

I'm really excited for this panel.

One of the things that I have found the most influential, the most changing in my time as a foster doctor parent, is the idea that lived expertise, lived experience is really the only way to make a change and to make a difference.

If we're not talking to people who have similar experiences, who have actually been receivers of child welfare services, who lived through foster care, we really don't fully understand how to do the work or how what we're doing works or doesn't work. And I'm really excited today to have Carol Edwards in this amazing panel from Quality Parenting Initiative come together and present to us and really talk through lived experience, lived expertise, and how that really has shaped the laws and what we're doing moving forward.

Carol, I'm sending that to you.

Thank you.

Good morning, Amanda.

It's so great to be here.

We appreciate the opportunity to be with everyone this morning, and we're looking forward to this amazing panel.

My co presenter is Jamie Averett, and Jamie is actually going to begin our session.

So, Jamie, it's all yours.

And again, my name is Jamie Brett, and I have the privilege to work as the Florida consultant for Pi and have been the GPI for a little over four years now.

And prior to that, I would have the opportunity to for children

and families from a legal perspective, as an attorney and also as a dependency judge and Georgia.

And it is really just a true privilege to be here today because we believe in the power of excellent parenting, the Quality Parenting and know that you as caregivers are an integral part and sharing that our children and care receive things that they need to scribe, if you will put us on.

And we will go ahead and go to our panel of experts.

So I'm Super excited you're going to love our panel that we have with us today, and I'm going to introduce them.

Dan Burn is here with us this morning.

I'm Dan serves as the President of the Pope Chapter in Tallahassee in the Northwest region, and his last, Olivia, have been caregiver since 2,016 numerous children in their homes from infants to 17 years old.

And they truly believe in the power of relationships and working with birth parents and birth families and really fostering them as a whole to improve outcomes for children.

And he is a proud dad, two twin boys, so vile.

And Owen, he has what he calls to banish children right now that he's in the process of adoption to of two girls.

I'm so excited to have Dan.

We also have with us, Victoria Camper.

Victoria is the mother to three children, and she brings to us today that experience from a birth parents who was successfully reunified with her children.

And after that, Victoria began to use that experience to

work on the Birth Parent Advisory Board for Community Partnership for Children in the Northeast Region, and she has continued that work by now becoming exunited Week advocacy coordinator with TPI, where she tries to not tries that.

She does engage reverse parents and bring their voices to system change.

So we're excited to have Vicki.

We also have Rachel Martin and he brings us the case manager perspective, and she has a true heart and passion for social work. Raquel works at children home, the body, and she really believed in the power of relationships and herbal as a case meet. Next we will have Marty Lowery.

And Marty is a lot for young man who was a for foster you.

He grew up and he can hear from the age three.

And so he aged out at 20 and his foster here.

He is now an independent young man who is working as a claim adjuster for commercial insurance.

But he's also serving as an advocate for you with Lord Youth Time. Solar Harris is one of our wonderful leaking partners, and she brings with her years of experience.

She was one of the first original attorneys in the state of Florida.

That work began to do this work after the Florida Bar were expired. Attorney to represent Hrs.

She took a brief right to be a mother to her own children that came back to the area of law that she loves and has worked as the managing attorney for CLS.

Now for 16.

We also have Jamie Spring and Jamie has two hats that she will be wearing today.

In a diverse perspective.

She and her husband has served as license caregiver mail for around nine years.

They've had multiple placements on your home and have adopted two URLs.

But Additionally, Jamie works as a sorting them laden.

She was at Garland starting in Latin bound here for around two years, and she's now been a child advocate manager for the last three years.

And last but not least, my amazing friend Carol Edwards, who you have already seen this morning.

And Carol is going to be our facilitator for the funeral.

And Carol has her Masters in social work and is working on her doctorate.

And she has spent her entire career in child welfare.

She worked for GCS.

She worked for the community based care agency, formerly non is big in.

She's full time Meal FSU and the College of Social Work.

And she is also our National training coordinator for Pi.

So you can see why I'm excited.

Just a wonderful panel that I think you will find dynamic.

So if we look at our objectives for today, got a next slide.

We're going to look at Florida wall and really some wall

that has come into effect with the purpose of looking at relationships and building relationships for the sole purpose, the reduced trauma for children and to ensure that children drive next 5 0.

Okay.

So when we talk about Pi, we had a National conference recently and one of the questions that came up is what is Pi?

What is top all about?

So Pi has lots of principles and values and Foundation that we stand on.

Research is part of that.

But there are some foundational beliefs that are part of Pi, and this one exemplifies as one of our core beliefs.

It's around excellent parenting.

We stand by this belief that excellent parenting and strong, secure, healthy relationships are critical to healthy development for children.

This is what gives them the best opportunity for success.

And so I'm going to challenge everyone.

Now, if you have been part of KPI, you're either KPI champion or you're a parent who participates.

Or if you just you believe in this principle.

And what you do is just put in the chat something that you know, to be true, right.

Something that we stand on around children, because I think all of us are here because we are committed to making sure that children have the best possible outcome.

So go ahead and put something in the chat that you stand on one of your core foundational principles, and I'm sure it will align with this one and with Pi.

So I've been seeing lots of things coming up in chat about PCI, and a lot of that has looked at relationships.

And so this law that went into effect last summer was the direct work of PPI and Florida and throughout the nation.

But work that we have been doing with you as caregivers and other partners that really focus on relationships and attachment.

And because what we do know for children, it's harmful for children when we have to remove them and from those relationships and attachments that they have developed.

And that is not our goal in the system.

We do not want to do harm to children to help children.

And so when we look at that and really that children know that to do that, we have to build relationships and building those healthy relationships and connections not only support our children, but they support our caregivers.

They support our birth parents and other system partners for us to be able to truly improve outcomes and permanency.

So as things are coming in, I've seen lots of things of ensuring that kids are successful, being Blama informed, bonding with parents and children.

All of those things are Pi.

And we were satisfied that book principles, and I really became the core values that were present in this law to Carol, if he will move forward.

Okay.

Jamie, as move to that one.

I saw one.

It just popped up for me around the whole concept of love.

And, you know, we talk about safety and permanent fee, and we talk about all of those principles that kids need.

But sometimes we forget that one.

And I saw that Fabiola put that one in there, that kids need love, and that's just so important that we keep that in mind that it's bigger.

And that's coming up again for careful.

That just came in, making them feel love and consistently and faith.

And the reality is we all need love.

And so when we look at this statue and we kind of talk through this, it's not just impact our kids, but it's impacting every one of us in this child welfare system.

And so the bill became artist statue or 9.1 4-1-5 for those of you who are interested.

And there are three main areas of focus that we're going to highlight today.

The first is supporting respectful partnerships.

It is the parent relationships, which may also know more directly as co parenting.

And the last is looking at developmental sets of transition for our children.

Next slide.

When we look at respectful partnership for kids, that really is a conversation about all of us, about the way that we as a system are working together collaboratively to support one another and to respect one another.

So when we look at that, well, there are several things that come up that I just want to highlight.

A few really focuses on the importance of communication with us as stakeholders.

It focuses on the importance of information sharing together.

Focuses on the importance of really looking at things to that child focus in not my list.

How this is a fact, me that really how is this impacting our children that work here for?

And it focuses on the importance of excellent parenting.

Several years ago, quality parenting was put into statute that this will replace the word quality with excellence, which truly is.

The mission of Pi is to ensure that children receive excellent parenting. Research tells us that is the absolute best thing that we can provide for them.

But what we also know is that you as caregiver in order to provide that excellent guarantee that for need that ongoing training, need those relationships, need that information to make sure you're equipped to provide that excellent.

So we kind of move forward in this conversation.

We're going to learn more about the all through that of our lived experience and to our panels.

So, Carol, I will let you take it away to our panelists and hear from them about how these things have impacted them personally. Thanks, Jamie.

One of the things I wanted to mention right away is in our CPI work, we have an opportunity to work with systems all over the country.

And I have to give a shout out to Florida.

I have to let you know that Florida in so many places is the envy of the nation in terms of child welfare because of this new law, because it really emphasizes the importance of excellent parenting partnership, supporting each other and working collaborative way to do what is best for children and including their voice in everything we do, making sure that we have as a priority, including individuals with lived experiences. So kudos to Florida, all of you who made that happen. I know so many parents with great ideas push those ideas forward and said, Hey, this is something we need to change. I know individuals with lived experiences use their voices to advocate.

And, of course, all of our system partners, the Department of Children and Families, the amazing work that they do, as well as all of our community based care partners and all of our agencies.

So together, we were able to achieve this.

And now we have an opportunity to hear from our amazing panel.

Jamie introduced them to us earlier, and we're going to just talk for a moment about excellent caregiving.

And for this one, I'm going to call in.

We're gonna call on three of our panelists to chime in at this point.

And, Marty, just as a heads up, you're gonna be first.

All right.

We're gonna have Marty.

And then we're gonna hear from Raquel and then Victoria, and what the first question is in your eyes, what makes an excellent caregiver?

And I'll turn first to Marty.

Good morning, everyone.

So I grew up in foster care from three to 20, so I definitely have a lot of experience going through different placements.

I definitely went through a lot throughout my experience.

I did have.

