

Transitional Issues for Relative Caregivers*

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behaviors and Feelings
Hopes and dreams	These are the caregiver's wishes and desires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The caregiver hopes that the birth parent will resume responsibility for raising the child. ▪ The caregiver hopes that soon his or her life will go back to being "normal." ▪ The caregiver hopes that the child will grow up to have a good life and be able to care for himself or herself. ▪ The caregiver hopes that the child will not become involved with drugs.
Grief and adjustment	The caregiver grieves over changes in lifestyle and relationships. The caregiver has to make adjustments as a result of assuming responsibility for the child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lifestyle changes from that of a single person or a couple to that of parents with young children. ▪ The caregiver has to postpone short- and long-term plans for retirement, second career or relocation. ▪ The caregiver has to share physical space in home, often having to change rooms or furnishings to accommodate the child. ▪ The caregiver must now place the child's priorities before his or her own plans or priorities.

*Adapted with permission from original material developed by Joseph Crumbley, M.S.W., D.S.W. © 1996.

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behaviors and Feelings
Shifting parental roles and responsibilities	The caregiver, the birth parent and the child all must adjust to changes in their relationships to each other. The caregiver now has primary parenting responsibilities for the child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The caregiver now changes from a friend to a disciplinarian and parental authority with the child. The caregiver must help the child understand and accept this new relationship. ▪ The caregiver now changes from a peer to the birth parent to someone with more authority over the child than the birth parent. For example, the caregiver may have to tell the birth parent when he or she can or cannot see the child.
Guilt	The caregiver feels some responsibility for the birth parent's problems that have resulted in the current situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The caregiver feels guilty over "replacing" the birth parent by assuming primary parenting responsibility for the child. ▪ The caregiver feels guilty about placing the child's needs over the birth parent's needs. ▪ The caregiver feels guilty about giving the child "special treatment" that others in the family, such as other grandchildren, their own older children or adult brothers and sisters of the birth parent do not receive. ▪ The caregiver feels guilty when he or she must report the birth parent for abuse or neglect or when he or she must ask the birth parent to leave his or her home.

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behaviors and Feelings
Embarrassment	The caregiver feels embarrassed about the reasons for and various aspects of his or her current living situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The caregiver feels embarrassed that the birth parent cannot raise his or her own child. ▪ The caregiver feels embarrassed when he or she has to explain to friends and family why the child is in his or her care. ▪ The caregiver feels embarrassed about being dependent on agencies and having to apply for services.
Carrying over past issues	The caregiver's past problems and emotional issues with the birth parent interfere with the caregiver's relationship with the child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The caregiver might respond negatively to the child when the child does something that reminds the caregiver of the birth parent's negative traits. ▪ The caregiver may perceive the child to be "just like" the birth parent. ▪ The caregiver may still harbor anger over birth parent's past actions, such as becoming a teen parent, dropping out of school or using drugs at an early age.

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behaviors and Feelings
Loyalty	The caregiver feels as if he or she has betrayed the birth parent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The caregiver feels disloyal because he or she has “replaced” the birth parent by assuming primary parenting responsibility for the child. ▪ The caregiver may feel like he or she is betraying the birth parent in reporting the birth parent for abuse or neglect. ▪ The caregiver may feel disloyal when he or she has to follow through on court orders by limiting contact or visits between birth parent and child.
Adjusting to child-rearing demands	The caregiver must understand and adapt to new and different approaches to raising children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The caregiver must understand that what was not considered abusive years ago might now be considered abusive. ▪ If the child has special needs, such as being overly active or needing medical treatment, caregiver must be able to use creative discipline alternatives. ▪ The caregiver must work with professionals from multiple agencies in caring for the child. ▪ The caregiver must adhere to agency policy on discipline methods. ▪ The caregiver needs to find supports and respite in order to avoid “overtaxing” himself or herself.

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behaviors and Feelings
Anger	Caregiver has intense, negative feelings of displeasure about the reasons for and various aspects of his or her current living situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The caregiver may not agree with agency plans to reunify the child with the birth parent. ▪ The caregiver may feel angry that the birth parent has maltreated the child and has done such a “poor” job of raising the child. ▪ The caregiver may feel angry that the child expresses the desire to go back to the birth parent. ▪ The caregiver may feel angry that there is conflict and rivalry between himself or herself and the birth parent.
Planning for illness or death	The caregiver must make plans for who will care for the child if the caregiver becomes ill or dies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The caregiver should identify who else in family could care for the child if he or she became ill or died, and then make specific plans with that person or persons. ▪ The caregiver should talk honestly with the child about what would happen if the caregiver became ill or died and help the child understand who would take care of him or her in those situations. ▪ The caregiver should involve the alternative caregiver in the child’s life, through activities, sleepovers, etc., so that they can develop a relationship.

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behaviors and Feelings
Sabotage	The caregiver must deal with his or her own feelings and actions, or those of the birth parent or the child, that can undermine the child's current living situation or case plan or the family relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The caregiver and the birth parent may compete in the parenting role. ▪ The birth parent may not want to accept the caregiver's role as the decision-maker in the child's care. ▪ The caregiver may feel frustrated or left out when the agency makes plans for the child without the caregiver's involvement or agreement. ▪ The child resists the caregiver's efforts to discipline him or her or refuses to submit to the caregiver's authority.

Transitional Issues for Children Living With Relatives*

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behavior and Feelings
Hopes and dreams	These are the child's wishes and desires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Constantly talking about going back home. ▪ Wanting to be with their brothers and sisters, live in their old neighborhood, attend their old school, etc. ▪ Child says, "I just wish things were the way they used to be." ▪ For older children, making plans for the future, such as going to college or vocational school, getting a job, etc.
Loss/separation	The child grieves over being separated from birth parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Missing birth parents and other brothers and sisters ▪ Is lethargic and/or quiet ▪ Unhappy to be in the home of the caregiver ▪ Seems sad ▪ Acts out ▪ Destroys property
Feeling unloved and thrown away	The child feels unwanted and given away by his or her birth parents. The child feels like an outsider in the relative caregiver's home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child says, "Mommy doesn't love me anymore." ▪ Child isolates himself or herself from the family. ▪ Child rejects affection from the caregiver and others. ▪ Child clings to the caregiver and others.

* Adapted with permission from original material developed by Joseph Crumbley, M.S.W., D.S.W. ©

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behavior and Feelings
Guilt	Child feels like his or her removal from birth parents was his or her fault.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child says, “It’s my fault that I’m living with you. If I had just done what I was told, none of this would have happened.” ▪ Child isolates himself or herself from the family. ▪ Child rejects affection from the caregiver and others.
Anger	Child has intense, negative feelings of displeasure about being separated from his or her birth parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child is defiant. ▪ Child gets in fights. ▪ Child hit his or her dolls or toys. ▪ Child constantly argues with the caregiver and is disrespectful. ▪ Child destroys clothing given to him or her by others. ▪ Child is withdrawn. ▪ Child says, “If you hadn’t agreed to keep me, I would be at home now.”

Embarrassment	<p>Child feels shame and disgrace that he or she has a different living situation than other children.</p> <p>Child is embarrassed about the reason for his or her living situation.</p> <p>If the caregiver is elderly, child is embarrassed by the age difference between himself or herself and the caregiver.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child avoids introducing the relative caregiver to friends or teachers. ▪ Child avoids contact with the relative caregiver when they are in public. ▪ Child is dishonest about where he or she lives and why.
Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behavior and Feelings
Carrying over past issues	The child does not trust adults because of past experiences in which his or her needs were not being met by the adults closest to the child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child feels that all adults are the same: “My parents didn’t care for me, so why would you?” ▪ Some children constantly question and test the commitment of the relative caregiver. ▪ Child does not allow himself or herself to become emotionally close to the caregiver. ▪ Child says he or she does not want to be like his or her parents.

Trying to get put out, or “acting out”	The child tries to undermine the placement because of his or her loyalty and attachment to the birth parents and his or her desire to return to them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child says, “Go ahead and put me out. I don’t have to stay here.” ▪ Child is defiant. ▪ Child gets in fights. ▪ Child constantly argues with the caregiver and is disrespectful. ▪ Child engages in unacceptable behavior, such as constant breaking of curfews, involvement in gang activity, stealing, missing school, etc.
Accepting the relative caregiver in a parental role	The child finds it hard to accept the relative caregiver’s care, discipline and affection, especially when the caregiver is much older than the child’s birth parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The child resists the caregiver’s efforts to discipline him or her or refuses to submit to the caregiver’s authority. ▪ The child does not want to adjust to another adult’s living environment, personality, style, temperament, etc. ▪ The child says, “Grandma, I love you, but I really want you to be my grandmother and my mom and dad to be my parents.”

