

# Parents Responding to Children Placed in Care

When children are apprehended by Child and Family Services, parents usually feel overwhelmed by very painful feelings of anger, sadness, loneliness, shock and fear. Many parents say this feels like grieving a loss. These strong feelings sometimes make it hard for parents to work with social workers or focus on the things CFS is telling them to do.

It is important to realize that all feelings are acceptable and valuable. There is no emotion we should not feel. Emotions are part of what it is to be a human being. The challenge is to **find appropriate ways of expressing them**. Our feelings tell us what is important to us, and what we might need. Below is a list of feelings that are often hard to handle or express. Think about what you are feeling and what you might need because of it.

<b>Anger:</b>	When expressed appropriately, anger is a fire for change and a way of letting other know their behaviour is unacceptable to us. Look for the hurt that is often underneath. <i>"I need change. I need to figure out how to communicate this."</i>
<b>Resentment:</b>	Resentment blames others for how we feel or for the situation we're in. It is blocked anger. <i>"I need to take responsibility for how I really feel and to change this situation."</i>
<b>Hurt:</b>	Hurt tells us that our needs are not being met, or that our self-esteem has been wounded. Often we can improve our relationships with others if we can communicate our hurt without resentment. <i>"I need to be close to my family. I need to be healed."</i>
<b>Fear:</b>	Fear warns us that we need to proceed with caution, to get help or more information, and to separate our worries from reality. <i>"I need to take care. I need help."</i>
<b>Guilt:</b>	Guilt comes when we act or feel something differently than what we expected of ourselves. It shows us there is the possibility for a better reaction. <i>"I need to make amends or do something differently next time."</i>
<b>Regret:</b>	Regret is a huge feeling that can be both pain and sorrow. It is being aware of the unfulfilled potential of a situation. It is often the last feeling before we let go of the 'if only' and get to a place of acceptance of our reality. <i>"I need to acknowledge my pain and accept it without denial."</i>

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Talk to someone you trust about your feelings, or call the **Klinic Crisis Line at 1-888-322-3019**. Working through your feelings is the first step towards understanding your situation and what you can do to make things better. A trusted friend, community worker or staff at the crisis line can help you figure out what your feelings are, what your feelings are telling you and how to communicate your strong feelings to your social worker.

## Talking About Strong Feelings

A helpful way of talking about strong feelings is called an “I Message”. An “I Message” is a way of telling others how you feel and why without blaming or accusing them. There are three parts to this message.

- “I feel.....” State your feeling.
- “...when.....” This part is the action that affects you. Be as specific as possible without calling the other person names or judging their intentions.
- “...and I would like.....” This is a suggestion about how you would like to move forward or what could help you feel better.

Some examples:

“I feel worried sick about my kids when I don’t get visits with them, and I would like to know when my next visit will be.”

“I feel frustrated and ignored when you don’t return my phone calls, and I would like a chance to talk about my case plan with you.”

“I feel angry because I don’t agree with what you wrote about me, and I would like to tell my side of the story.”

No matter how bad you may feel, remember that you have the right to feel that way AND you have the responsibility to talk about your feelings without hurting others. Find someone to support you in dealing with your feelings if you feel very upset at your social worker; saying angry or hurtful things to your worker will make it harder to build a helpful working relationship with them.

## Connecting with your child in care

Parents are often very overwhelmed by loneliness for their child who has been apprehended. Parents may have a hard time concentrating on everyday things or focus on understanding their CFS case because of this loneliness. Writing a note to your child is a simple way of connecting with your child in care that could help you deal with these feelings.

- The note should be short and **positive**. Talk about something your child likes, remind them of a fun memory or tell your child about some family members or friends you have seen lately. Do not focus on the bad things in your situation. Tell your child how much you love them
- You can tell your child that you’re working hard to make sure they will come home soon, or that you’re looking forward to seeing them soon. Never promise things you can’t control, like promising that your child will be home by a certain date.
- You can add pictures, notes from other family members, or something fun like stickers. You can also add something you normally wear, like jewellery, a scarf or a hat. If you have some extra money, you can buy cards, stuffed animals or books that record your own voice for your child to hear.
- Drop it off at your agency office. They will be able to forward the note to wherever your child is staying.
- Feel free to do this as often as possible. Some parents have written a letter every day to their children. This will help you keep a strong connection with your child and help ease your worries.
- Some parents also write short, positive notes to the foster parents. This may include thanking them for taking good care of your child for a while, telling them your child’s favorite food or music, or asking short questions like how your child is sleeping or what activities your child is enjoying right now. The foster parent may not respond, but this is still a positive way of keeping connected to caring for your child.