. CHERISH is an infant mental health program designed to meet the needs of foster children in tandem with a traditional early intervention program. This unique program supports both child and caregiver as they discover each other and journey through the child welfare system through an array of services.

This brochure was developed by Alicia Shafer and Katie Biron as an initiative of the Caregiver Advisory Panel. We welcome your feedback on this new resource. Please contact Alicia Shafer at alicia.shafer@kindering.org with suggestions.
Simple things a foster parent or caregiver can do to open the door for connection:

• Practice good self care – you can be a much more open and kind foster parent when you are calm and your cup is filled!
• First call to parent from a foster parent (see resource)
• Invite parent to well child exams and therapy appointments, maybe even invite parents to play at the park afterwards.
• Remember to refer to the child as “your child” when speaking to the birth parents. Try not to use possessive words about the child, even on your social media accounts (If posting a picture of a foster baby and your bio son, maybe consider saying “These sweet boys” instead of “My sweet boys”).
• Meet up at a McDonald’s with a play place –public place, neutral ground, near bus stop. Consider offering to buy the parent a cup of coffee or lunch.
• Ask parent best way to communicate – text, social media, phone calls, notes
• Ask parents for pictures of themselves or ask if you can take a picture of them for the child (it may be very hard for parents in crisis to print pictures themselves). Hang these pictures in your home to help children know you are ok with them talking about and remembering their families. Make sure to ask an older child if they are ok with pictures of their parents prior to putting up the picture.
• Set up a new email just for communication with parents if needed (example katiefostermom@outlook.com)
• Consider a prepaid cell phone for communication if needed.
• Consider a new Facebook account for communication if needed (not with children’s pics or name, just personal)
• Print pictures regularly for parents and include in visit bag.
• Ask parent about child – favorite foods, activities, routines
• If feasible provide transportation to some or all visits to be able to greet parent and check in briefly. It is particularly helpful to arrange to transport to the first visit, as that is a great time to connect caregiver and parent.
• Pass on child’s art, school work, report cards and projects to parents.
• Utilize free passes to children’s museum, science center or aquarium with parent. Your local EI center may be able to help you. Most places have free or highly reduced rates for foster families or kids who receive the medical coupon.
• Ask parent about themselves – favorite activities, foods, cultural things, get to know them!
• Ask what foods, toys or books they like to have in the visit bag. (Remember you likely have more resources and can utilize WIC, Treehouse, clothing vouchers if needed)
• Speak well of parent to all parties involved
• Consider special accommodations for holidays or birthdays when regular visits don’t happen. Can you provide an extra visit? It may mean a lot to the parent.
• Once a relationship is developed, invite the parent to your family functions
• Consider which caregiver has developed a better relationship with a parent. Sometimes a foster Dad is easier to interact with then foster Mom as it’s not such a direct replacement.
• Ask when court dates are, write caregiver reports and attend court when possible. Attach pictures of the child to the court report to allow all to put a face to the case. Print an extra copy of these pictures and bring to court to give to parents.
• Give hugs, affirm parents hard work, encourage them forward.
• Ask your social worker to schedule an Ice breaker meeting, ideally within a few days of placement. The purpose of this meeting is not to discuss case details, but to provide the caregiver and parent a chance to come together on neutral ground to discuss the child. If the foster parent would feel more comfortable, the SW can mediate the Ice Breaker.
• Take written reports from the court and CPS with a grain of salt -remember it’s not the whole story about a parent, perhaps its their lowest moment. How would you feel if someone wrote down your mistakes and shared them with others.

Post reunification:

• Consider providing respite or babysitting.
• Let them know you are still a resource if needed.
• Let parents know you how to reach you in the future – Facebook may be good if phone numbers change frequently.

Simple things social workers can do to open the door for connection:

• Offer to provide contact information to other parties and see if parents are ok with it.
• Provide caregiver with guidelines such as first call to parent from a foster parent.
• Speak well of both parent and caregiver
• Include caregiver in communications so they know what’s going on.