So I moved around a lot when I was younger.

And then I found a foster family when I was about eight years old. That foster family has been a very, like, good impact on my life.

When I first, because a lot of people would just give up on me, I had anger issues, and I just throw tantrums all the time, and then I'd be in a different home.

But when I got to the age of eight, and I moved into their last name is best.

So I moved into the best house on December 28 th 2,005 from there. As soon as I got to their home, they already had Christmas gift for me.

Even though Christmas had already passed, they had Christmas gifts waiting under this tree, waiting for me.

And it just showed that they actually really cared for me.

Getting beyond that, I started to live in their home.

I lived in their home for about six years or five or 6 years.

They really turned me around.

You could tell that they really cared for me.

They made sure that I had good grades.

They would take me places.

They would treat me like I was their own.

So.

And that, to me, really helped me a lot, because I didn't have that stability.

So when I get somebody that cares about me, I don't really know how to Act.

But then it just felt like I can't explain it.

I can't articulate it.

But it was just it felt like a real home.

They took care of me.

They took me on vacations.

They did everything that a normal parent would.

And that's what a lot of youth and kids in care need is that parent. What children really need is a parent, because this is the person that they're going to look up to, this is a person that they're going to try to shadow their life after, you know, having a good role model there for them is going to really push them in the right direction.

Because if I didn't have those foster parents, I wouldn't be as responsible and successful as I am today.

But they instilled in me the right thing how to be a respectable young man.

And that's what a lot of, you know, you need.

They need guidance.

And I'm so about it.

And I'm so about quality parents because I see, like my friends parents, they didn't grow up in foster care.

But you see, that how much their parents care for them.

That's what I want with a foster parent, the same kind of love. That's what these children need.

A lot of the times, like when they're being pulled from their home, it's not of any fault of their own.

You know, you got to treat them with love and respect.

You treat them like they're your own kid.

You can't treat them, you know, separately because it's just going to make them feel bad and it's going to be very negative to their life.

But, you know, I think what makes it to answer the question?

I think what really makes an excellent caregiver is somebody that has a pure heart that really wants to see that child succeed and love them.

So the last thing that they're in their home and even beyond that, that's Marty, you said something in the middle.

You said, I don't know how to express it.

Let me tell you what you just did it your expression was

so authentic and so genuine.

And one of the things I heard from you is that's what you want in excellent caregivers, that their love and care was authentic. It was genuine.

It was real.

And so you couldn't necessarily pin it down because it was a living thing, right?

You experienced it, right?

Yeah.

So I just love the way you express that.

And I think it would really resonate with so many parents to see that it's not the fancy thing.

It's not the big vacations.

It's not all that.

It's that love and care.

So thank you for thank you for just expressing it in your own way.

I we heard you loud and clear on that.

I'm going to go to Rachel next.

So, Rachel, from your experience, I think Jamie said you're a case manager.

And what do you see as some of the components of excellent caregiving or excellent parenting?

So I have a little bit of a different perspective.

So as a case manager for me, what makes an excellent caregiver or someone who's willing to have an open line of communication with me as a case manager and also with the bio parent and

that they're willing to keep both of us updated and keep us in the know I have some caregivers right now that will text me even like, Oh, this child had a hard week this and this happened.

And even though I might not have the time to respond back right away, I always appreciate those little updates, because then it lets them know, okay, this is how the child is getting in the home.

This is what's happening.

And then it also lets me know they're really doing what they need to do for the child and that they'll let me know when they have a specific need or when something is coming up.

And so as a case manager, I really appreciate that open line of communication because it just lets me stay in the now and just stay up to date.

And then as well as when they're willing to communicate with those by parents, when we're looking at Pi, that's essential in being able to even text the bio parents like, Hey, this is what happened this week.

This is how they're doing.

Or like, Hey, I have this appointment for them, keeping them in the now when the medical appointments are and the time of manner and all of those things.

And so whenever I see that, that's a is Super encouraging for me because it always leads to a better transition later on with reunification, because they're keeping the parents in the notes.

So when the parents get the kids back, they know, Okay, these are all the things that I missed while they were in the care of someone else.

And so for me, whenever I see that, that's an excellent caregiver to me.

That's great.

Thank you, Raquel, because one of the things that as you were talking, I was thinking about your coordinating all of this.

So if you don't have the information, it's really hard to get the information to all the right people and to make sure everybody's on that same page.

So your work and coordinating that is so important, but you have to have the information in order to be able to do it.

So thank you for sharing that.

And I think we'll close off this first question with Victoria, who really is an amazing advocate.

I can say that.

And she's also a birth parent with some amazing experiences that she's able to share with others and inspire others to to move forward with excellent parenting.

So, Victoria, what would you say?

So when I think back of my children were placed with my grandparents and my grandparents were elderly, so we kind of had that opportunity without even realizing it, it worked out that way because my parents really did need my help.

I had a four year old that strangers couldn't understand

him, and I was kind of a translator.

So a lot of times my grandpa would say, What is he saying and put the phone to him so I could say he wants this.

And so there was those kind of things.

And then I also had the opportunity to do normal stuff.

So I was required by my grandparents that I had to make 24 hours worth of bottles every day.

So no matter what I was doing, at some point during the day, I had to go to the house and make bottles.

And that gave me an opportunity to feed my newborn at least one bottle a day, which I understand that in foster care, that can't happen.

But I did have contact with my grandparents on how the kids were doing on a daily basis, at least in back at it.

Just this conversation has made me think about it and made me grateful for that.

So my four year old was in preschool VPK, and, you know, they were practicing letters.

And so I got to do his weekly homework assignment with him to write his name or write the letter a However many times.

And now, because of what I know about attachment, I realized that that really helped to keep our attachment bond, because it's not I don't know how many of you have ever done homework with a four year old, but it's not fun.

You know, it's not it is frustrating for everybody.

But those are the things we build attachment in those challenging situations where you both have to get through something and

then you can hug afterwards and be like, it's going to be okay. And so now I look back at it.

I'm like, Wow, in the moment, I remember going, Oh, I'm spending this little bit of time with him having to do this.

Didn't appreciate it like I did now.

So being able to do those normal things, like feed the baby bottle and do homework with my for having that normalcy and being respected as the expert.

And when something does come up that they were unsure of, they called me and ask my influence how they should handle something. Victoria, thank you so much for sharing that.

And one of the first things you said was, you are still a parent, right?

So you still had some parent responsibilities.

You were still engaged, you were pulled in.

So, you know, you weren't kind of left on the periphery of watching someone parents, but you are actively engaged in parenting. So thank you for sharing your experiences with us. And we look forward to hearing more from you.

So we're going to move on to our second question that we're going to talk about.

And this really relates to one of the underlying principles of the new law that Jamie talked about.

Basically, in a nutshell, our new law encourages all of us to support caregivers in making sure that they are able to parent their children in an excellent way.

And so that means that we all have to work together.

But in order to support caregivers, in providing excellent parenting, we have system partners, have some things that we could do to lend some support.

So I'm going to call on two of our panelists I'm going to start out with Jamie, and then we'll go to Dan.

And the question for you is, how do system partners support excellent parenting?

Because we have some of those on the call right now.

Yeah.

I think it's Super important to set expectations from the very beginning.

And that's something that I do both as a foster parent and also as a Guardian.

Litem, when we have a new case come in, I reach out to everybody, introduce myself.

Oftentimes I will create a group text message with the Guardian, Alite, the case manager, the caregiver, depending upon the situation, the bio parent, just depending on what it is.

Sometimes it's just the the parent and the foster parent and myself, it really varies, but I think it's important in that way.

I can easily keep everybody up to date with what's going on. I never want to assume that somebody who's also involved in the case knows what's happening.

I don't want to assume that the caregiver to the case manager told the caregiver about the Jr that scheduled.

I would rather them hear it twice.

Once from the case manager went from me as the Guardian to make sure that they know when that schedule than just assume that they're aware and then find out later that they didn't know anything was scheduled.

So that's really important for me to make sure everybody's up to date.

And it's a really good Foundation of developing that relationship as the case goes on to start it at the very beginning.

Thank you, Jamie, for sharing that, because caregivers just imagine, I think about it if you're caregiving for one child, but you might have multiple children with all kinds of things happening for each child, and you want to be present.

When Marty talked about full on parenting, like you want to be loved and care for the same way.

So that means that caregivers have to be involved in everything.

And as Jamie was just saying, you have to make sure that that information is getting to all the right people.

So as a system partner, really making sure that everyone is informed and stays informed is so helpful.

Dan, from your perspective, what are some other ways that system partners can really support excellent parenting for our caregivers?

Sure.

Absolutely.

So I'm going to Echo what Jamie just said and say that communication is so critical.

But I define that in terms of engaging in co parenting because

the system partners are part of the co parenting process and our co parents, along with the primary caregivers, as well as the biological parents or the family of origin.

So it's really a team effort in co parenting and part of the way that we do that through regular staffing.

I request on every one of my cases to have regular staffing.

So we're communicating on a regular basis through text message and through email.

But we're also getting together on a frequent basis in order to discuss hurdles that we have in the case, plan to discuss progress, to encourage the parents and really function as a team together.

So we actually had a case.

This is an example.

