



crucial
confrontations™

S U C C E S S S T O R Y

“Every relationship improved as a result of this crucial confrontation.”



Fostering Crucial Confrontations

Rebecca R. Howland
Salt Lake City, Utah

“I am the mother of six children. However, my family and I willingly turned our home upside down to take in two boys whose mother was recuperating from a severe injury and attempting to rehabilitate from a substance addiction. She agreed to give temporary custody of her boys to me until she could take charge of her own life and meet the living standards enforced by her siblings: clean home, steady job, abstinence from drugs, and proven financial stability.

“My family and I purchased two sets of bunk beds, rearranged closets and dressers, and significantly altered our schedules to accommodate the boys. →

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“When the mother called the first week, she was reasonably warm and friendly. As the days went on, however, she became progressively more terse and abrupt. Three weeks later, she would barely speak to me and began manipulating the boys during the calls—pressuring them into telling her they missed her, and making them think they were very unhappy without her. She even tried to convince them that we were treating them poorly. Ironically, the boys were happier than I had seen them in years. They expressed that they loved our home and did not want to leave. Consequently, they began to avoid her calls.

“Finally, I decided to discuss the issue with the mother. The next time she called, I asked if we could discuss something that was bothering me for a few moments. She agreed. Tentatively, I asked if she knew her boys were avoiding her. And then she let me have it—claiming I was trying to take her boys and turn them against her. She felt I had always hated her, wanted her life to be miserable, and was now happy to finally see her suffer.

“With my newly acquired Crucial Confrontations skills, I carefully approached this very emotional and volatile situation. I worked on safety first. I used several contrasting statements to calm her down. I told her this wasn’t about her not having her kids—it was about when she could have them. I expressed my main concern was not her problems, rather finding solutions. I reassured her that my relationship with the boys was not as a mother but as a caregiver. She calmed down, but she still questioned my motives. I established the mutual purpose of wanting her to succeed so her children could return to her.

“The animosity and anger slowly melted away. By the end of the call, our relationship was better than it had ever been. She expressed appreciation for the shared understanding we had drawn together during the call. In the 25 years I have known her, I had never seen a discussion end positively. From that point forward, our communication was vastly improved. She stopped coercing and pressuring her boys, and they began to speak with her again. Every relationship improved as a result of this crucial confrontation. It was quite miraculous.”



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