

Sharing Important information

HONORING IMPORTANT PEOPLE

# MY STORY, so far...

For Professionals, Parents, and other Caring Adults

documenting memories

preserving keepsakes

facilitating reflection and planning....

## MY STORY...so far!

This document is a tool that can be used over time and in multiple situations by DCS and other child welfare professionals, foster parents, family members and children/youth for several purposes:

- To provide support to the child immediately upon entry into foster care by providing a framework for understanding and managing the trauma of this initial separation
- To begin the process of documenting the child's story as soon as they enter foster care
- To gather and preserve vital information about a child's history and experiences
- To facilitate communication between the youth, family, and other members of the team
- To document the strengths and unique characteristics of the birth family and the child/youth
- To provide clarification of the reasons the child and family have come into contact with the child welfare system
- To prepare and support the child through the major transitions inherent in the child welfare experience
- To empower the child by giving voice to their experiences of love and loss, trauma and resilience, in their own words and the words of those who care for them
- To integrate the past, embrace the present, visualize and prepare for the future
- To implement the core concepts of the 3-5-7 Model of Child Preparation, throughout the child's journey through the system to permanence.

## **How this tool is used:**

*MY STORY... so far* is a template which is provided to the DCS or private agency worker that can be customized for use with each individual child, adapted as to age, situation, stage of custody episode, etc.

- It is not intended to be printed and presented as a whole to a child at one time; instead, the pages can be printed and used over time during routine contacts between the child and the worker. Completed pages and documents will be preserved in a notebook so that the child will be able to refer to it and keep it.
- This template is designed to welcome input from the birth family, the foster family, the child's team members, professionals involved with the child, and, of course, the child or youth!
- A very important part of this book is the picture/memento section! This should be constructed of heavier paper, and pictures labeled and dated as possible.
- Most of the pages are appropriate to be used with all children/youth, but some will be introduced only if the situation warrants it, such as the "Separation of Siblings" section, or the entire range of options presented in the "Finding Home" section.
- The evolving MY STORY book should be safeguarded from loss or damage, particularly during periods of placement instability, etc. It should be kept in a safe place in the foster parent's home, or in the office with the child's record if necessary.

**Additional pages, worksheets from other sources, or original work from the child/youth will add depth and richness to this book and should be utilized freely!**

# TAKING CARE OF OUR KIDS!

## Safety First: Building a Relationship

While it's important for children and youth to talk about the "hard stuff", they may be emotionally vulnerable when they do. It is important to always plan for how the child will be supported when we have hard conversations.

Even if we're not doing "My Story" work, it often becomes our responsibility, like it or not, to be the bearers of some of the most painful news kids may have to face, or to be with them during some of the hardest moments of their lives – right while they are happening. Whether we're talking about the past or coping with an immediate "crisis", it's our relationship with the child that is our greatest asset in helping them to cope – and hope.

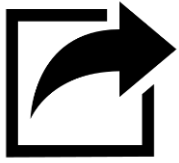
**There are a few key things to keep in mind about building a relationship strong enough to support our youth and ourselves through the hard stuff!**

- First, we earn youth's trust by being consistent, respectful and honest. That means:
  - showing up when we say we will;
  - never promising what we can't deliver;
  - letting kids know what is going to happen to the extent that we know, and honestly telling them when we don't (but will let them know as soon as we do!);
  - honoring all of their feelings, including their pain and anger, without trying to provide false reassurances or platitudes;
  - clearly verbalizing a strength or positive characteristic in every interaction, and
  - remembering to add a bit of humor and lightness to our contacts, to remind them and ourselves that everything about them is not a problem or an issue.

- **It is useful to develop a “language of feelings”** with youth when there is not a crisis or complicated issue to handle. This can be done by playing feelings games (like charades), using feelings charts or worksheets, even sharing how we ourselves express feelings. If we can get an understanding of how kids express themselves, what situations bring up different feelings, and what they need from adults, we’ll be better able to support them when they’re overcome by strong feelings. It is essential to introduce the concept of “mixed feelings”, as so many situations in foster care bring up contradictory experiences of love and anger, sadness and relief, etc. We can let kids know that this is normal, and that we “get it”!
- **Consider the timing.** Never visit kids at school to have a serious conversation, and then send them back to class to take a math test! If a necessity arises to go to the school to share difficult information, arrange for them to go home afterwards, or spend more time with you, a counselor or other trusted adult.
- **Plan the conversation and prepare.** Depending on the urgency of the situation, take as much time as possible to think about the facts you need to share with a child or youth, and plan how to present the truth of the situation without using judgmental statements. Sometimes it helps to talk things over with colleagues in order to get a fresh perspective. The examples in the attached section provide some suggestions as to how to frame difficult information in a way that is *honest, accessible, and non-judgmental*.
- **Take care of yourself!** Often, the situations youths find themselves in are very painful to think about. Reading accounts of maltreatment that led to foster care can create secondary trauma for us. Telling children that their parents have relapsed again, that the reunification plan is not going well, that their foster parents have asked that they be moved is a tremendous and often unwelcome responsibility. This is when it’s important to rely on colleagues and the team, prepare, and to *remind ourselves that we are*

*giving the youth a great gift simply by being there for them. Nobody should have to face the tough stuff alone.*

- **After a difficult conversation**, praise youth for their openness and courage, and remind them of how strong they have already been to have managed challenging situations. Invite them to “put away” the information that they have talked about, to bring out and discuss more next time, as they wish. Then spend a few minutes doing something fun, light, positive. Let them know that you would like to tell their caregiver that they have had an intense conversation and may need a bit of extra support. You can negotiate with the child how much detail they are ready to share with their caregiver. Let the child know that you are there to continue to support them and tell them when you are going to see them next. You might consider giving them a small token, such as a smooth stone, for them to keep.
- **The conversations we have as child welfare professionals are central to our role and are also important in our work with the child’s entire team.** The child’s therapist should be kept informed of what is being discussed and may also contribute to the “My Story” process. Teachers may also benefit from knowing, in a general sense, what children are experiencing, and what some of their emotional challenges are. *We can build a supportive team around the children we care about!*



## tip sheet: My Story...so far

### **The Handbook:** Establishing Safety from the beginning...

- Regardless of the conditions in their home, one of the most traumatic experiences a child can have is to leave the familiarity of all they have known and enter a strange and unfamiliar world, full of new people and even a new “language”! According to the Child Welfare Trauma Toolkit, one of the best ways to provide a sense of “safety” to someone in trauma is to give them information and predictability, as well as acknowledging their feelings and experience. This Handbook provides the opportunity for sharing this critical process with a child or youth.
- The Handbook should be shared with the child as soon as possible upon entering care. There are several ways this process may begin. Ideally, the book would be initially processed with the child by the placing worker, with contributions from the foster parent, at the time of placement.
- The Handbook belongs to the child and stays in his/her possession. Foster parents, FSWs, CASA or other involved adults can ask the child to share the book, so that they can process some of the information, such as understanding the specialized terminology (“What are people talking about?!”) It’s easy to forget how strange some of our acronyms can be!

## The Handbook, cont.

- The Handbook can be used to prepare the child for their first CFTM or Court hearing. Part of this preparation can involve using the pages: “Why is this happening in my family?” Building upon the prompts in the book, the FSW can provide the “official” reason, while also focusing on the child’s ideas, including the parents’ perspectives.
- The Feelings pages, complete with recognizable emojis, should always be available for discussions about the separation and placement.
- The Handbook can be taken to the first CFTM, with a focus on “Making a Plan”. The child can be introduced to team members, and they can be given the opportunity to add their names and contact information to the book – or at least share it with the child and family. The child can also be assisted to understand and write down key elements of the plan.
- The Handbook ends with some beginning appointment pages, so youth can write down dates of important upcoming events, including visits with their family, CFTM meetings, school events and things to look forward to. It is a good idea to make sure that a youth always has an appointment calendar in order to support a sense of predictability in their world.

Finally, there are some pages for notes and an envelope for photos. Notes are for the child; photos should be taken at every opportunity, particularly when the child is with his/her family

## tip sheet: My Story...so far

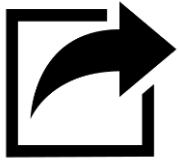
“My Story...” is a *product* and a *process*:

- The most important aspect of *this process* is the conversations and interactions with the child! *The product* involves writing down important information and preserving documents so that the child will be able to refer to it and keep it.
- This template is a **guide** for engaging and documenting important conversations. It is not intended to be printed and presented as a whole to a child at one time. Instead, the pages can be printed and used over time during routine contacts between the child and the worker. *Each page format can be edited or simply used as a conversation guide, with the information written down as it emerges.*
- The printed words are designed to be appropriate for a child/youth to read on their own, but they are more likely to be used as a guide for you as you plan how to introduce a topic or section to a child.
- Some children are intimidated by the responsibility of writing down their responses. You can offer to be a “scribe” or note-taker and write in their responses for them as they talk! If you do this, it is essential to write down exactly what the child wants you to write and resist the temptation to influence or “edit” their responses.
- The template is designed to welcome input from the birth family, the foster family, the child’s team members, professionals involved with the child, and, of course, the child or youth!

