

## Improving Customer Service

# PHONE INTERACTIONS WITH FAMILIES

### 5 Things You Can Do

For prospective and current foster, adoptive and kinship parents, much of their interaction with the child welfare agency takes place by phone. Although these interactions may sometimes seem minor, it is important to remember that each interaction with a family makes an impression—either positive or negative—and may affect the likelihood that the family will remain engaged with the agency. As you work to recruit and retain families for children, you will see more success if you find ways to strengthen your relationships with prospective families at every chance you get.

#### 1 Answer the phone with a positive attitude.

Foster and adoptive parent retention is everyone's business. Having a welcoming attitude is the basis of good customer service.

#### 2 Call back promptly.

Return all phone calls to prospective and current foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers within 24 hours. Even if you are waiting for more information and can't answer the caller's questions, call them back to let them know that you're working on their questions.

#### 3 Be responsive even when you can't answer the phone.

Make your outgoing voicemail message warm and friendly, and state that you'll return messages within 24 hours. Make sure that your voicemail message is current and accurately describes whether you are on vacation or are currently in the office.

#### 4 Avoid using jargon and acronyms.

Parents are likely not familiar with a lot of the terms that are commonly used within child welfare agencies and it's not their responsibility to know all of the agency-speak. Be plainspoken and explain things in ways that your friends and family would understand, but don't speak down to anyone or be condescending.

#### 5 Help the caller get what they need.

Your job isn't to answer the phone, it's to be helpful. If a parent (or prospective parent) is calling with one question, they likely would benefit from other related information but may not know what to ask. You're the expert, so think about that additional information would be helpful to the caller. If you can't help the caller, don't hang up until you have either made a plan to get an answer and get back to them or connected the caller to someone who can answer their questions.



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[www.nrcdr.org](http://www.nrcdr.org)

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