I actually had a case where both parents were deaf, and we had a case manager that realizing that we had translators that would come.

But the case manager realized, if I'm really going to engage with these parents, I need to know how to speak their language.

And so she started watching YouTube videos in the evening to learn how to speak as American sign language.

And my wife knows how to speak sign language.

So we as a team would work together to better communicate with these parents, which I think really encourage them, by the way, three months to reunification from removal.

So really, it was a team effort coming together to support this family in their specific way that they needed support.

And that's amazing.

I was just thinking like, that's the example of teamwork makes the dream work, right?

Exactly.

Sometimes if we were to say, you can make this happen in the spirit, it's like, Oh, no, that will never happen.

But your example of kind of going above and beyond finding a way to make it happen and being persistent about it make such a difference.

And by the way, I've always wanted to learn sign language, and I have not.

So you just kind of gave me an extra motivation.

Youtube videos.

You can do it on YouTube.

Now you can do everything on YouTube, right.

Thank you.

Thank you, Daniel, for sharing that.

Now, another part of this law really requires that, you know, as Daniel started talking about is really working together as a team and partnering.

But the bottom line for all that is about relationships, right? Relationships.

So it's not something that you can really kind of fake, you know, you have to develop genuine relationships.

What are some examples in their experience of the importance of relationships and making all of this come together?

And we'll start out with Jamie.

I think that there are some easy things that we can do as far as maintaining those relationships.

I always get copies of the medical records when I'm at the doctor's office, and I saw somebody put that in the chat earlier as one of the things that we can do to help maintain those relationships and show case management or the Guardian alien program that I do value them as a partner.

And I want to make their job as easy as I can.

I know they've got a lot of other things on their plate.

So it takes me a second to ask the doctor's office for that note and just to send it over by email to everybody.

And then it saves the case manager having to request it later from the doctor's office.

So anything that I can do to assist with those types of things, supervising visits with the bio parents so that it takes it off the plate of the Department.

Those are the types of things that we try to do or our family tries to do as caregivers with the kids.

Thank you, Jamie.

I mean, those are such good, specific examples, too.

And when you were sharing, it made me think about all of the folks that we have on the call.

I think I see that we have 138 people on here who also might have some perspective.

So as our panel is sharing, go ahead and put it in the chat because we also learn from each other at the same time.

So if you think about the value of relationships, everyone

who's listening, I want you to put something in the chat about relationships, about why relationships are so important or an example of why the relationship really mattered in a situation.

So go ahead and just put in that chat things that really highlight the importance of relationships.

And we'll go to Raquel and Raquel asks you to share from your perspective.

Well, my relationships are so important.

So for me, something that I do also to try to build those relationships is I try to take that extra time, which is hard to do with my busy schedule.

But I try my best to try to, like whenever I first get a case, like talk to the caregivers, talk to bio parents, and just kind of explain what the process is of the system going forward. And from there, try to build that report and that trust, letting them know like, Hey, if you have any questions, I might not get back to you the same day, but I will get back to you as soon as I can with an answer and try to get you to the right person because I want to as a case manager, be there and try and limit any gaps and anything going on because that's one of the biggest issues is sometimes one person knows something and then the other person is left out of the loop.

And so I'm trying to be that mediate is the best that I can do. I saw that when I was scrolling through some of in the chat that some of the caregivers, they keep the case manager

updated, which is awesome, or they already write down on the calendar when staffing are so that they limit how many questions they have to ask.

And so that's really awesome and really helpful for the case manager when they do that.

And I definitely value my relationships and relationships that I really value as well is with CLS.

Sometimes case managers will leave the attorneys out of the loop sometimes.

And so I really value and I have an attorney that really wants to know a lot more of the details on the case because it makes things go a lot quicker.

When I have an emergency motion that comes up, then the no, this child really needs this care.

Let me get this figured out really quickly.

Instead of just doing the paperwork when they really know what's happening in the case, that it really does make a difference. I feel like.

And so I really value that partnership as well with the attorneys.

Thanks out.

Those were really good examples of how relationships make such a difference.

And you definitely brought out a couple of things in the chat. And I really appreciate that.

And I saw that Kelsey is a new foster mom.

And so I just want to give a shout out to a new foster mom out there.

So way to go.

Kelsey.

And Kelsey's last name, Hazard, is my mom's maiden name,
and it spelled the exact same way.

So I had to give a shout out Kelsey.

But Kelsey talked about as a new mom, she's only had one
placement under her belt, but she had a good relationship
with the birth parent.

And now that the child has left her home, they still are
in communications.

So relationships they build over time, they can extend beyond
placement. They support children.

I saw so many people put in here about trust, you know, that
was mentioned so many times.

Relationships, you know, really builds trust.

And the bottom line I saw that somebody put in here was about
relationships makes things better for children.

Right.

So it's all about everything we can do for the child.

And so thank you for bringing that out.

So polar.

Would you share your perspective on relationships?

Good morning.

I'm so excited to be here.

And I want to thank you all.

It's so wonderful to be able to present to foster parents
and what a difference you make.

And what is so exciting about this law to me is these principles are embedded in Florida law.

So it means all of us have to take notice.

We can't just be mindful and nod towards it.

We really have to have the opportunity to make a difference here. So thank you, Raquel, because I'm with CLS and she mentioned CLS.

And what I wanted to say is a foster parent, I think you're like a superhero.

The court system is very dehumanizing, and this new law enables us all to be human beings again.

And talking about relationships, Carol, how exciting, because this is where we really have the opportunity to make that exciting difference for children and for these families.

You talked about trust.

Trust is so important to reduce fear, to reduce trauma, so we can work together, building a puzzle.

Now we all have a little piece.

But who has the big pieces?

The bio parent and the foster parent, they have the big pieces.

So the rest of us should take a step back and support them.

This is our opportunity to support you all and to make sure, since I'm part of the court system to make sure that you're heard, that your voice, you all are the most important people and that your voice is heard loud and clear.

So the value of relationships that says it all.

I mean, this is a game changer.

This is a revolution, in my opinion.

So how do I, as a managing attorney for Children's Legal Services, what do I bring to the table?

I want to make the court system more accessible to you.

I want you to be heard.

What do I do in my circuit where we send out our contact list? What is that?

Our phone numbers.

We want you to email us.

We want to engage you in Witness Prep.

You know, oftentimes we have a case manager at Witness Prep.

And if we have the foster parent at Witness Prep, Oh, my gosh. We have so much more information because who's living the life with the child every day?

Who's speaking to that child every day?

It's the foster parent case manager doesn't have the time to do that, Unfortunately.

So it's so much more robust, so much more fulfilled to be able to give all of that to the court.

And we want to and this is a battle through the battle every day, a foster parent per Florida law has a right to be heard in court loud and clear.

They can't be pushed aside anymore.

So we've got to make sure that that's happening.

And so you have the courtroom or a virtual courtroom full of a lot of boxes with people.

How do we know the foster parents there?

So be texting us or if we're in courtroom, walk up to the bar and pull on our co tails, you have a right to be heard.

And if a foster parent can't be heard, can't physically be at the courtroom or they're working a job.

We have something in our circuit called a caregiver input form, where they can ride a form, and we file it with the court. So the court knows what the foster parent has to say.

I hope that answered your question, Carol.

Oh, my gosh.

Did I answer the question?

I want to go to your court room.

I want to be part of your system of care, because it sounds like you not only believe in the principles, but you practice them, you know, you put them in place.

And to let caregivers let our foster Paris know in particular that you want to hear from them, that they have a place at the table.

That's what it's all about.

So thank you, Paula, for sharing that with us.

Okay.

So we're going to go back.

Jamie is going to introduce us.

Really?

Guys, we have just heard some of this law is being brought to life, which is what this panel is about, about how we need to work together.

And so what you need to know is a caregiver that if there

is a case plan that requires the unification and that is the permanency goal, the things that you prefer are the expectations. Now under the law that everyone is working together to improve your role as a caregiver, but also to help birth parents like everybody in the system, our case manager, our caregivers are placement providers.

All of our system partners are to help birth parents improve their circumstances.

I'm through these relationships to be able to provide for your children.

And part of that is what we can talk about.

Some of that normal fee and maintaining those relationships.

A visitation and communication.

Is that something we learn through COVID there's different ways to do this.

Doesn't have to always be in person, but to do the Zoom or stop or whatever you can do those daily phone calls to keep birth parents engaged in relationships with their children and with you as caregivers to open up that communication.

That daily communication so they know what's going on in the lives of your child and you can help them learn and vice versa. So really, again, that information sharing, vacation flow. And this is something that we're all required to do.

And our CDC are also required to help you as caregiver to be equipped.

What we talked about before, excellent parenting requires all of us.

But part of our role in the system is to make sure you're supported as caregivers to be able to meet that.

Do you need additional training?

You need additional support.

Do you need additional information?

All of those things that require that not are required that are needed and necessary to help you be the best you can be for these children to be their parents.

We know that there is no such thing as a perfect parent, right? But as you saw in Marty faith being a parent, I mean, he didn't have to say it.

We saw it in his faith of being that parent, of providing that love and providing that consistency, work and commitment.

We know that sometimes kids come with challenging behaviors, and Marty talked about that a little bit.

