THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

Respecting the Caregiver's Daily Authority

Co-Parenting & Communication · Inside-Out Co-Parenting

How an inside parent can stay involved without undercutting the adult running the household.

IN THIS GUIDE

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A free guide from My Fairy GodParents — for youth impacted by parental incarceration, justice-impacted youth, and the caregivers and families who support them.
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint

Print, write on it, and share it with the people helping your family.

Respecting the Caregiver's Daily Authority

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THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

An inside parent does not stop being a parent, and a caregiver running the household every day is not trying to replace them. Both things are true at once, and the tension between them is where a lot of unnecessary conflict lives. The parent wants to stay involved and does not want decisions made without them; the caregiver is the one up at 6 a.m., managing homework, discipline, and every ordinary crisis, and needs the authority to actually run the house.

When a parent tries to direct daily decisions from a distance — the bedtime, the phone rules, the discipline for a specific incident — it usually does not work, because the caregiver has information the parent does not and consequences to manage that the parent will not be there for. It also puts the caregiver in an impossible spot: follow an instruction that does not fit the household, or ignore the parent and risk a fight.

This lesson is about finding the version of involvement that actually helps: one where the parent stays present and informed, defers on daily operations to whoever is doing them, and reserves direct input for the decisions that are genuinely theirs to weigh in on. Children also do better when the adults around them look aligned, even when the adults privately see things differently.

WHAT BELONGS TO THE HOUSEHOLD RUNNING IT

Bedtime, screen time, chores, day-to-day discipline, what happens after a bad grade or a fight with a sibling — these are decisions that require being present for the pattern, not just the incident. The caregiver sees whether a kid is chronically overtired or just had one bad night, whether a phone rule needs tightening because of what actually happened at school, not because of a general instinct.

A parent second-guessing these from a distance, even with good intentions, tends to undercut the caregiver's authority in the child's eyes. A child who learns that a caregiver's rule can be appealed to a parent on the next call will use that leverage, and it makes an already hard job harder.

This does not mean the parent has no say ever. It means the say is expressed privately to the caregiver, adult to adult, and the two of them decide together how it shows up to the child — ideally as one consistent answer.

+ WHAT IS GENUINELY THE PARENT'S TO WEIGH IN ON

Major decisions — a school change, a significant medical decision, a move, who else has contact with the child — are different from daily operations, and a parent's input on these matters even while incarcerated, subject to whatever legal authority they actually hold in their state or custody situation.

Values and identity — what the family believes, how a child understands their culture or faith, what they're told about their parent's absence — are also areas where a parent's voice matters and should be actively invited rather than assumed away.

The way to keep this distinction workable is for the parent to ask 'is this a today decision or a big decision' before pushing on something, and to accept the caregiver's answer most of the time, since they are the one positioned to know.

+ DISAGREE PRIVATELY, PRESENT ONE ANSWER

When the two adults do disagree — about a rule, a consequence, a decision — that disagreement should happen between them, not in front of the child and not across a monitored call the child can overhear. Children who watch the adults contradict each other learn to play one against the other, which is exhausting for everyone and does not serve the child either.

It is fine, and often better, for a parent to say to the child 'I trust the rule your grandmother set' even if privately they'd have set it differently, while raising the actual disagreement with the caregiver separately.

'How can I back you up?' is a more useful question for a parent to ask than 'why did you do it that way,' because it starts from support rather than challenge and usually gets a more honest answer about what's actually going on.

+ SAY THE THANK-YOU OUT LOUD

Caregivers running a household alone, often unexpectedly and without much support, carry a load that is easy to take for granted, especially from a distance where the day-to-day is invisible. A specific, spoken appreciation costs nothing and does real work: it is different from a general 'thanks for everything' and lands differently because it names something real.

This matters for the relationship between the two adults, and it also matters for the child, who benefits from hearing the two most important adults in their life speak well of each other rather than compete.

+ THE PHONE RULE THAT ALMOST CAUSED A RIFT

An incarcerated father heard from his daughter that her phone had been taken away for a week and told her, on the call, that he thought that was too harsh and she should get it back. The grandmother running the household found out about this the next day when the girl brought it up as leverage.

The grandmother was furious — not necessarily because the father disagreed with the punishment, but

because he'd overruled her directly to the child, undermining a rule she'd set for reasons he didn't have full context on: the phone use had been happening at 2 a.m.

When they talked privately afterward, he apologized and admitted he hadn't known the full story. They agreed that going forward, if he had concerns about a household rule, he'd raise it with her directly first, and whatever they decided together, he'd support out loud to his daughter — even if what they decided was to keep the rule exactly as it was.

+ WORDS YOU CAN USE

Asking rather than instructing

From the inside parent to the caregiver, about a daily rule.

"I heard about the phone getting taken away and my first reaction was that it seemed harsh, but I know I don't have the full picture. Can you walk me through what happened? However it lands, I want to back you up with her."

Presenting one answer to the child

"That's a rule your grandmother set, and I agree with it. If you want to talk about how it feels, I'm glad to listen, but it's not going to change because you brought it to me."

Raising a genuine disagreement privately

Adult to adult, not on a call the child can hear.

"I want to talk through something about how discipline's being handled, not to second-guess you generally, but because this specific thing has been on my mind. Can we find a time to talk just the two of us?"

A specific thank-you

"I know I don't say this enough, but I've noticed how much you've held together — getting her to therapy every week, staying on top of the school stuff, all of it. I see it, and I'm grateful, even from in here."

+ SUPPORT WITHOUT UNDERCUTTING

- ☐ Sort the next disagreement into 'today decision' or 'big decision' before raising it.
- ☐ Take daily-rule disagreements to the caregiver privately, not to the child.
- ☐ Ask 'how can I back you up' instead of leading with a challenge.
- ☐ Present one consistent answer to the child even after private disagreement.

- [ ] Actively invite the parent's voice on major decisions and values, not just daily rules.
- [ ] Say one specific thank-you to the caregiver this month.
- [ ] Notice if a child is using one adult against the other, and address it together.
- [ ] Check what legal authority the parent actually holds for major decisions where you live.

+ REFLECT AND WRITE

Where have I, as the parent or the caregiver, crossed from a big decision into a daily one, or the reverse?

When was the last time the two of us disagreed in front of the child instead of privately?

What is one specific thing the caregiver has done recently that deserves to be said out loud?

What would 'how can I back you up' sound like in our next conversation?

+ YOUR NEXT STEP

> Say one specific thank-you on your next call.

+ WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Written by My Fairy GodParents — reviewed August 2026.

This is general information and practice guidance — not legal advice, mental-health treatment, or a statement of any court, agency, or facility's rules. Policies differ by state, county, facility, school, and program, so always confirm details with the office involved.

For decisions with legal, medical, financial, or clinical consequences, work with a licensed professional or the organizations listed with each resource.

You do not have to do this alone.

More free guides, scripts, and checklists:
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint