

How Foster Parents Provide A Secure Base

Jessica Floeter and Emma Granquist
 Advised by: Susan Wolfgram, Ph.D.
 University of Wisconsin-Stout



Research Problem and Question

Understanding the importance of providing a safe and secure environment for foster children can reduce the likelihood of a disruption and can prepare foster parents for what to expect when fostering (Baker, 2007). Our purpose of this study is to gain the perspectives of foster parents and how they provide security for their foster children.

How do foster parents provide a secure base for their foster children?

Purpose

1. To examine how foster parents provide a safe and secure base for their foster children
2. To develop an email interview protocol to assess foster parents' perceptions of providing a secure base
3. That results from this study will add to the scant literature in the US on providing foster care from the perceptions of foster parents; and to provide practical information to professionals in helping to prepare and educate future foster parents.

Theoretical Framework

The Life Course Development Theory pays particular attention to the connection between an individual's life and the events in their life that result in change. The life course perspective elaborates the importance of time, context, process, and meaning of human development and family life.

As applied to our study, the Life Course Development would predict that each response from the foster parents who complete the qualitative email interview would reflect differences among their life course sequence and major events. (Mitchell, 2003)

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	#1	#2	#3	#4
Age	18-25	41-50	41-50	51-60
How long have you been a foster parent?	9 months	4 years	3 years	15 years
How many foster children have you had?	2	6	7	11 plus respite
How many foster children are currently in the home?	1	1	1	1
How many biological children do you have?	1	2	3	2
How many biological children are currently in your home?	1	2	3	n/a

Selected Interview Questions and Themes Derived from Interviews

Questions	Themes
<p>How do you build a sense of relationship between you and your foster child (ren)?</p> <p><i>"We make them feel part of the family, include them in things, give love and affection and spend time to get to know them."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending time together • Having open communication and talking together • Playing with the child
<p>How do you promote trust between you and your foster child (ren)?</p> <p><i>"We always tell them the truth and always do what you say toy will do. Being consistent and having schedules help too, keep them informed and explain any changes in plans."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being consistent and utilizing a schedule • Explaining when changes to occur • Follow through with what is said
<p>How do you assure your foster child (ren) that you are there to protect them?</p> <p><i>"We talk about what scares them. We explain that we will do everything we can do to make sure that event does not happen to them. We tell them that they can count on us."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking about and understanding different fears • Demonstrate verbally and through actions • Advocate for the child
<p>What, if any, differences in providing a secure base have you noticed among your foster children based on gender, age, and histories?</p> <p><i>"I had 3 bi-racial children...I have worked with young and old...the young ones have more need for assistance and most often want help. The older ones most often want to try for themselves...I have used all sorts of measures depending on the individual."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibling groups • Younger children require more assistance • Older children are more independent
<p>What do you think is the most important aspect to providing a secure base for foster children?</p> <p><i>"Providing a home where the child can feel loved, secure, and part of a family."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a home that is safe and secure • Always being there for the child • Making the child feel loved and cared for



Method

Participants: 4 female Midwestern foster parents

Sampling Types: Purposive and Snowball

Research Design: Phenomenology

Data Collection Instrument: Qualitative Email Interview (Meho, 2006) through Qualtrics

Procedure: Administered online to foster mothers using "Qualtrics" and via email sent by the Alternate Care Worker of the collaborating agency.. Informed consent, confidentiality, and right to withdraw were explained through e-mail and at the beginning of the interview.

Data Analysis Plan: Thematic Analysis (Kvale, 1996)

Literature Review

- **Murray, Tarren-Sweeney & France (2011)** conducted a mixed methods study to gain knowledge on foster parents' perceived need for support.
- **Brown (2008)** analyzed the needs of foster parents for a successful foster child placement.
- **Baker (2007)** reviewed eight narrative stories to explain the importance of why social workers, foster families, and foster children should read fostering stories.
- **Buehler, Rhodes, Orme & Cuddeback (2006)** described twelve domains to successful foster care.
- **Schofield and Beek (2005)** investigated children who grew up in long term foster care and followed them longitudinally.

Implications

For Practitioners: Foster parent participants suggested having more consistency among caseworkers such as returning phone calls in a timely manner and receiving the child's required documents following placement –that this would improve their care and increase a sense of security. Foster parents building an attachment with a foster child through play and other activities is critical to providing a secure base. Allowing the child to have household responsibilities and chores can help establish family membership. Based upon the child age, race, gender, or background different approaches may be used to provide a secure base for the child.

For Research: Increase sample size, use a mixed methods approach, and conduct interviews with the foster children.

Conclusion

This study provides first hand insight from the lived experiences of female foster parents who have successfully provided safe and secure environments to their foster children. The participants provided us with many examples of how to provide a secure base, but overall making the foster child feel loved, supporting your child, providing a safe home and building trust are essential in providing a secure base.