But despite those challenging behavior to be committed and making sure that you got what you need, those challenging behaviors with something that you can manage as a family, as a parent.

So again, this goes back to everything that we're talking about. Relationship, relationship, relationship between all of us as partners.

That's required under Florida law for us to do this.

And it's the expectation of you as a caregiver and the expectation of everyone else in the system to work together to improve outcomes. And I said it's likely to increase the time for reunification when we're doing this well and doing this together

because we don't want kids to stay out of homes any more than they need to and they're ready to return their families. That happens when we're really holding each other a curable and engaged in these relationships.

Alright, Carol, I'm excited to hear more of what our panel has to say about how they have seen the cons of fruition.

Thanks, Jamie.

So as we talk about these relationships.

I know that I've had the privilege of being in the presence of foster parents and birth parents and youth have lived experiences. And I've heard enough stories to know that sometimes there's some fear about these relationships that we don't know what might happen.

We can't predict how the relationship is going to go.

You know, there's always that fear.

What if the person blows up?

What if they are angry, too angry and we can't communicate?

What if it fails?

So there's some natural fear around this.

So we want to just put that on a table and just acknowledge that because we're talking about relationships doesn't mean that we're not aware that there are situations that are more complicated. Right.

And that fear is normal to have some fear about uncertainty and about what we don't know.

So we don't ever want caregivers to feel like they have to be perfect, that it's unnatural to have fear.

It is fear is a natural thing to have.

Right.

Fear helps us to survive.

In fact, we have to have fear in order to survive.

But fear can also be a really powerful motivator, because

it begs the question, what could go right?

Right.

So we know what could go.

You know, we talked about what could go wrong, but what could

go right?

If I explore this relationship, what are all the possibilities

that could happen?

But I might be doing that even though I'm fearful.

So Let's talk about three or 4 minute with our panel.

We're gonna ask four of our panelists to share.

So panelists, I want you to think about, you know, have you

experienced fear in trying to build relationships with caregivers,

our system partners, our birth parents, you know, in our

child welfare system, if you experience fear, and then also,

how are those fears to overcome?

And we have four people that are going to share, and we're

going to start with Raquel.

We're going to do real, then Dan, then Marty, and then Victoria.

So for me, when I first started, some of my peers were engaging

with birth parents.

So I'm fresh out of social work school.

Of course, they're always teaching you safety and worst case

scenario. And so in my head, I was like, Oh, my goodness, I don't know what to expect.

And I honestly overcame that fear just by facing it head on and just talking to those parents and realizing that the end of the day, they're just people going through a rough patch. And that's why we're there to help give them the resources that they need to hopefully see them get better and get reunified.

And so once I got on my first case, just like getting to those parents and just meeting them where they're at and just trying to understand, like, their frustrations with maybe the system with maybe one of their providers, maybe the caregivers, and then just trying to meet those needs and realizing like I said like that here at the end of the day, they're just people.

And I also had some fear sometimes of engaging with caregivers because I was like, I don't know how they're going to feel about me being in their home more consistently because I have to see the child every so often.

And what really helps is that with getting to know the caregivers, getting to know their passions, their family life.

And so when I know.

Okay, like on Thursdays, maybe they have karate with their kids. So I'm not going to ask them to do visit on Thursday and then just keeping in mind their schedule and who they are. Like, that has really helped with building those relationships and getting over those spheres because when they know that I'm willing to work with them, a lot of times I tend to have

better interaction instead of getting those interactions
that are always the best.

And of course, that still happens.

But what helps me get through that is just knowing.

Okay, they're having a rough spot.

They having a frustration.

Maybe I'll get back later with them when they're a little
calmer or once I step away, then I can get back and try and
meet them where they're at.

Thanks, Rachel.

Thank you for sharing that and acknowledging we do have people
that come into our field that are straight out of, like you
said, social work, school or counseling school or whatever
school that they've been a part of.

And it's a little intimidating to go out and to start building
those relationships.

So thank you for sharing that.

Alright, Daniel, I'm coming to you to talk about your experience
of fear.

And I think I I just wanted to point out the fact that sometimes
we don't have dads in our conversations.

And so I just wanted to give a shout out to all the dads
out there that are carried children.

You know, your day is two weeks away.

You're going to be treated like Kings.

Alright.

So day you'll talk to us about, even as a dad, did you have

fears and how did you overcome them?

Of course.

And honestly, I'm so grateful that we're all here talking about relationships because when I speak to local foster parents that are sort of in the CPT process and getting ready to get licensed, I always try to drive home the point that relationships are costly and there is a value to relationships because they are costly.

And I think if we have that in our mind, it helps us begin to analyze what is sort of the underpinning of this fear.

And I think that there are really two things.

It's judgment.

And if we're being honest is judgment of biological parents.

And as part of this process, we have to realize that we're meeting parents on their worst day.

That day in court is their worst day.

They are terrified.

They have nobody there to support them.

Really they need a hug.

And when we went to court one time, my wife walked up and just immediately hugged the parents.

She had never even met them before.

And I thought, this is a wonderful example.

They needed a hug.

They needed to know that somebody was there to support them, to help them with their child.

And so it really changed the way that we looked at the relationships

that we formed with biological family.

But the other thing I think it's important to acknowledge is that it makes us vulnerable.

And that's part of the reason that this is so scary is it puts us in a vulnerable situation because our heart is on the line.

We love these children.

When we love these parents, when we love anybody in our life, it puts us in a vulnerable situation.

It puts us in a situation where we could get hurt.

And I think if we acknowledge that as foster parents, it puts us in a better place to love.

Well, so how do we do that?

We do that by respecting other people, even if they haven't necessarily earned our respect.

And so I'm talking about showing Grace to others unmerited favor. And with that, I want to kick that off to Marty, because I know.

Marty, you want to jump in here on respect?

I'm sorry, Victoria.

No, you are right, Marty.

Well, okay, good.

Alright.

No worries.

But Yeah, respect is definitely a key when forming relationships with a foster.

And even with everybody involved, especially the parents,

because that is their child.

They gave birth to them.

They have a connection to that child.

So if you respect a child like a parent, the relationship between you and that parent is going to be very good.

And it knocks out that fear that you have with that parent.

If you try and initiate a relationship with that, it's going to ultimately work in your favor.

I can tell you that I went through I believe it was 18 foster homes throughout the course of my life.

So, you know, I always have a fear of going to a new foster home because I don't know what I'm stepping into.

And it's just like, I don't know these people and they're supposed to be taking care of me.

How are they gonna you make me feel comfortable.

And a lot of times it's not up to the foster youth to develop that comfortability.

You have to make that you feel comfortable in your home because that's your house and you're bringing them into your house.

So you have to make them feel comfortable and you have to make them feel that they're not afraid.

And that's how they begin to trust you.

Like the example I gave earlier with the foster parents I moved in with at eight years old, they made me feel comfortable.

When I first walked into their home, you know, I was scared.

I didn't know what I was going to.

I don't know who's about to take care of me right now.

I was scared.

But I swear, I mean, like, a week later, that was gone.

That was completely gone because they made me feel comfortable.

This is my house.

I live here, you know, and they made me feel like I was part of their family, that's that ultimately takes the fear out of any youth.

If you make them feel a part of your life, they're going to love that, you know, because I have a family.

I know my parents are there, but I have to live in this situation.

But these people actually care about me.

And I can't tell you that kind of relationship is going to prove that outcome for that youth when they get older.

Because if you have a negative relationship and you've got this person, this youth moving from place to place, it's not consistent, and they're ultimately not going to prevail.

And this is one of the reasons I advocate is because these youth are taken from their home of no fault of their own.

So they need to have a great life.

They need to be able to build their life.

And these relationships are a critical part, developing their life and being an adult and ultimately having great outcomes.

I just really adore foster parents that really care about their children, because that's really going to help that.

You don't see it until they get older.

But what you did help them.

And it's just like I'm 24 now, but when I went to the when

I was in their home, I can see it like I could see what they were trying to do.

I could see that they were trying to make me, like I said, a respectable young man, and that's what they did.

They did as much as they could to help me.

And that's what I think that the caregivers have.

And that's what's going to release a lot of the fear that that youth has enter your home.

Marty, thank you so much for sharing that.

And what you said in so many ways, it sounds simple.

But the fact that you were in, like, 18 homes says it is not as simple as a sound.

But you gave us a blueprint, you told us what needs to happen.

And so when you said you had one sentence in there, you said it was my home.

So it was no longer like I'm in their home, but I'm in my home, right.

So that ownership that you is your home.

And so, you know, Daniel's wife went up and hugged the birth par. And it's like, I want to hug the foster parents that you're talking about.

And just thank you for being amazing.

And my heart did drop when you said 18 placements.

And I know other people's faces.

I watched the faces on the Zoom.

And, you know, one of the things that I found, I worked in child welfare for almost 30 years.

But there was a certain point when people would be desensitized, like, they would hear something and not even respond.

And I just prayed that I would not be one of those people.

So I just wanted to acknowledge at that moment when you said

18 homes, honestly, my heart drop and I sell that, you know,

I felt pain.

I felt sadness about it.

And so I just want to acknowledge that for people on here,

that when we hear things like that, it's not okay.

