

Together Again

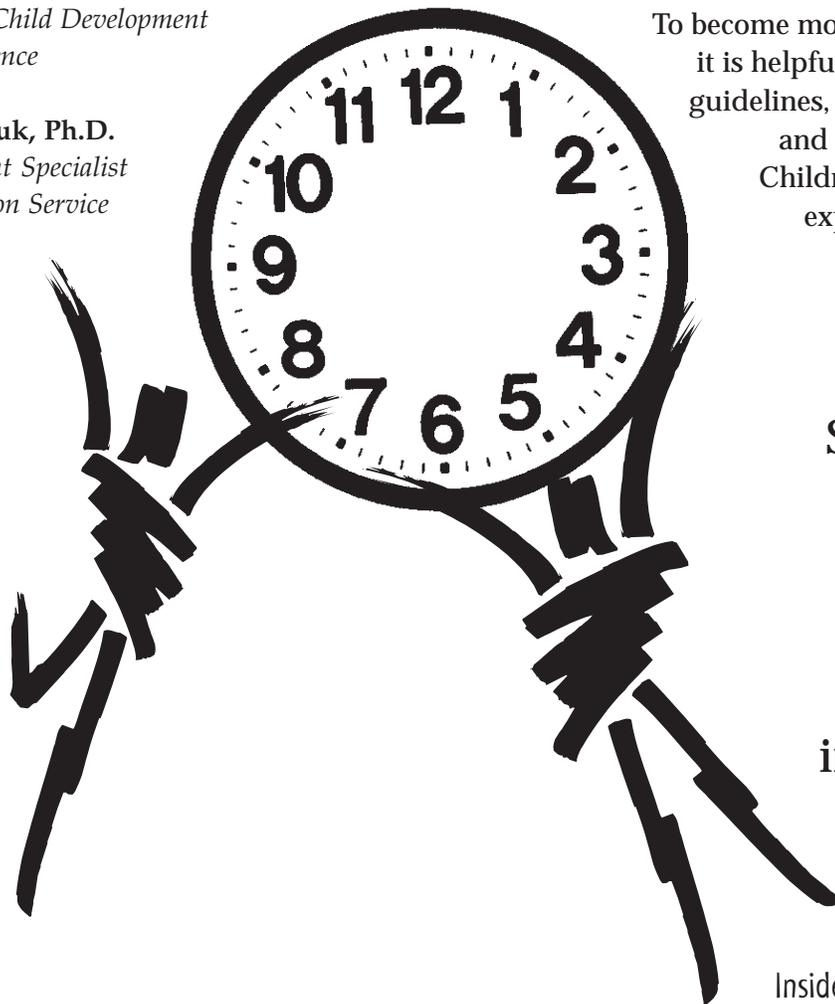


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There are ways to help families to be together again after being apart.

To become more united as a family again, it is helpful to establish routines, have guidelines, promote stability, set limits and have good communication. Children need to know what you expect of them and what they can expect from you.



Spending time together can be the first step in settling back into family life.

Inside ...

- establishing routines
- creating schedules
- showing that you care through communication

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How can I help my children/teens feel more secure?

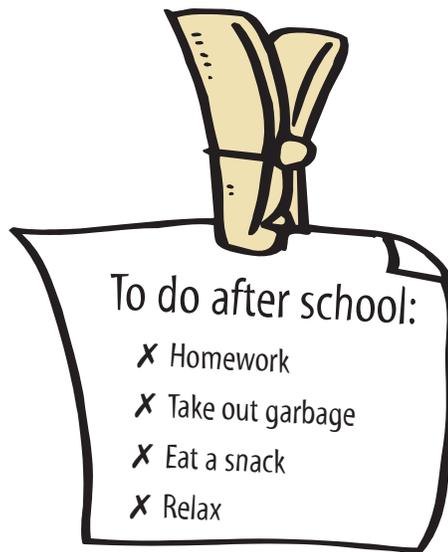
Establish Routines

- Routines are part of providing stability.
- Routines help children feel secure.
- Routines allow children to know what to expect.

Establish Routines Using Schedules

Select a part of your day and write a schedule. List the activities that will take place in the order they will happen (*see examples*).

Writing a schedule will help your children know what is expected of them. Following schedules will help establish routines.



Find a schedule that works *for your family*.

Each family has a *different* schedule.

Some schedules might need to be more detailed, while other schedules contain only basic information. Ask your children/teens to help create a schedule. Your family will be able to create an atmosphere where children/teens are able to see that their input is important.

This can lead to better communication among family members and encourages the feeling of being a valuable part of the family. Improved family bonding may take place because *everyone works as a team*. Children/teens tend to respect a schedule more if they participated in creating it and they will be more likely to follow the schedule. Usually, the more children/teens can participate in creating anything, the more they *will respect the results*.