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behavior and Feelings
Divided loyalties	<p>The child feels torn between his or her birth parents and the relative caregiver.</p> <p>The child has a strong allegiance to his or her birth parents.</p> <p>Often birth parents tell children that they do not have to listen to or obey the relative caregivers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child says to caregiver, “You’re not my mother!” ▪ Child says to caregiver, “Mommy always said you never thought she could do anything right.” ▪ Child says to caregiver, “My dad told me not to get attached to you because he’s coming back for me.” ▪ Child takes the side of the birth parents against the caregiver. ▪ Child refuses to obey the relative caregiver.
Worrying about the caregiver becoming ill or dying	The child worries about who will care for him or her if the relative caregiver gets sick, is hospitalized, or dies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The child becomes upset when the caregiver goes to the doctor. ▪ The child asks many questions about the caregiver’s health or seems preoccupied with the caregiver taking his or her medication. ▪ The child says, “Grandpa, are you going to be OK? I am so worried about you.”

Transitional Issues for Birth Parents*

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behavior and Feelings
Hopes and dreams	These are the birth parents' wishes and desires. Reality may not fit with their fantasies; they may have difficulty accepting and making realistic goals about their future relationship with their child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents refuse to talk about the future. ▪ Parents talk about getting the child back "tomorrow." ▪ Parents talk with the child about their "dream home" together.
Grief and remorse	The birth parents grieve over the loss of their child. They feel remorse because they have also lost the role of parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents deny that anyone else is really "parenting" the child. ▪ Parents try to make bargains, such as promising to stay clean and sober. ▪ Parents behave angrily, such as hanging up the phone when the conversation with the caregiver gets too difficult to handle. ▪ In their despair, parents stay drunk or high. ▪ Parents act depressed, such as crying uncontrollably whenever around family members or friends or withdrawing from family and friends. ▪ Parents show pictures of the child and talk about the child to anyone who will listen.

* Adapted with permission from original material developed by Joseph Crumbley, M.S.W., D.S.W. © 1996.

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behavior and Feelings
Accepting a new relationship	The birth parents must adjust to changes in their relationships with the relative caregiver and the child. They must give the relative caregiver parental authority and support the caregiver in this role. The birth parents are no longer the final authority to the child. These are frustrating, challenging changes for birth parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents refuse to talk with the child about “minding” the caregiver. ▪ Parents remind caregiver who is the parent and insist on intervening in day-to-day parenting decisions. ▪ Parents express feelings of jealousy that the children are “taking their place.” ▪ Parents express anger toward caregiver.
Guilt	Parents experience feelings of guilt because they think or know that they have disappointed their own children. They also feel exposed to other family members and child welfare professionals; they feel that they have also disappointed other adults.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents make “put downs” about themselves or others. ▪ Parents lie about the family situation. ▪ Parents brag about being good parents. ▪ Parents who are chemically dependent may stay away from the family if they leave their treatment program prematurely.
Carrying over past issues	The birth parents’ pain at being unable to do the job of parenting is often complicated by issues in their relationships with family members that are carried over from the past. A parent might dwell on past conflicts or poor relationships with family members, and this has a negative impact in the present.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents complain regularly and constantly about a mistake the caregiver made in the past. ▪ Parents refuse to talk about a problem in the past, even when the caregiver asks to talk about it. ▪ Parents complain about the caregiver’s parenting skills and remind the caregiver of parenting mistakes made in the past. ▪ Parents might say they “were not as loved” by their own parents when they were growing up. May accuse their parents of loving their siblings more.

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behavior and Feelings
Feeling under the relative's and agency's authority	Birth parents may respond negatively to the family's and agency's efforts to help them. They may feel under the authority of the caregiver and agency, and this undermines their own sense of power and control. Though they are unable to take care of their children at present, they may want to prove they have power and influence over the children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents set up "triangles" between the parent, caregiver and child. ▪ Parents use the child to "get at" the caregiver. ▪ Parents encourage the child to defy the caregiver. ▪ Parents accuse caregiver of being in collusion with the caseworker. ▪ Parents attempt to exercise power and influence over the child.
Anger and disappointment	Parents feel anger and disappointment because they feel they must compete with relatives and professionals. Parents feel anger toward their children when the children become close to relatives and professionals. Parents also feel angry with themselves.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents do self-destructive things, such as getting and staying high or drunk or destroying property. ▪ Parents yell at the child for little or no apparent reason. ▪ Parents yell at the relative caregiver for little or no apparent reason. ▪ Parents compete with the relative caregiver for attention from the child. ▪ Parents verbally put themselves down. ▪ Parents say to the child, "I'm so sorry I can't be here for you."

