



The Importance of Family Connections

We all want to belong. Belonging is at the core of the human spirit. From birth we seek the connection to our parents, moving our heads and bodies for touch, sound and nurturing. Toddlers are looking for parents and other familiar persons for security as they venture out to explore the world. Teenagers look to parents and adult mentors for guidance as they forge their own paths. As adults we seek to build our own family connections while still maintaining the ones with our family of origin.

Even though we are driven to seek and maintain family connections they are not always positive and fulfilling. Like all aspects of human relationships they can be messy; feeling get hurt, communication is misunderstood, distance makes seeing family challenging, our daily routines get in the way of time together. But that does not take away the desire and need to stay connected. This is especially true for children and adults who are separated from their family of origin through foster placement, adoption, immigration and other situation not of their making.

Both within our families and within our professional responsibilities it is important to foster family connections to ensure that we all strengthen our relationships and meet our “belonging” needs. Here are some ways to do this within our own families with those with whom we work.

- 1) **Use technology** to help family members stay connected through skype and other venues. This includes grandparents and grandchildren, siblings separated through out of home placement, family members who are deployed or away on business.
- 2) **Make family gatherings and visits a priority** even if only every few years. Without a commitment and planning, time moves quickly and the best intentions never happen.
- 3) **Remember special events**; holidays, birthdays, anniversaries with cards and pictures. Use e-cards and social media messaging to send greetings, well wishes and share memories. It is quick and often free.
- 4) **Take and share picture**. Cameras on phones make it easy and quick to take pictures and make videos. E-mail, texting and social media makes it easy to share. Seeing family members “live” in pictures and videos creates a strong feeling of connection and belonging.
- 5) **Call regularly**. While technology makes staying connected quick and easy it does not take the place of talking to someone and hearing their voice. We are social beings and we need regular, ongoing social interaction. When distance and circumstances prohibit visits phone calls can help secure the relationships and family connections.
- 6) **Resolve conflicts**: We all get upset and create discord within our relationships, especially in families. Some actions do cause permanent separations. But most conflicts can be resolved if the family members are committed to listening, seeking solutions and forgiving.

We are happier and more secure when our family connections are strong and we know we belong.