

# From Foster to Family: A new way of thinking.

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*(The phrase “From Foster to Family” is being used here in two ways: Not just the institutions, but also the idea of promoting growth and development by fostering to establishing growth and development in the family unit. This is about the importance of transitioning in every level of relationship.)*

Help, my child likes a dirty room!

For children who have come out of the foster care system or spent years in a chaotic and unstable family, the dirty room can be symbolic to hold on to their past self! When they lived in filth, they learned how to be safe in filth or unclean spaces. In some of that present “dirty space”, the issue may be that they still need to feel some sense of personal control or belonging in their life.

They must come to a place of saying to themselves “it’s okay to be new!” “It’s okay to be clean.” “I can also have control in the new space.” The new space is my new home. My new home is my new start, I don’t need old thinking in my new space.” Unfortunately, dirty rooms, dirty spaces might represent a form of safety in their mind. Therefore, be careful with forcing them into your version of clean. Though it might be better, that young person may not see it as safe. This could create a setback in your new relationship.

Former foster kids, especially the older teens, do not need to adopt the new parent’s way of thinking. They need to establish their own **New Way of Thinking**. Parents need to communicate this to their young people, without fear or condemnation.

In cognitive behavioral therapy we learn that a change in thinking is how we achieve a change in our behaviors. Our foster to family kids need to know that new thinking is safe and necessary for our growth. This principle is true for every member of the family, regardless of age. A **New Way of Thinking** will translate to new behaviors. New behaviors can lead to a strong, healthier lifestyle.

Yes, they survived in other spaces, but now they have the opportunity to thrive in this new, safe space. It should also be noted that they learned some great skills during those survival years. The energy of those skills is still there and needs

redirection. They need help and creativity to process that leaving the old behaviors is not about leaving or losing their memories of the past. You leave your old behaviors because you are new, your family is new, your space is new. Foster to Family kids must give themselves permission to accept and adopt the new.

Parents must use caution to not communicate that the new is better than the old. The focus is not about comparing old vs new. The new is just new. When a snake is growing, they shed the old skin and leave it behind. The new skin is now the new normal and more suited for the next stage of the journey. Not better skin, just new skin.

When we move into the gift of a new day, it is not a better day, it is simply a new day. When I wake up to a new day, I can start fresh with grace and gratitude, or I can bring my old self and negative attitudes into the new day and not take advantage of the blessings. The choice is mine. The new is present. The new is now. When we bring new thinking into a new day, we can experience new joy! A new way of learning. A new way of communicating. My new day only becomes a better day based on how I journey through it.

In the Foster to Family home, everyone must adopt the new way of thinking and make it work for their family. We must adopt the thinking like the snake that realizes the old skin no longer represents the new life and new growth, therefore that old skin is freely left behind because it is no longer necessary.

For humans, old snake skins represent old thinking and old behaviors. By holding on to the old thinking we are keeping ourselves from growing and expanding into the new. The new might be scary, but we don't have to experience it alone.

Concerning the dirty room, invite your young person to establish something new and it can start with how they take care of what belongs to them. Starting something new with room cleanliness cannot just be about the parent's idea of cleaning. Your young person might want to do some research on keeping their room clean. Everyone must make space for new thinking. As the parent, you have communicated that "this is your new home and new room". Now you must make space for this new thinking and behavior of ownership.

Talk about ownership, responsibility, and building a new safe space. They will need some independence with this new adventure. Allow them to create their own cleaning chart and schedule for room inspection. Being apart of a new family setting means new family guidelines, and it requires extra patience from everyone.

This can be especially helpful and effective with teenagers. Keep this as an area of open dialogue to continue listening, learning, and connecting with each other.

The issue of focus is not about the dirty room but more about the new relationship with self and the new family. A change in thinking creates a change in behavior. Adopt the new daily. We are all worth it!

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