Transitional Issue	Description of Transitional Issue	Examples of Behavior and Feelings
Feeling betrayed	A parent may feel betrayed by the relative caregiver because the caregiver is having a positive impact on the child. A parent may also feel betrayed by the caregiver for appearing to place the child's needs before his or her needs. Often a parent may feel betrayed by professionals for supporting the child's placement with a relative. A parent may also feel betrayed by the child for becoming attached to the relative caregiver or for telling family secrets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents tell the child that he or she is "no good." ▪ Parents accuse the child of telling "family secrets." ▪ Parents accuse the relative caregiver of trying to emotionally kidnap the child. ▪ Parents accuse the professionals of siding with the relative caregivers. ▪ Parents accuse caregivers of doing more for the children than they did for the birth parents when they were children.
Planning for illness or death	In families in which there are health issues, the birth parents may struggle with planning for the care of their children in case they or the relative caregiver should become seriously ill or die.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents refuse to talk with the child and/or the relative caregiver about their own illness. ▪ Parents refuse to talk with the child and/or relative caregiver about an illness of the relative caregiver. ▪ Parents refuse to plan for alternative care for the child in the event of their own death or that of the relative caregiver.

Transitional Issues and Management Strategies for Birth Parents*

Transitional Issue	Strategies
Hopes and Dreams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Let parent verbalize goals, hopes and dreams. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify what goals are shared in common. <input type="checkbox"/> Set up process for determining if goals or hopes can happen. Identify constraints such as custody or court order. <input type="checkbox"/> Involve agency or other professionals to help define reality and limits.
Grief and Remorse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledge the parent's feelings and convey empathy about losing the child
Accepting a New Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Involve birth parent in making rules. <input type="checkbox"/> Have birth parent explain change of authority. <input type="checkbox"/> Have parent instruct child to accept relative's authority. <input type="checkbox"/> Tell parents how their acceptance and support of the relative's authority is necessary if the child is going to accept the change in roles. <input type="checkbox"/> Define parent's role and how to solve any future problems.
Guilt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledge feelings. <input type="checkbox"/> Help parents focus on what would make them feel better about themselves. <input type="checkbox"/> Focus on what's been learned from disappointments or mistakes.

* Adapted with permission from original material developed by Joseph Crumbley, M.S.W., D.S.W. © 1996.

Transitional Issues	Strategies
Carrying Over Past Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledge past mistakes relative caregiver made and extend apologies. <input type="checkbox"/> Express desire to begin a new relationship and not hold negative feelings from past. <input type="checkbox"/> Plan how to address any past issues that may arise.
Feeling Under the Relative's and Agency's Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Let parents know you recognize their power and influence. <input type="checkbox"/> Let parents know how you need them to use their power. <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss how the parent will explain and show his or her influence with the child in various roles with the child. <input type="checkbox"/> Explain what authority the relative is under.
Anger and Disappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Extend understanding of and empathy with parent's hurt and anger. <input type="checkbox"/> Relatives should explain how they will not belittle or try to hurt the parent's relationship with the child. <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss how relative caregivers will be positive with the child about memories or involvement with the parent. <input type="checkbox"/> Relatives should withdraw from discussions or interactions when feeling angry; get mediator or third party if necessary to help communication or resolve conflict.

Transitional Issues	Strategies
Feeling Betrayed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="678 329 1906 402"><input type="checkbox"/> Identify with parent what needs he or she has and how you can or cannot help him or her. <li data-bbox="678 435 1906 475"><input type="checkbox"/> Refer parent for help from other sources. <li data-bbox="678 508 1906 589"><input type="checkbox"/> Identify to the parent the feelings the child may still have for the parent which are being reinforced by the relative caregiver.
Planning for Illness or Death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="678 631 1906 672"><input type="checkbox"/> Plan with parent regarding the death of parent or relative caregiver. <li data-bbox="678 704 1906 745"><input type="checkbox"/> Involve a secondary relative caregiver in planning. <li data-bbox="678 777 1906 818"><input type="checkbox"/> Share the plan with the child. <li data-bbox="678 850 1906 932"><input type="checkbox"/> Keep child aware of changes in the parents' or relative caregiver's health, or measures such as hospitalization and medication. <li data-bbox="678 964 1906 1005"><input type="checkbox"/> Begin involving the secondary relative caregiver with the child.