

Fostering Family

GUILT + SHAME STUDYGUIDE

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Kinship care is an emotional rollercoaster. Taking on children wasn't a planned thing, it was more in the moment. You're a consistent caregiver so you allow these children to come into your home, but tons of emotions come with the territory, and experiences of guilt and shame is very normal and common among kinship guardians.

We may feel responsible for the parent's loss of their child or for the disruption of the family system. Caregivers may also experience guilt when a child becomes more attached to them as the caregiver than the actual biological parent. There could be guilt and shame regarding reporting information that may negatively impact the parent to the police, a court of law, or the CYFD.

Guilt and shame can arise when explaining to the children why they are no longer with their parents. It's a huge and heavy conversation, and very unique to kinship care. There could be feelings of betrayal or disloyalty towards the parent.

In placing the needs of this child over the needs of their parents, Kinship caregivers can find themselves in a tug-of-war. You want to protect the child, but you're concerned about the bio parent as well. Your heart pulled back and forth, trying to support the whole system as much as possible, but prioritizing the child's wellbeing and safety.

When an adult child violates our values, makes poor choices, or gets in deep trouble, we often question our own parenting abilities. When the bio parent is your child, it feels very personal that your child was not successfully parenting and you had to step in.

Shame may arise on having to request support from Public Services. A lot of caregivers don't receive any support. It might be very uncomfortable if you have never had to rely on anybody outside of the family before. Sometimes it's hard to ask for help or even know what type of public assistance is available.

Giving the new child in your home more attention than the others can cause guilty feelings. In a crisis situation, you're putting extra energy towards this child, which leaves an imbalance. Shame can arise if the situation is known publicly. Having your neighbors know about any issues that the biological parent has had, whether it's involvement with CYFD or a case in the media, can be very embarrassing. The fear of being blamed for the biological parents' shortcomings is uncomfortable.

Guilt can manifest in several ways: insomnia, upset stomach, nausea, digestive issues, pain, muscle tension, anxiety, headache, and tearfulness are common.

Some things that we can do to overcome guilt and shame is acknowledging the emotion, asking yourself how this feeling is impacting your functioning. Ask yourself if this feeling is leading to manipulation or compromising the child's wellbeing. Identifying what guilt and shame triggers you have. Identifying our own buttons prevents people from having the ability to trigger us.

What's the intention of the person pushing the button? Is it because they want to blame the caregiver, preventing them from taking responsibility for their own actions?

What is our new planned response? Set boundaries. You don't have to engaging in conversations with certain people over certain topics.

Prioritize self-care activities. Going on a walk. Reading a book. Journaling. Getting outside for exercise, or inside. Inside, I know there are lots of great free resources on youtube for exercise. Listening to music. Talking with a friend. Talking with your partner. Going out on a date. Spending time with your partner. Connecting with the church or community group and connecting with other families.

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