

It's All Relative: Supporting Kinship Connections

A Bright Future: A Foster-to-Adopt Story

Casey and Heath have been licensed foster parents since May 2016. Casey's employment at an outpatient mental health agency lead her to meet 15-year-old Nakiah. Nakiah's family has been involved with the Department of Child Services since 2013, and, when Nakiah needed an adoptive home, Casey and Heath felt called to provide Nakiah with a forever home.

The family experienced challenges with Nakiah's inability to bond and attach to them as caregivers as well as the grief and loss she felt about leaving her biological family. Casey and Heath overcame these challenges by creating a safe space for Nakiah, which facilitates open communication. Communication has been key to this family's ability to process their feelings about each other, and they fostered good communication by modeling and setting clear expectations and boundaries for Nakiah. An important part of overcoming Nakiah's attachment problems was to let Nakiah tell her story to Casey and Heath starting from day one and for Casey and Heath to communicate that they love and support Nakiah no matter what decisions she makes regarding her biological family.



They also worked with Nakiah's therapist, who was helpful in providing the family with information about Nakiah's background and emotions so that they could best understand Nakiah and how they need to interact with her. Casey and Heath let Nakiah go at her own pace in regard to seeing her biological family. They want to support Nakiah's biological family being a part of her life, and they are going to make a family tree in her room with pictures since this has meaning to Nakiah and shows Nakiah that they care about this, too.

The family also navigates Nakiah's difficulty establishing peer relationships and biological developmental changes by utilizing their informal supports. Church is a great resource for the family. For example, Nakiah helps with Casey and Heath's youth group by babysitting. Another essential resource is Nakiah's extracurricular activities, which facilitate growth in social interactions, good judgment, and self-esteem. When the family experiences conflict, they use communication and family meetings to address it. Casey and Heath give Nakiah time to cool off alone and revisit the topic when everyone is calm. Casey and Heath advise that at times they have to "agree to disagree" and be flexible. Casey and Heath have developed such a safe space for Nakiah that she has opened up to them about past issues that she has never told her therapist. The family believes that another contributor to their safe space is that they consistently remind Nakiah of her strengths and reassure her that they love her.

The plan is for Casey and Heath to adopt Nakiah. They plan to participate in National Adoption Day in November 2017. The future is bright for the family. Nakiah will start driving soon, the family plans to visit Nakiah's siblings in another state, and the Bentleys will continue to foster children to contribute to better outcomes for children and families.

If you would like to learn more about becoming a license foster parent in Indiana, visit <https://www.in.gov/dcs/fostercare.htm>.



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