And it's okay if we feel vulnerable if we feel the reaction

right, because we don't ever want to get so desensitized.

That when a young person says, Oh, I was in 18 homes, we're

just like, Oh, they were in 18 homes.

No, it should give us pause, because if it doesn't, how are

we going to make sure that no one else has to be an 18?

Right.

So that should fire us up.

That should motivate us.

And, you know, so thank you, Marty, for sharing that, because

it just reminds me that we still have a lot of work to do.

We appreciate you just sharing and being vulnerable with

us. And so now.

So Daniel had passed it off to Victoria, and then we pass

it back to Martis.

Now we're passing it back to Victoria.

So, Victoria, fear from your perspective, and what are some

things you do to overcome it?

Well, what I can say when my children were first removed,
I can remember some real heavy fears.

So my they were my daughter tested positive for substances
in the hospital.

So she was removed from the hospital.

My four year old was already with my grandparents.

So in my head, I got two elderly grandparents taking care
of my four year old for sure.

They're going to go get him and my daughter, and they're
going to put them in foster care.

So my first beer was.

And for the record, it's the only thing that I ever knew
or had not even known.

The only thing I ever heard about foster care is what I see
on really bad Lifetime shows us that was my concept of foster
care. Okay.

So in my head, I got this kid that nobody can understand.

He's saying they're going to put him at a table with a bunch
of food that he doesn't like because he's so picky.

And they're going to, like, make him stay at the table all
day until he eats broccoli or something like, and then he's
never going to be able to communicate with him because he
can't understand what he's saying.

Like, those are the fears.

And, you know, and when you can't understand what a kid saying,
that's frustrating.

And are you gonna be frustrated with him because he can't

understand what he's saying?

Like, those are the fears that were going on in my head.

But and then it went to once I knew my children were being placed with my grandparents.

Then my spear went to and I don't know any person, any parents out there.

I mean, I know other mothers that I've talked to for sure.

I don't know a mother that hasn't brought home a newborn that isn't constantly going in to check if they're still breathing. Right.

And my grandma is old school.

So, you know, she's one of those people that think that they sleep better on their belly.

And so I'm like, Oh, my goodness.

I'm tall DCF worker.

I'm like, please make sure that she's on her back to sleep.

And she doesn't have any people make sure she understands how important this is, you know.

So that was another fear that I had.

And and no matter who, you know, I knew it was better coming from the investigator to tell my grandmother that than me.

I knew that.

But had I been talking to somebody else that I didn't know,

I would have wanted to hear them say the words, Oh, Yeah.

Back to sleep for babies.

We always put them back.

Like, I would have just wanted to hear that so I could sleep

that first night.

So those are some first years that I had, but and I guess how I overcame those as I got you know, I said in one of my first court hearings, I was in dependency drug court.

And one of the first court hearings we had, we had to sit outside and wait for a shelter hearing.

And it was a first shelter hearing that I'd ever seen.

And I could hear, you know, like, I could hear the toddler screaming for their mom.

And I just know you can't come with me today and all these things. And I'm out and out here.

And I still have this image of what foster care is in my brain at that time.

Right.

And I was beside myself in tears.

And then I can tell you, as my case group on, and I got better.

Like, I got well, and I've seen those sheltered hearings, and I would see I would see the birth mom kind of comfort the chip.

No, no, you're going to go with her.

Everything is going to be okay.

It help the transition.

And I start to see these, like, more positive things.

And for me, it was just the better that I got, the more mental health I got.

And how well I got.

And it opened my mind.

And I seen other perspectives.

And I seen a bigger picture.

And I think that that was the thing that helped me to overcome my fear and relationships.

Thank you.

Victoria.

As you were sharing, you kind of provided a great summary.

And the way you ended it, it helped you overcome your fear and relationship because everything that each one of you guys just share was all about really overcoming that fear, the fears that you experienced, you overcame them.

It doesn't mean that you don't fear something else later, but by investing, by moving forward, by really listening and being engaged, you were able to move beyond those fears.

So hopefully everybody that's participating in this session really got that message that fear is natural, that fear is something that no matter what your role is, if you're a youth in our foster care system, if you're a foster parent, if you're a birth parent, if you're someone from a legal perspective, if you're a Casement, whoever you are, it is natural to have fear. And so when we invest in these relationships, we can overcome those fears because that's the only way we're able to really form a true team so that we can do what's best for children.

Alright, we're going to move to our next slide here and we're going to talk about an interesting concept and some people may know something about it and others may say, what is that

all about?

So this is the concept around comfort calls and ice Breakers, which is really an initial face to face meeting.

So just to explain it a little bit.

So you see on this graphic, there's a telephone.

Now, I know it's an old school phone, but it's just for an example. So there's a phone and there's this ice breaker.

So really comfort calls really about making sure that as soon as possible after a child is removed from their family place with another family, that there's a conversation that happens. That is a conversation that any parent would want to have.

Right?

So as a parent, I always think about one of the things I know about Pi, as we always say, would that be okay for your birth children?

Would that be okay for you?

You have to always think about it in that context.

But to have a child go somewhere you don't know where they are, your panic.

You're worried.

The comfort call is also opportunities for the caregiver to get information about the child to make that transition easier. So it's just an initial conversation is picking up the phone, their protocols throughout the state, in different areas. So we're not going into the details of it.

But I just want you to know the concept.

It's just a simple phone call.

It's just are reaching out to say, Hey, we're here.

We're safe.

What is it that you need to know?

What is something about your child?

When Victoria was just talking about communicating, that would have been really important for a caregiver to understand some things kids don't like.

How do kids go to sleep at night?

That's important.

What are the routine things like that?

But to really be able to share and to just acknowledge that as a caregiver, you're there providing care for their child.

But you also respect them as a parent.

And so for the bird parent, it gives them a chance to share also. So that's the comfort call and then that ice breaker is that initial face to face meeting where you get a chance to meet face to face or in our Zoom reality, it's been zoomed to Zoom or Skype to Skype or However it goes.

But that face to face meeting to be able to meet and acknowledge each other.

That's how relationships begin with meeting each other and having that initial conversation.

So we don't need to make it unnatural because it's the foster care system.

We want to respect relationships like we would in any other part of our life by meeting people, extending courtesy and

kindness as we meet each other.

So to share a little bit about comfort calls and ice Breakers,

I'm going to call on Dan first.

And then Victoria and I want you to just share from your perspective the value of comfort calls and ice Breakers.

And I'll ask you to just take, like, a couple of minutes to share those so we'll kick it off with Dan.

Sure.

So, you know, when we first started foster parenting, I actually had to ask the question, Are we allowed to communicate with the parents and the person?

The first person that we asked was our case manager, and they said, I don't know.

Nobody's ever asked that before.

They talked to somebody and they talked to somebody.

And then all of a sudden we had to have a meeting about it.

And the team decided, Yes, it would be okay for my wife and I to communicate with the parents.

So that's how it works.

I have to tell you a Oh, my gosh.

You just reminded me of it the beginning of practice that would happen.

Do you know, I would have foster parents to tell me that they were sneaking behind the case managers back and calling each other, and they would tell me because I was a foster parent liaison, and they say, We're just telling you, but don't tell them that we actually like them like we're talking

all the time, but they're not supposed supposed to know.

So it's just so unnatural.

But go ahead, Dan.

I'm sorry.

It just amazes me that we're talking about this.

And I have read every single chat message.

When I'm not talking, I'm reading all the chat messages.

And I love how many parents are engaging with parents already,

because five years ago, that was not the norm.

In fact, I didn't know anybody that did it five years ago,

but I do think it is becoming more and more the norm now.

So years ago, back before this started, and back before we

talked about comfort calls and ice Breakers and trainings,

before it was a part of our standard operating procedures

to initiate these things as part of the system.

My wife and I would always ask the CPI for the phone number

of the parents, and we would text them immediately, no matter

what time of night it was.

And we would say, I just want you to know that the baby is

safe. They're here with us.

This is who we are.

Because don't you think that parent wants to know?

Of course they want to know they love that baby and they

want to know that that child is safe and where they are and

that they fell asleep.

What all of those kinds of things.

And so I got a response from one mom and this is the first

text message into our relationship.

And she said, did my baby get his stuff?

Blue elephant.

That was a valuable connection for this child that he sleeps with every night.

And then she asked, did you get his wrist guard?

Because he had an occupational therapist and he had indwelling thumbs. And so she asked, did he get his risk guards on?

I have them on in the morning and in the evening and I'll hook you up with his occupational therapist so he can maintain that therapy.

And then she informed us that he has seizures.

Well, nobody even knew that he had seizures except for Mom because Mom knows about this baby.

Mom knows that the history of this child.

I need this relationship with Mom so that I can care for the child.

If he had had a random seizure that first night, I would have had absolutely no clue about what this child needed.

He ended up having a seizure in my home at a much later date, quit breathing for several minutes, and we ended up in a hospital for a week as a result.

But that's how valuable this relationship is.

And even that initial contact is to really help us as caregivers care for the needs of the children.

But it's also valuable because it shows respect for that parent. And it helps us develop the relationship of mutual

respect where we work together to provide for the needs of the child.

Thanks, Dan man, so many good examples in that one.

Alright, I'm going.

