

Youths' Takeaway Advice for QPI Families during this National Emergency

- Foster parents don't understand how big of an impact they can have in a youth's life. I remember one specific family was gentle and radiated good energy. They didn't force their way into having a relationship with me, but I felt their positivity and energy from a distance. Just because you aren't as close as you want to be with the youth in your home doesn't mean you aren't making an.
- I remember the foster parents who took time with me and were gentle and nurturing. That one relationship impacted my life—the foster parents were patient enough with me to see something I didn't see in myself. Despite chaos in the lives of youth, foster parents' response and gentleness can go a long way even if they can't see immediately.
- Not everyone gets kind words in care, so the few foster parents that do give kindness really stand out. For newer foster parents, see youth for who they are and create an open pathway for communication. Especially during this lockdown, communication is important. Understanding different styles of communication is critical.
- Look beyond what you read in case files of youth and beyond diagnoses and past behaviors. See the youth in your home for who they are, not just what you heard or read. They are so much more than that.
- Don't judge the youth based on the expectations or explanations from the case file. A lot of times, social workers only write what they have physical evidence of, and children have been through a lot more. They have greater needs. Not every child who goes through the same thing will have the same acceptance or denial of their situation. Normal development principles might not apply and foster parents should be accommodating and understanding.
- I feel like a lot of foster parents avoid talking to youth because they are worried we will blow up. We feel excluded if you don't talk to us. Communication is always the best thing to start off with. It's the first step to a lot of other things that can be great for youth. Youth just want someone to show us we are actually cared about. Take the time to get to know the youth. It all starts with a simple conversation.
- Be patient with youth. This crisis is hitting foster youth ten times as hard because of all the transitions we have been through and are going through. I'm not going to adapt to everything you want me to, so it's important to control your expectations.
- While foster parents will want children to get comfortable with them, remember youth may feel suspicious and anxious if foster parents want to hold their hand or give them a hug. It's important for foster parents to understand barriers that exist and be supportive of youth even when they are frustrated. We want foster parents to educate themselves about teens and where they are coming from and to teach us life skills.
- It's so important for families to be calm. For many youth, going to a true home setting is foreign. Youth are in defensive mode or survival mode. Although we may appear difficult, we have goals and aspirations. Families can really communicate with us and we appreciate when foster parents meet us where we are at in conflicts. At some point, you will teach us how to grow and trust again. This will happen through the relationship, and not through a power trip or forcing their weight.