Another *bonus* of creating a schedule is that children will get upset with the piece of paper that the schedule is written on, *not you!*

Arguing with or trying to get out of a schedule the child helped create is difficult. Therefore, having a *written schedule* can reduce conflict and confusion later. This might increase communication among family members. Seeing a schedule often makes remembering what is happening next easier.

Posting your work schedule tells other family members when you will be home.

You can take a piece of paper and mark the days you work with a W or write it on the calendar.

January - My work schedule						
	W		W			W
	W	W		W	W	W
W		W			W	
W	W	W	W	W		

Routines also are important. For instance, make sure your children, even teens, sleep in a familiar house and bed at night if possible. Often, children feel more vulnerable in the evening. This is a time when children might want a favorite toy or stuffed animal, a night light, a picture of a loved one or another item that allows them to feel more secure. Being home with your child or having a steady support person (an extended-family member, good friend or neighbor) available when you are not around can add the extra support that your child needs.

Communication

Another important aspect of family bonding is good communication.

Good communication can be displayed in actions as well as words. Communication can take place without speaking. Through actions such as washing your children's favorite T-shirt, jeans, etc., so they can wear the item the next day, helping your children clean the living room, or baking their favorite foods *shows that you*

care. Doing these little things can create another form of bond among family members.

Examples of little things you can do that mean a lot include going for a walk together, playing a board game, playing cards, shoveling the sidewalk, playing basketball or taking time to listen to music. These moments will speak volumes to a child. The more high quality moments you spend together, the more opportunities you have for *communication* and bonding to take place. Your child might even try to communicate back to you through actions instead of words. *Watch and see.*

Time together is the most important element in getting to know one another again. Spending time together may help children/teens get over any fear of being abandoned or displaced. This can help rebuild relationships. Being together provides more opportunities for communication, *but it takes time.*

Note that spending time together can be stressful. Getting to know one another again can be uncomfortable

for some people. Small steps here can be very beneficial. Having patience and going slow can put everyone at ease.

Talk about neutral subjects. Discuss subjects such as the weather, who you talked to or have seen lately, your day or about things that you have experienced. Discuss what is happening in your life or other people's lives.

Example: "Did you know that your uncle got a new car?"

"Have you seen it?"

"Did he take you for a ride?"

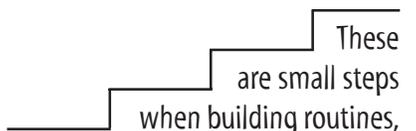
Light, informational statements can create an atmosphere that promotes discussion. They can allow communication to flow between you and your child/teen.

Do not rush in and start quizzing your children about their day. This can seem threatening and cause communication to slow down or stop. Respecting communication boundaries can help promote communication.

After discussing neutral subjects, topics that are more personal may arise.

"How are your friends?"

"What was your day like?"



These are small steps when building routines, communication and relationships.

These are the beginning steps in being together again.

Overall, creating family stability will help a child of any age feel more secure. Children/teens need to feel loved, valued and connected to their families. Physically being there will provide the time needed to learn how to re-connect family ties. Children need to learn again what being a family means. Establish routines and good communication and spend time together to help the connection grow.

Remember, these techniques are beginning steps. If these techniques are not working for your family, seek additional help through other resources. Valuable resources include your support system, such as family, friends, neighbors and professionals.

Helpful information always is available in books, newsletters and through family counseling or therapy. Counseling can provide families with additional tools to overcome difficult times.

Helpful Phone Numbers

- **North Dakota Helpline**
2-1-1 or (800) 472-2911
- **Badlands Human Service Center**
(888) 227-7525
- **Or call your local office of the NDSU Extension Service** to find phone numbers for agencies that can assist you. Regional Parent Resource Centers also have information available to help provide phone numbers of other agencies to assist you.

Helpful Resources for Parents

Kupchella, R. (2003) *Tell me what we did today*. Golden Valley, Minn.: Tristan Publishing Inc.

Pellman, P. & Good, M. (1997) *303 Great Ideas for Families (Most Cost Less than 99 Cents!)*. New York, N.Y.: Good Books Publishing.

References

McKenry, Patrick C. & Price, Sharon J. (2000) *Families & Change: Coping with stressful events and transitions*. Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publishing Inc.

Haight, Wendy, Kagle, Jill Doner, & Black, James (2003) Understanding and supporting parent-child relationships during foster care visits: Attachment theory and research. *Social Work*, 48 (2), 195-207.

Moorman, C. (2003) *Parent Talk: How to talk to your child in language that builds self-esteem and encourages responsibility*. New York, N.Y.: Simon and Schuster Adult Publishing Group.

For more information on this and other topics, see: www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu