

Comfort Call Guide

Quality Parenting Initiative – Minnesota

Significant stress and confusion occurs for children and youth when they experience separation from their primary caregiver(s) due to out of home placement. At the earliest stage of out of home placement, there is often a lack of connection/ relationship established between the birth and the foster family. This comfort call guide is meant to address these early stage difficulties for children/youth and their families.

Goals of the comfort call:

- Set the stage for partnership and co-parenting between the birth family and foster family.
- Open the door for birth and foster families to ask questions to one another that support the child/youth during the difficult time of initial separation.
- Encourage and invite everyone to attend the Circle of Support Meeting.

Recommendations:

- Occurs within the first 48 hours after the child/youth has been placed outside of their family's care.
- This call is not conducted in the presence of the child/youth; its primary purpose is initiating partnership between the birth family and foster parents.
- If the birth family is not ready to participate in the conversation, that is okay. Offer understanding by sharing with them that you would want to know this information if the roles were reversed and can answer their questions later if they prefer. The removal of children is stressful and overwhelming for parents; there may be another family member the birth family would like to have called and relayed information (such as grandmother or other relative or family friend).

The spirit of the comfort call is for the birth and foster families to engage with one another. Different counties and agencies across Minnesota are part of the QPI-MN network. Therefore, how comfort calls are initiated will depend on the specific system the birth family and foster family are involved in.

Options to initiate the comfort call:

- The foster family initiates the call.
- After the child is settled at the foster home (or emergency shelter home/placement), the placing social worker / caseworker and foster parent call the birth family together.
- The placing social worker / caseworker calls the birth family and if they are willing to talk with the foster family, a 3-way call occurs, or the foster family is given the okay to call the family.
- Private foster care agency or shelter staff engage in the phone call with the foster family and birth family.



The Comfort Call is based on the QPI-MN value: Birth families, relatives and foster parents connect and create mutually healthy relationships to care for children and youth.

Foster Parent Tips:

In the beginning of the call explain why you are calling and who you are by telling the birth parents a bit about yourself. Here are examples of some of things you could share about yourself:

- How long you have been a foster parent
- Who lives in your home, including pets
- What activities or hobbies do you have
- What is your daily routine

Also ask about any information that would be good for you to know about their child(ren)/youth, while you are caring for them. Here are some examples:

- What is the child(ren)/youth favorite food?
- Do they have a favorite toy or game they like to play?
- What do you do to provide comfort to the child(ren)/youth?
- What is a nickname that they might go by?
- If an infant or baby: Is there a type of formula or baby food they prefer?
- Do they have a primary doctor?
- Any food allergies or medical prescriptions I should know about?

Tell how the foster child is doing:

- How their first few nights went and how they slept
- When they child will go back to school/daycare

For Foster Parents: What to do if the phone call becomes unhelpful:

These phone calls are meant to be helpful to all persons and demonstrate care and concern for the child/youth. If the phone call is not going well and the birth parent is not ready and able for the conversation, end the call in a calm manner by simply restating why you made the phone call and indicate that you hope to communicate in the future. If you do have to end the conversation, contact the placing worker/agency and let them know what happened.

Next Steps:

This comfort call is the building blocks to a relationship between the birth and foster families with hope that a Circle of Support Meeting occurs next. We know that children and youth do their best when there is strengthened communication and relationship between their caregivers. Be sure to share with the placing worker / agency how the phone call went if they were not involved.



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