I'm in the interest of time, I'm going to go on to Victoria to share Victoria the value from your perspective of comfort calls and ice Breakers.

Well, I think I shared about those questions that I would have wanted to ask if it was somebody that I didn't know.

But Dan reminded me of something when he was talking.

What?

I didn't know what nobody told me.

I didn't even think I could have a conversation with my grandmother.

I was so afraid that if I called my grandmother, they were gonna go get my kids and put them in foster care.

So I wouldn't even call my grandma.

So nobody said I could have a conversation.

My uncle lived in the home with my grandma.

So I called my uncle and I said, cause my dude, this is my son never came up to the hospital when my daughter was born.

He stayed up with my grandparents and I didn't ever get to see him see his sister for the first time.

So I called my uncle, and I said, Hey, will you do me a favor?

Will you please just go take a picture of Eddie looking at Rena when she gets there?

So I still have that picture because he took that picture for me.

And then once we went to court the next day and they explained everything to me, and they said I could go to the house and I could spend the day with the baby and stuff.

But that kind of thing just something that was irreplaceable that I would have never been able to have.

I have that Photo, and that Photo is it's such a treasure to me.

So just something like that, moving forward, the memories and the thing that I missed out on.

But I'm just so glad that I have that picture for that, even though I didn't have that moment.

But still, just to capture that for you and what that does us to continue in that relationship.

So even though yours was your grandparents, so even with that, to me, it just magnifies the importance of it because you knew they were the grandparents, but you still needed that. But imagine if they were with someone that you've never met before, you've never spoken to, and your child is going to be there overnight.

I cannot imagine that as a parent.

Right.

So, Marty, when Comfort Calls and Ice Bergers and all of this stuff started, this wasn't really the thing that was happening when you were younger in care.

But I want you to think about other children that are in care and even birth families.

What is the importance of having something like a comfort

call or Ice Berger?

What can that do to help children and families?

I think that because Jamie had discussed with her last week,
I had no clue about this.

And I was like, Wow, if this was in existence when I was
getting in care and a lot of kids were being taken back when
I was younger, it was ruthless.

I think, just the overall perspective, me thinking about
other youth.

I think that that comfort call is vital is very vital, especially
because you don't know this job and then you don't know the
parents can help you with that.

And then it also establishes the relationship with that parent,
just like you're giving them comfort that I have this child,
and I'm actually taking care of it because I need to know
what they like, what they don't like, their medical, everything.

I think that improves the overall outcome at the end of the
day, because that child is like, you're going to be taking
care of them.

And to Dance point, he said that he had a child that he didn't
even nobody told him that this child had seizures.

If he did not have that call, he wouldn't have known that
this child would have seizures.

And that's not fair to foster a in the care game rates.

It's really not.

Because what if something happens to that child and they
had no idea about it, but they could have been told about

it. It's not fair.

But the thing is, with these comfort calls, it's going to make everything so much smoother, I swear.

And then it just helps with reunification as well.

You're going to take care of this child, and you're also communicating with that parent kind of help them get back on their feet and get their child back.

And they know that when they get their Choco bat, they've been well taken care of because you've been in communication.

Listen, thank you, Marty, for chiming in.

And like you say, you just learned about this concept, and it just wasn't part of your experience.

And for so many people as new, even for staff.

Once the new law was signed off on, and we started talking about this as a standard practice, it was new for a lot of our system partners as well.

And it just made me think about I wanted to give a shout out to I think it's Heartland that made the video.

Jamie correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it was Heartland.

They created this really, really cool video around comfort calls, and it showed an example.

And one of the things about it that pointed out that I thought about when Marty was just sharing is that it showed the comfort that a parent gets when you get to hear your child say, I'm okay, I'm here.

And then for the child to see, Hey, this parent respected my parent enough to call them.

It says, You respect me, too, because they're a reflection,
right, of their parents.

And so it's important for them to see their parents respected
and valued.

So thanks, Marty, for reminding me about that in that video.

And so when we're talking about our other system partners
and in the context of comfort calls and Icebreakers as tools
for relationship building, so I want you guys to think about
these as tools.

So a comfort call and an Icebreaker two tools that you can
utilize to really build those relationships.

So Raquel, Jamie, and then polar from your perspective, because
using these requires a commitment from everybody to kind
of be on that same page.

So from your perspective, why would this be valuable in establishing
great parenting partnerships?

And I'll start with Rachel.

So as a case manager, I typically get the case after the
child has already been placed and gratefully.

A lot of the cases I've received the caregivers are already
in communication with the bio parents.

Dan was saying that he couldn't get contact information for
some of the parents.

That crazy to me, because as a case manager, I can't imagine
what it would be like if my caregivers couldn't talk to the
bio parents.

Because I have so many cases that were able to be reunified

a lot more quickly because of that relationship and being able to have an open door for visits and do more outside of that one hour a week and even go to the Park with the kids and the bio parents and doing that kind of thing that really led to reunification a lot quicker because they were able to keep that attachment, show that they really care for the child.

We're meeting the children's needs.

And so that's crazy to me.

Yeah.

So it's definitely important for those bio parents and caregivers to have with relationships.

And so I'm very excited for comfort calls to become the norm, because it is good, especially for those caregivers to know what that child needs, what that child is comfortable with.

If the child is having a day, what are some of the things that comfort them?

And so those kind of things are definitely essential, especially in trying to minimize the trauma that this child has.

If they are in an environment where they're getting a lot of similar experiences to what they have at home with their parents, that really helps the transition a lot more.

And especially when they're still able to visit with even other family members as well.

That helps as well.

And so I definitely think that that partnership is very, very valuable.

Thank you.

Thank you, Rachel, for sharing that.

And I think it's so helpful sometimes to just hear that perspective that a case manager brings to it.

So thanks for sharing that.

Let's go to Jamie.

I think those relationships, as you're building them are really important, not just for the kids, also for the parents, and to be able to have those ongoing relationships.

Obviously, it's helpful when they're in your home.

We had a time where a CPI brought a child to us and we were calling him by his first name and he didn't respond ever.

And I thought, like, can he hear us?

Does he not know his name?

Like, we didn't know what was going on, but he never responded to us.

And then a couple of days later, when I went to the doctor's office, the case manager met us there.

And keep in mind, the CPI had dropped him off.

The case manager met us there, and she called him by a completely different name.

So he literally did not know his name, that we had been calling him for several days, but nobody thought to mention that as he goes by his initials.

Well, we didn't know that.

And so that communication would certainly help.

And had we had an opportunity to speak to his parents the

night that he came to our home, that's something they could have shared with us.

But instead, we kind of floundered a little bit for the first couple of days with lots of questions that would have been answered if we had had the opportunity to comfort call.

And that certainly would have been helpful.

So I think that's just one example of why these things are so important.

And also, when the child is reunified the ability to maintain a relationship with the child, that's one less trauma for them to go down the road and still be able to babysit or still be able to just interact, to have play dates with the kids that remain in our home.

I think that's such a big opportunity for us as a system of care.

And I'm really glad that there's now a focus on how important those things are for our kids.

Thank you, Jamie.

And I know that I've seen in some of the workshops where birth parents, especially really smile when we talk about babysitters and becoming Godparents.

Right.

The aunties and uncles and all that stuff.

So as I got mom to 15 children, I know that when I give them a break, they really appreciate it.

All right.

Thank you.

Let's go to police.

Or would you chime in on this one?

Yes, ma'am.

I think this is so important because it shows the maturity
or the progression of our whole system.

We're getting better.

We're not there yet, but we're working hard to get better.

And so what is the value of the partnership?

From my perspective?

Well, from my perspective, which is very unique, the court
perspective is most cases or Reification cases.

And so in our circuit, we celebrate reifications.

We don't just celebrate adoptions.

We have a Reification lab.

And so we really want to enforce all those players, whether
it's the foster parent, the bio parent, the case manager,
the Guardian, and Liam, we want to celebrate those successes,
and we want to build on that.

So when I talk about it shows a progression.

It shows changing the narrative.

We talked about foster parents being those evil people that
are going to steal your children, you know?

No, we're changing the narrative.

We're rewriting it.

And that's what parenting partnerships.

So from life perspective, as a lawyer, talk about settlement
conferences, talk about changing the narrative.

Well, the foster parent is there with the bio parent and they're talking together.

What would be the best thing for the child and for the family to get back together?

How does that reification look like?

What does it look like?

You know, I want to celebrate reifications because that's what we see as our big goal.

But Unfortunately, sometimes we don't make it to reification.

Sometimes it's determination.

And you know what I've seen frequently, not rarely, frequently.

Right before the trial, the foster parent is talking to the bio parent because the foster parent is going to be the adoptive parent if that TPR is successful.

And it gives the bio parent such comfort to overuse that word, such relief to know who is going to be taking.

And a lot of times we see the trial never happen, because right before the bio parent and the foster parent are talking together, and the bio parent agrees that would be the best outcome for her child or his child.

So I mean this partnership with whichever way it goes, whichever way it goes, it's helpful because it's changing the entire system. It's changing the entire narrative, and it's embedded in the law now.

So at least in Florida, Florida is recognizing the importance of this and elevating this and encouraging judges and lawyers and everybody else to recognize the importance of the bio

parent and the foster parents relationship and how all of us should come together to support that.