## The Product and the Process, cont.

- A very important part of this book is pictures and mementos! You can use cardstock or heavier paper, and label and date photos or other keepsakes. Page protectors can also be used to collect items that can't be glued or taped.
- *There are several pages in the book that should be printed and used many times throughout the process.* Examples include: all of the “Feelings” pages; *How others see me*; *Keeping up with the plan*, and *Letters*.
- Most of the pages are appropriate to be used with all children/youth, but *some will be introduced only if the situation warrants it*, such as the “Separation of Siblings” section, or the entire range of options presented in the “Finding Home” section.
- The evolving MY STORY book should be safeguarded from loss or damage, particularly during periods of placement instability, etc. It should be kept in a safe place in the foster parent's home, or in the office with the child's record if necessary.

Additional pages, worksheets from other sources, or original work from the child/youth will add depth and richness to this book and should be utilized freely!



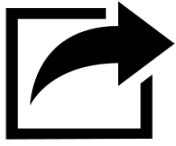
## tip sheet: My Story...so far

### “My Story...” the Role of the Foster Parent:

- Foster Parents play a vital role in the lives of children by preparing them for the next step along the road to permanency. This includes working with the FSW to create a Life Story book for each child in your care.
- “My Story..so far” is a Lifebook guide for engaging and documenting important conversations and events in the child’s life. This helps children to integrate past experiences with current circumstances and process their feelings.
- A scrapbook is pulled out during special occasions to show off accomplishments and events; A Lifebook is private. Because it contains personal details relating to a child’s birth family and the reasons for placement, a Lifebook should only be shared with those the child deems worthy.
- Even if children are reluctant to participate in the creation of a Lifebook, foster and adoptive parents should still compile information. Eventually all children want to know and understand their past, so foster parents should never stop collecting memories and updating the child’s “My Story” book.
- Foster parents can be creative with additions to the book, while engaging the age-appropriate child in deciding what goes into the book. This means taking pictures during events, writing down comments at Parent-Teacher conferences, preserving child’s drawings, collecting awards or certificates earned or any other significant event that occurs.

## Role of the Foster Parent, cont.

- The printed words are designed to be appropriate for a child/youth to read on their own, but they are more likely to be used as a guide for you as you plan how to introduce a topic or section to a child. In addition, some children are intimidated by the responsibility of writing down their responses. You can offer to be a “scribe” or note-taker and write in their responses for them as they talk! If you do this, it is essential to write down exactly what the child wants you to write and resist the temptation to influence or “edit” their responses.
- Foster Parents also have the role of safe-guarding the book. Although the book belongs to the child, some children may have difficulty keeping it safe from destruction, loss or unwanted eyes. A plan should be made with each child based upon their age and ability regarding a safe place to keep the book in the foster home. The foster parent must ensure the book travels with the child in the event of a placement move.
- The Foster Parent’s role is so important!! You are there with them 24/7 and hear their stories, see their accomplishments, listen to their questions, and help them put all the pieces together. The “My Story” book gives you the product that will help you document and preserve this child’s unique story.



# tip sheet: My Story...so far

## Getting Started:

- Tell the child that you'd like to get to know him better; that you would like to hear more about what's on her mind about the past/present/ future; that you might have information in your record that could answer some questions that he has; that you want to help her to keep track of some of the experiences she's having in care – and that *because all of a child's thoughts, experiences, and mementos are very important, you want to help him/her create a book or a box to keep them safe for the child to have forever.*
- Offer a variety of supplies – markers of different sizes, pencils with erasers, glue sticks, scrap-book tape, glitter glue, colored or heavy weight paper (for some of the drawing activities or photos), magazine cut-outs – your (and the child's) imagination are the only limits!
- Help kids decide how they want to work together with you. Do they want to “fill in the blanks” themselves? With pen, pencil, colored marker? Or do they want you to “take notes” or be the scribe – as you discuss the questions and prompts, write down their responses (EXACTLY as they want it!) and then read it back together!
- Start with doing the cover of the book: “If there was a book about you, what would the title be? You can draw, cut out pictures, use photographs to show what you're interested in, what your life's all about.”
- You could also start with asking whether there are some special photos, certificates, or mementos that the child will want to add to their book, and glue, tape, or store in a page protector.

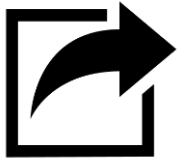
## Getting Started, cont.

- Move to the “All About Me” section: Start with generic “get to know you” pages, like the “Who Am I” or “Job Interview”
- Or, begin with providing birth information – be prepared for this, by having detailed info, including name of hospital, doctor, any detail you can find. It’s also fun to do an internet search to find out what was happening the specific day the child was born: popular music, etc.
- Start where the child wants to: ALWAYS ask the child if they have any questions that they’d like you to answer. If you don’t know, tell them you’ll try to find out!
- Tell the child you want to protect their information by developing a plan regarding how to keep the book safe from damage, loss or unwanted eyes. Discuss options with the child, foster parent, or involved staff (residential) to determine where to keep the book and how it can be accessed when needed. Ultimately, the book belongs to the child! Important pages could be copied (with permission from the child) if desired for safe-keeping.

# tip sheet: My Story...so far

## My Family's Story:

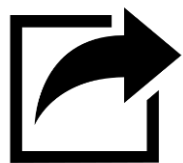
- ***Don't be afraid.*** Youth usually think about their birth family, and welcome the opportunity to talk about them. If they tell you they don't, it's ok – let them know you're happy to talk with them at some other time if they decide they want to. They may have to think about it for a while.
- If the child/youth is ***visiting*** with the birth family, this section can be presented as an opportunity for the family to work on a “*family book*”, because the parents are experts on their own family. Working on this material together can be a step in the reunification process. A copy of what is shared can be provided to the whole family.
- Youth may want to “interview” their parents.
- Material in this section is presented as factual and informational, not focusing on problems, issues, judgment. It allows youth to see their parents as whole people, with a wide range of experiences.
- ***Strengths and Identity:*** children's identity is based on what they know and feel about their birth parents, and how they were cared for by their birth parents. This is why it's essential to identify any strengths birth parents have shown, at any time in their lives, and any evidence that they care/d for their children. You can always start with appearance and physical characteristics that youth share with their parents.
- ***The Hard Part: Explaining the Separation:*** Again, start with what children already know, or have been told. Supplemental Material on how to talk about some of the reasons for separation is provided in this manual. ***AGAIN, DON'T BE AFRAID!*** You are not asking the child to go into detail about their traumatic experiences. You are simply naming and acknowledging what they have survived, some of the feelings they might have, and giving them permission to talk or ask questions of you if they wish.



# tip sheet: My Story...so far

## My Life in Foster Care:

- Reflect on past placements as appropriate (*Families you have lived with*); use this page with any placement transitions going forward.
- *Sibling* information: this section is provided as a resource for you if there is a separation that needs to be addressed. There are samples of how to frame tough information in the Supplemental Information for Professionals and Parents.
- Prepare a child for CFTMs or Foster Care Review Boards by reviewing members of the team, goals and tasks of the Permanency Plan. If there is something they want to say, help them to plan it or write a *Letter*.
- Use “*Keeping up with the Process*” page for home visits with the youth and foster family. It can be a guide for the interview and/or a note-taking guide, engaging the youth and foster family in open conversation. Be sure to document a STRENGTH and positives each time, along with acknowledging issues that need to be addressed.
- *School* and activities: you can always talk about this, hopefully in a positive, exploratory way.
- “*Understanding yourself*” can be used when a child is struggling, if painful things are happening with the birth family, any time you want to provide emotional support to a child. Resources to talk about “The Hard Part” are located in the Supplemental Information section.
- “*You Are Resilient*” is a valuable tool to support a youth’s strengths and highlight progress and growth. I should be re-read and updated routinely and can be shared with the child’s team.



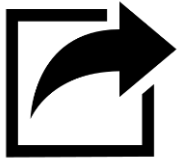
## tip sheet: My Story...so far

### The Blessing...

- There is little that we can do to take away the pain of loss that a child or youth experiences when separated from someone to whom they have become attached. What we can do is to begin to alleviate the guilt and conflict the child may feel when they have the opportunity to build a new attachment, by getting a “blessing message” from the person that the child is separating from.
- **The first step** is to determine who should give the child a blessing – there may be more than one person. We often think of birth parents, but a child may have a strong attachment to another relative, a foster parent, or a sibling from whom they are being separated.
- **The next step** is to determine if the message will be *direct* or *indirect*. Is the person available and able to express concern for the child’s well-being? If so, the goal is to engage that person in providing a *direct* message to the child – in person or in writing, with the assistance of a professional. An *indirect* message is based on a person’s behavior and statements in the past; for example, “your mom told me that she thought your foster parents were taking such good care of you, better than she ever could, and that she would be at peace if she knew you could stay with them.”
- A blessing message affirms that the message-giver loves the child and wants the best for him/her, and also gives the child “permission” to love someone else, or to join a new family. It is based on the concept that it is not necessary to stop loving one person in order to love someone else.

## The Blessing, cont.

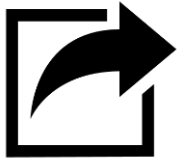
- **In engaging a parent or loved one in preparing a blessing**, it is first important to acknowledge that person's love and care for the child, as well as the fact that the child loves them, too, and will always be helped to remember the important role they have had in the child's life. This can be a very emotional conversation. The person can then engage in a conversation about what they want and hope for the child's well-being in the future, and who can best provide that for the child.
- **The blessing itself** consists of an expression of love and caring, an acknowledgement of the separation which does not place any blame on the child, and "permission" for the child to love, trust, and belong to another caregiver. Because it is often difficult for anyone to fully articulate what they may want to communicate to the child, the professional can take notes during the conversation, and then write up a letter for the parent to review and sign at the next meeting.



# tip sheet: My Story...so far

## Finding Home:

- *Reunification* and *Home with Relatives* are both addressed as possible outcomes of the Permanency Plan. Both of these outcomes, no matter how much they are desired, involve change and adjustment. This section allows for acknowledgement and reflection on what is different.
- *Termination of Parental Rights* can be another point of significant grief for a child. It's important to explain what this process means, as well as honoring and providing an opportunity for a child/youth to express whatever feelings s/he may have, which are often mixed.
- The *Three Dimensions of Parenting* helps a child understand the difference between foster care and adoption, as well as the lifelong contributions of the birth parent.
- *Foster parent adoption* is explained, and youth are able to reflect and process the decision if the foster family will NOT become the adoptive family. This section encourages input from the foster family as to how they can support the youth through the adoptive process.
- Children/youth are offered an opportunity to reflect on what kind of family really works for them (not just what they *want!*), and to understand and engage in recruitment efforts.
- Children/youth are empowered to actively reflect and engage in the process of *family integration*, which begins with visitation, and continues until the adoption is finalized. Families and youth are provided with the opportunity to reflect on the personal meaning of the *adoption commitment* for themselves and their family.



# tip sheet: My Story...so far

## Integrating “My Story” into daily work:

- **Meet Policy Requirements**—16.8 Attachment-Guidelines for Life Story Books
- Use Handbook to provide support to ease the **trauma** of entry into care.
- **First visit: Engagement**
  - Communicates to the child that you are interested in getting to know them
  - Establishes two-way communication, builds trust
  - Gives you a place to start
- **Assessment:** the more you know, the more you understand – and better CANS!
  - What is the child’s unique perspective? What does s/he know?
  - What does each parent know and think?
  - How does what you are learning support better parenting? Lead to better referrals?
- **Teaming** – honoring all roles, giving child a voice, sharing information, building team cohesion; all team members have a role in “My Story”
- **Family visits: Making a family book?**
  - Gives everyone something to do during visits!
  - Strengthens family communication
- **Quality Contacts:** ongoing assessment, engagement, purposeful communication
- **Points of Crisis:** managing the trauma of moves and other painful transitions

# Supplemental information for Professionals and Parents:

One of the hardest things to talk with our children about is the reason that they are separated from their family or their siblings – but it is something all children wonder about.

It is important that we provide them honest information in order to keep them from blaming themselves or creating a story out of their own patchwork of memories and perceptions. Children will construct their own stories, drawing their own conclusions about themselves, caregivers, relationships and their own future and potential. Often the children are carrying the burden of an incomplete, inaccurate, possibly toxic story that they have constructed from their own frightening confusing and chaotic experiences.

The following are offered as “samples” of how to present difficult information in a way that is honest but non-judgmental, understandable and clearly lifting any sense of responsibility from the child or youth.

## **HOW TO TALK ABOUT THE HARD PART – REASONS FOR THE SEPARATION**

- Sometimes parents are so young when their children are born that they haven't finished growing up themselves. They haven't even learned how to take care of themselves, and certainly aren't ready to take care of a baby. Sometimes they were parented poorly themselves, and never experienced the type of love that would help them love a child or another person. There may not be a family member or neighbor to help with the baby. A child born to parents in this situation might not have enough to eat, might not be picked up and held often enough, may have been left alone too often.

- Sometimes parents don't know how to have good relationships, especially with each other. They may not have learned how to handle anger or manage their feelings. Sometimes relationships end, and one member of the couple is left alone with the children. In other situations, the anger between them explodes into physical violence. When one member of the couple is violent towards the other, the situation at home is frightening and dangerous. There might be police intervention, trips to the hospital, and children in these families watch and worry that something terrible could happen to one of their parents or to them.
- Sometimes one or both parents gets involved with use of drugs or alcohol. Using drugs or alcohol usually begins as a way to help people feel better and escape from their worries, but it can end up as an addiction which is very hard to break. When someone is addicted, their body craves the drug so much that they will do almost anything to get it, including things that are illegal that they would not do otherwise. When someone is at this point, they are not thinking clearly, and are not able to parent any child. They need professional help to begin to deal with their addiction. There is help available to deal with addiction, but it can take a long time, and parents need lots of support in order to be successful.
- Sometimes parents have mental health issues that are not being treated. Mental health issues are often given names such as clinical depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or others. These issues can make it hard for parents to think clearly and make good decisions for themselves or others. People with mental health issues can be helped, usually with both medication and counseling. The hard part is that sometimes the medicine has side effects, and it's tempting for people to stop using their medication when they are feeling better.

- Sometimes people grow up with very confused ideas about sexuality. They may rely on sex as a way to feel close, or as a way of feeling powerful, or as a way of controlling other people. If adults are in the habit of using sex inappropriately, or have no sexual boundaries, they will sometimes try to force or convince children to participate in sexual activity with them. Often, the adult tries to convince the child that sex with them is a good and normal thing or gives the child special privileges if they will engage in sexual activity. Because this is not an appropriate way to use sex, they try to make the child keep it a secret. This is referred to as sexual abuse. It is never ok for an adult to have sex with a child, even if the child has received special privileges or kept the secret. It is always the adult's responsibility and problem, and is not the child's fault.

All of the situations described above can lead to family situations that are dangerous and frightening, which is why foster care is necessary.

Children and youth in these families have real strengths, and do the best they can to take care of themselves, each other and their parents. They have coped in the best way they know how, and often neglected their own interests as kids in order to try to manage things in their family. These coping skills can become the source of resiliency for the future, as they and their families try to heal from these difficult situations.

### **The following are explanations of why siblings might be separated.**

- **It is not safe to live together:** *sometimes, when brothers and sisters have been hurt or mistreated by some of the adults in their lives, they act out that pain by hurting each other. Sometimes adults have even wanted them to hurt each other. If this happens, it's best for brothers and sisters to live separately while they get the help they need to heal from their own pain, and learn to cope in other ways. Brothers and sisters can usually keep in touch with each other while the healing is happening, and It's possible that after a period of healing and therapy they can learn to live together again.*

- **Brothers and sisters have different needs:** *people are different, and sometimes brothers and sisters may need different types of families. One sibling might do best as an only child; another might do best as a youngest child in a family. Some youth relate best with a single parent, and sometimes a brother or sister might need residential treatment to help them deal with some past hurts. Separations for this reason may be short or long, and siblings can keep in contact!*
- **Brothers and sisters can't get unstuck from old patterns:** *sometimes, while they are growing up in their birth family, one sibling becomes like a parent to their younger siblings. This pattern gets started for a good reason, and it's usually because the oldest sibling wants to be sure that everyone stays safe and taken care of. Later, even when everyone is safe, there are parents to take care of everyone and the oldest sibling doesn't need to be like a parent any more, it's hard for everyone to change this pattern. This isn't good for anyone: the oldest sibling doesn't have to take care of everyone any more, and the younger children don't need another parent telling them what to do! Sometimes it's easier to stop these patterns by living separately – for a short or longer time.*