So you're Welcome.

Thank you.

Yeah.

And one of the things you said is that Florida is moving forward, really advancing some of these best practices, and we're not there yet, but we are moving forward.

It is a different system, right?

It is a different system.

Anytime you can get relationships as part of your legislation, you know, we've changed.

So good for Florida.

All right.

Now we talked about the comfort calls and the Ice Bergers after a child's place.

But all of this revolves around transition that children experience. And part of our statute addresses transitions and set expectations for transitioning, for transitions to be non traumatic for children, that we want to make sure that children aren't harmed during a transition emotionally.

Right.

We want to make sure it's not acceptable for children to lose their connections.

You shouldn't have to lose your connections because you come into foster care.

You should gain connections.

You shouldn't have to lose the connection you had.

You should just build on to what you already had.

And so that's important to keep in mind.

And this little girl, this picture always remind us this
is always a reminder to us.

The kids should never move with a trash bag.

Right.

It just communicates a message about your worth that is so
untrue. And so we have to make that never happen.

Right.

We want to just abolish that entire practice.

But in the context of transition, how children move from
one home to another home.

Hopefully that is minimal.

You know, moving is minimal anyway.

But when it has to occur, it's important that we do it thoughtfully,
that we plan it well, we do it with great consideration,
and we do it in a loving manner for each and every child.

And so I'm going to ask Marty, if you would share your experience
with transitions when you are in care.

Hopefully the rest of us are ready to listen and learn from
what you have to share.

So like I mentioned previously, I went through 16 different
foster homes.

It is unfortunate.

I read some of the messages in the chat.

It is for any child to have to move from so many different

placements. The transitions I had were not very good when

I was moving around a lot.

And I'm going to tell you how it was very negative in the

transition that I had.

A lot of times I would transition.

It was because I had a temper tantrum, so I would throw tantrum

and then the foster parents would just give up on, which

I think is outlandish, in my opinion.

But, you know, they would give up on me, and I would get

Baker active.

They call the police, and they would Baker actin.

And I'd be in, like, the mental health side of a hospital

for three days.

And after the three days, I'm going to need foster.

But a lot of times, not all of my stuff came with me.

So I was missing toys and clothes, and I'm just like, and

there's just like, this little girl in the PowerPoint right

here, she's holding that there.

I had different toys that I had.

That really meant a lot to me.

It's an object.

But you never know how much of a significant impact that

has on that child.

When I would move and I'd be in another home, I'm already

scared. And then I don't have my stuff.

I don't have all of my things.

Like, a lot of the times I'm getting taken by my case manager

to a new home with whatever little things that the foster parents decided to pass on, and they would be in trash.

Just like this girl here would be in trash bag.

I didn't have a suitcase.

And it's just like now that I think about it because I wasn't thinking about it then because I thought that was normal.

Now that I think about it trash bags and moving from place to place, I'm looking at like a youth that would be in my position when I was there.

You know, that's worthless.

You're making that child feel worthless.

Like they don't have anything.

Like they don't deserve to have, you know, a good life, you know, putting their stuff in trash bags.

Like, I mean, it hurts.

It hurts a lot.

And it's just like it was just because this child had a and kicked them out of your house.

You know, you have to have patience when you come.

Every child is going to be different.

The patients.

And the fact that you accept that is what's going to really help this child prevail.

But the transitions that I've had were just really bad.

You know, the thing is, if you really care about a child, you make sure that they transition in the most respectable way possible and that you are part of that transition.

But it really hurts when I think about it.

It's just like I feel like I was so young.

I didn't really know the people that I was living with.

But the fact that I had to go through 18 different placements,
it's sad when you get into foster parenting.

You have to understand that you're doing this for the chip.

You have to take care of this child no matter what.

You can't give up on them because it's going to hurt them
in the end.

You know, you have to have patience and you have to have
understanding that this child is going to be going through
different emotions.

No, I don't think that I was valued to that extent.

I really want to see that, you know, new foster parents,
current foster parents, you know, they really show the care
and respect for that child because this child didn't deserve
anything to be treated in any negative aspect.

So treat them with respect.

You treat them like your own child.

Like I said before, treat them like your own kid.

If you were to send your kid off to somewhere else, treat
them with that same respect.

You're going to put their stuff in two cases.

You're not going to put it in trash back and be like, Go,
no, you don't do that.

That's inhumane.

You have to think about that.

But that's my opinion.

Your opinion is valid, and we appreciate it.

When you were just talking about treating your own kids,

I thought about Marty, how much I would prepare to even send my kids to a babysitter for a couple of hours.

The conversation.

I would have the snacks.

I would pack up the little things I would put in the bag to make sure they were okay.

This is for maybe two hours with the person I knew.

So if I would spend hours preparing my children for a two hour visit, imagine how much I would need to invest if I had my child going to live with someone else.

I mean, it's just boggles my mind to think about that.

And I'm glad you just shared that with us.

We really appreciate it.

And our message for foster parents.

I hope what you're getting out of all of this, too, that for all of us who are not foster parents, but we're part of our system of care in some way.

We are responsible for supporting you as you do it.

We share the responsibility.

You're not in it by yourself.

We social workers, legal professionals, case managers, investigators, administrators, right.

Our Guardian at items, all of us.

Everybody has a responsibility to every child in care.

And so it's not all placed on the foster parents.

So those expectations we have for foster parents, those are the same expectations we have for ourselves, that we're going to support you as you do.

Excellent parenting.

Right.

So I'm not a foster parent, but I can help foster parents.

Right.

I can be part of your support system.

And that's what all of us have to do.

We have to take some role and responsibility to do what Marty said, to keep in mind that it's not their fault and children deserve, you know, just to be respected throughout a transition process. And so thinking about that legal piece of it polar,

I know how invested you are in this process.

I know how much you believe in this and how much you practice it every day.

So if you would just kind of share from that legal perspective with legal partners, how can we really focus more on transitions in a way that is really respectful for you, support families and maintain some of those connections.

Carol, I'm going to make a slight diversion here because

I want to thank Marty.

You can.

We all want to thank Marty because we're all doing this job.

Not one of us here, not case manager Raquel, not Jamie Gardi, mid item, not Daniel Foster.

None of us are here because we're getting wealthy.

We're doing this because we really love the work, and we want to make a difference.

And the KPI brings to the table and ability to make a huge difference with very, very little effort.

You know, when you think about financial resources, Yes, a lot of emotional effort.

But Marty reminds us.

And Marty, thank you for taking the time to remind us why we're here and what difference we want to make.

But transitions, Carol, are very close to my heart.

So I'm going to get right back on the road, okay?

And Jamie and my circuit tries to keep me on that road because sometimes I make a little return.

But I believe transitions are vital, vital to what we do every day, just as vital as removing children or returning children or finding new families for children.

Transitions is what it's all about if we want to reduce trauma and have healthy children and healthy families.

And we've got to start that day one.

Day 1, we got to start talking about transitions.

We have to remember day one.

It's very individualized to that child in that family.

We cannot say a transition is going to take a month or a transition is going to take two months.

We've got to talk about it from day one.

We have to make sure the court acknowledges that we have

to recognize when we talk about reification that families have worked very, very hard to get there very, very hard.

So we can't it's disrespectful to the child and the family to say, Okay, well, the family is ready to Readify.

We never talked about transition.

They've done everything.

So we've got to do it today.

No, that's harmful to children.

That's why it's very important that we all have to get on board day one.

In the state of Florida, we talk about conditions for return day one, and we're still not doing a very good job of that.

But that's what we've got to get on board day one, with the CPI, case management and investigating and bio parents and foster parent and Guardian elite.

We got to start talking about what does that transition work like? What does that in every stage of the process, the legal process. We should be talking about that.

That should not be something we do at the end of the case.

When we're ready for ratification, we've got to do it.

So do we do it at Arraignment?

I would say Yes.

Do we do it at mediation or settlement?

I would say Yes.

We keep talking about that case plan, planning stages, every stage. So that's my push, and that's what I'm working hard, and every voice has to be heard.

So if the child is old enough like Marty, if when Marty was 10, I think Marty and case management and the Guardian item should talk about, Oh, how invested are you in with the dog at the foster parents home?

You know, I mean, things that may seem very simplistic, thick and ridiculous from an adult point of view may not look that way from a child's point of view, so that has to be included in the process.

Those are my comments, and I'm going to swing it over to Jamie Frank, because I think she follows after me.

And if I need to add anything more, just let me know.

But I feel very strongly about transitions, as I hope you can see.

Thank you.

Thanks, Laura.

And I'm very lucky to have Polar in my circuit because this is very important to her.

And she mentioned there have been times where as a Guardian amount of case, there's a transition plan that really I don't think it's the right plan.

Foster parents don't think it's the right plan.

And Thankfully, I'm able to reach out to Polar and we can all kind of talk it through a little bit more and come up with something that's acceptable for everybody.

And I think that's really, really important.

And as a foster parent caregiver, I think it's also important that we understand our role to advocate for our kids, whether

it be the foster children that are placed in your home, but also the children that are going to remain in your home forever.

You need to advocate there's a lot of focus on the children that are in care, but there's also any transition of a child in or out of your home is going to impact the other children in your home.

And for us, we have an example with our family.

We had a little boy that had lived with us.

He was three, and he's lived the majority of his life in our home.

And we had been transitioning.

It had been a long transition plan because that's what he needed. And the Department wanted to move him the weekend before Thanksgiving.

And for us that it really was a hard not for us, because while he was three, he might not always associate that removal with Thanksgiving, but the other children on our home were older, and they would forever associate his leaving with the Thanksgiving holiday.

And so we were not willing to to do that.

And Thankfully, I was able to advocate for a different date.

Let Thanksgiving past.

They can enjoy the holidays together, and then we can transition after that.

But it took a lot of advocating.

Our caregiver support director had to mediate some, but it's important that we're all empowered to do that advocating

for our kids and not just the kids in care.

But everybody is in our homes as we accept kids into our homes. And so I think that's important.

And like I said, Thankfully, I'm in a circuit where everybody works together really well for the most part and trying to get the best outcomes for the kids.

So I'm very appreciative for that.

And I hope that everybody, as a caregiver, feels empowered to do that for their children.

Thank you, Jamie.

Thank you so much.

I think just listening to you and Polar and to really share that, it really emphasized the importance of what we can all do around transitions.

And then I think Dan had an example, Dan, that you're going to be able to share about transitions, because we know that sometimes it can work really well, but sometimes we need a Groat map, a guide to how to do it.

So if you would take a couple of minutes and share your example, we really appreciate it.

Sure.

So they gave me three minutes to talk about transitions, and I could probably talk for 300 minutes about transitions.

We actually start planning transitions at the very beginning of the case, and we practice transitions with transitions from our home to visit and then back into our home.

And we work and we coordinate with parents to develop a teamwork

approach to help even those small transitions with the children.

So when we get to the point that it's the big transition and we're talking reunification, that parent has come into my home, we sort of integrate them into our daily life.

We eat dinner together, we do bedtime routine together, and at first we start doing it together.

And then we start letting the parent do it alone in our home.

And a lot of times they've already have unsupervised at this point. So it's appropriate.

So they're doing bath time in our home.

They're following our bedtime routine, the baby goes down to sleep awake normally, because that's what we do.

And we work together as a team for that transition.

And we've done that with parents who've done that with single moms. We've done that with grandparents that we're re unifying with. And what's wonderful about it is it's a unified approach to the child.

And then a lot of times that parent sees the benefits of some of the things that we do in our home, and they'll turn around and they'll replicate it.

We even had a parent that invited us into their home so that we could put the child down in their home after reunification.

And so really, for the child, it says, all of the people around me are doing it this way.

This is appropriate.

I am safe.

I am loved.

I am care for.

Thank you, Dan, for sharing that.

And I definitely understand you could share so much more about that.

But thank you for just kind of given us that snapshot so that we understand how as caregivers we can approach some of those transition experiences.

So thank you.

Alright.

We're going into our final part of our panel time.

And one of the things we wanted to share is this quote.

This quote is all about hope.

May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.

That's the Nelson Mandela quote that we wanted to end with.

But I hope that as you reflect back on what you've heard from our panel, that we're talking about opportunities that our kids deserve so much.

And as you think about all of the information that you've just gotten, think about how you feel about the changes that have happened.

Where do you see us headed?

Like we said, we're so much of a better place.

But we have a voice that is so important for us to be able to tune into.

And so I'm going to ask Marty to be our final voice for our prepared part of our panel presentation.

And Marty, we just think about the changes that we've talked

about. Any words of wisdom, any advice, any insight that you could share with caregivers who are on here right now, who open their homes up to children who want to love them and care for them?

What would be your parting advice?

I don't forget to unmute my but first, what I would want,

I like to thank every caregiver that is a part of any useless you don't know the impact that you're doing to this child.

And I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart just because I've listened and it's just like it touches me how much you all care for these children that you don't even know until you get them into your home.

It touches me so much to just think about that.

And I love it.

Just continue the great work.

I don't really know if I have advice because I'm not a parent,

but what I would says be patient, have patience, because

I think that's one of the that was one of the major things

that caused me to move around a lot is because I didn't have people that were patient with and so I had to move so much.

But if you're getting into this work and you're really caring about this child, please be patient with them.

Because a lot of times it's the their emotions are on high.

They don't know what just happened.

They just got taken from their home and then you're taking care of them now.

Just be patient with them because it's a learning curve for

everyone. I also think some good advice is just to be invested in that child and be invested in the relationship that you have with their biological parents.

Just because it's going to help so much, it's going to help you out can help the child can help the parents and be able to reunify with their child.

So I think, you know, what Pi does is so great is because it's developing that relationship with the biological parent and the foster parent or the caregiver and the child.

It's going to do such a positive impact to that child if you continue to develop the relationship with their parents.

I'm the stope flabbergasted because, like, this never existed when I was in care.

And I just like, I can see that Florida is getting so much better with the child welfare system.

And it's just like it's a model that I think throughout the country should follow this.

But the fact that this is being implemented and it's in Florida law now, and the fact that a lot of foster parents want to do this, I encourage it.

Thank you all for what you do to care for these children.

This meeting just really, like, touch me my heart a lot, because it's just to see people that really care.

We need more of that.

You have no idea how many youth I talked to advocate on all the time, and you have no idea that these relationships our vital part of that slide.

Thank you for all that you do.

That's all I have to say.

But thank you.

Thank you so much.

Marty.

Thank you so much.

If you are standing right here, I would be giving you a gigantic hug. We will probably all Tapple you and freak you out, you know, but we just are so grateful for you for sharing your heart and just opening up and sharing with us and teaching us right.

Teaching us how to be better at what are you doing with life now? And are there things that you need to be supported right now? I think I really did.

When I turned 13, I got way more involved into my judicial case, you know?

So when I turned 13, I got a group of people, a wonderful, square, wonderful group of people that really cared about me. And they made sure that I was success.

And I still talk to them.

I'm not in care anymore, but they still talk to me.

I have them on Facebook.

They all have my phone number at me.

I still have that relationship with my Pace manager, my Guardian light. My Guardian light on her husband is, you know, it's

I love that.

But right now I've been able to be a little bit successful.

I'm a commercial.

I do liability claims.

So I do I work with all different types of businesses and things like that.

I really love it because at first I wanted to be a cop because

I like helping people.

And I also like to get down to the front.

I like to investigate that jobs a little dangerous.

So I decided he claims and insurance, and I'm still helping people. That's one of the things that I'm very passionate about. That's why I advocate all the time.

I don't do it money.

This is just my sure heart, you know, because I love helping people, especially Foss, because they're just very vulnerable, you know, but being able to do that at my career and helping people restore their lives, it's not a great experience for me. And it it's wonderful.

I love helping people.

That's one of my main things.

I love helping people, you know, because sometimes people just don't have the means or they just, you know, you never know what somebody is going through.

And they're like, this is why some come into characters.

People are going through it.

It's not a forever saying, but it's just people have things that are going on in their life and they just need some help.

And you can't beat them up because you got your kids taken.

No, it's just something happens in your life, a cause that to happen.

But it doesn't you can fix that can always fix that.

You can't beat people up because they just had a bad part of in their life, the bad time in their life.

And I see that all the time.

And I always have understanding and empathy for people because I feel like that's it should be that way.

Everybody should be empathetic because everybody I guarantee you, everybody on this call have had something go wrong in their life that they just didn't know what to do.

And if I can help somebody change their life or help them in any sort of way, that's what I want to do.

And it doesn't matter who you are.

And that's why I'm such a strong advocate for for I don't even know.

But I want to make sure that they have their rights and that they have good people to take care of them because they deserve as much as a normal life as a kid that never got displaced.

That's kind of what I'm doing now, just a long exclamation.

No, you're perfect, Marty.

And I think one thing that I heard you say every time you spoke it, and most of the other panelists, too, was this idea of relationship building.

And that that's kind of the whole point, I think used as a foster parent, whether you're displacing or child saying, I do not want to live with you, because that happens, too.

It is about those relationships.

And knowing that we, as fostered, opt to parents can put all of our energy out there.

That doesn't mean that that person, that child, that Antony, the parents are ready to hear it that day.

It might be that they're ready to hear it five years in the future, 10 years in the future.

But being that open, whether it's the transition planning, whether it's comfort called saying, I'm here and available whenever you need, you don't know when that call is going to happen.

I know, Carol, you have mentioned all of your God children.

We are similar.

We have so many God children and grandchildren.

I didn't think I'd have grandchildren at 30 something years old. But it's so important just for youth and for their families to know.

Whenever you're ready, I'm here.

Just pick up the phone and we're available when you need us. I cannot thank you, guys.

Enough.

Jamie, Carol, everybody.

This is fantastic.

I really think it got people thinking.

It got hopefully relationships going in your head, and I think it's never too late to start.

I know that the law is specifically focused on comfort calls

in those first 48 hours.

It's really comfort calls every day.

It's really about how do we know how do we reach out?

And there's never a time that's too late in your case to
change things around or a conversation with a team that's
living in your home where they just left your home to say,

Look, I know you hate me today, but when you need me in five
years, I'm here.

I will always answer the phone for you just the way that
you guys have paid that.

I really thank you and appreciate it.