

# **FOSTER**

**P**arent  
**R**esource  
**I**nformation  
**D**evelopment  
**E**ducation

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**Module Five, Session One—**

**Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families**

## What I Believe about Supporting Family Relationships

Below are some questions about your feelings, attitudes, and beliefs regarding children in foster care and their family connections. Mark your answers. The higher the number, the stronger your agreement with the statement. No one else will see your responses.

1. It is easier for children to accept having two sets of caregivers (i.e., parents and foster parents) than it is for the adults involved.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
 disagree nor disagree agree agree

2. Children can be attached to, and love, more than one mother and father.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
 disagree nor disagree agree agree

3. We strengthen a child's identity by keeping him or her connected to family, culture, and community.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
 disagree nor disagree agree agree

4. A child adjusts better to placement if allowed to continue his or her own routines, patterns, and/or traditions.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
 disagree nor disagree agree agree

5. When children sense they are being cut off from family or important connections, they may feel there is something "bad" about who they are.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
 disagree nor disagree agree agree

6. While placement may be necessary to ensure a child's safety, the very act of separating children from their families places them at risk for many kinds of loss.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
disagree nor disagree agree

7. Visits with parents need to be initiated immediately upon placement.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
disagree nor disagree agree

8. It is the responsibility of the foster care team to try to ensure that visits are positive for the child.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
disagree nor disagree agree

9. A child's tantruming and regressing after visits, while difficult to handle or watch, may actually indicate a strong and healthy attachment to parents.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
disagree nor disagree agree

10. Foster families are in a unique and ideal position to provide support to birth families.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
disagree nor disagree agree

## Session One Competencies and Objectives

### Competencies

The foster parent:

- Can respect and support a child's connections to birth family and previous foster/adoptive families.
- Can recognize cultural, spiritual, social, and economic similarities and differences between child's primary family and foster family.
- Can respect and support connections to siblings.
- Can help child accept primary/birth family relationships, and help child manage these feelings and relationships.

### Objectives

Session One will enable participants to:

1. Get acquainted with the trainers and each other;
2. Describe the relationship between this Foster PRIDE module and the entire PRIDE training program;
3. Clarify why respecting differences among children, their birth families, and foster families is an essential task of the foster care team;
4. Clarify why supporting a child's ties to family and previous foster or adoptive families is important;
5. Identify ways to manage diversity between children, their families, and foster families;
6. Identify ways to support a child's ties to family and previous foster and adoptive families;
7. Identify ways to help a child address loyalty conflicts and manage feelings regarding birth family relationships; and
8. Describe the importance of respecting and supporting a child's ties to extended family and kin, siblings, and friends.

## Session One Agenda

### Part I: Welcome and Introductions (45 minutes)

- A. Participant introductions
- B. Use of PRIDEbook
- C. Purpose of this Foster PRIDE module
- D. Review of Session One objectives and agenda
- E. Discussion of teamwork agreements

### Part II: Respecting and Supporting Child/Birth Family Ties (2 hours, including 15-minute break)

- A. Managing diversity among children, their birth families, and foster families
- B. Helping children manage attachment and loyalty conflicts
- C. Addressing the roles of siblings, extended family or kin, and friends

### Part III: Closing Remarks (15 minutes)

- A. Summary
- B. Preview of next session
- C. Taking PRIDE Activity
- D. End session

## Supporting Child/Family Relationships

Two ways of supporting the child/family relationship are:

- promoting family connections
- promoting family continuity

*Promoting family connections* means providing supports aimed at strengthening the child's relationship with the family. This is done primarily in three ways:

- by supporting the child's culture, traditions, and routines;
- by helping the child manage loyalty conflicts; and
- through managing visits and other contacts with families.

*Family continuity* can be defined as "continuation of important family relationships and bonds." This involves working as part of a team with the parent and involving the parent in decision-making about the child's life.

## Respecting the Child's Culture, Traditions, and Routines

The foster care team can support children's relationships with their families by:

- Being able to clarify personal values and biases about social class, ethnicity and cultural differences.
- Acknowledging the positive experiences the child has had with his or her family of origin;
- Learning the routines, traditions, and patterns of the child, and understanding that routines, traditions, and patterns bring comfort to all of us;
- Working to change only those patterns or routines that threaten the child or others;
- Demonstrating respect for the cultural identity of children and their families by taking into consideration cultural beliefs, needs, and values in planning and supporting visits and other contacts;
- Having a personal commitment to accepting children and their families, and recognizing the strengths inherent in all families; and
- Recognizing that to criticize the child's family of origin is to criticize the child.

# Managing Diversity

## Part One

**Routines** reflect established ways of doing things that generally are done the same way every day without much thought. Routines are accepted and save families from endless discussions negotiating behaviors every day.

*Think about your family. What routines has your family developed regarding:*

**Mealtime** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Television** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Family patterns** are ways that family members get along together, and things family members just "know"—such as how to communicate, problem-solve, and make decisions.

*Think about your family. What family patterns has your family developed regarding:*

**Discipline** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Expressing feelings** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Now think about a child placed with your family. This may be a new placement, or you may need to think back on what it was like when the child was initially placed.*

*What daily **routines** does this child have that may have been (or are) different from your family's daily routines?*

**Mealtime** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Television** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*What **patterns** does this child bring regarding:*

**Responding to discipline** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Expressing feelings** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Part Two**

Review your work in Part One and discuss with a partner. Discuss how you can respect differences in a way that would support the child's identity and connections, but would also allow the child to adjust and get along with your family. Discuss how you would handle the following areas:

### **Routines**

**Mealtime** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Television** \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Patterns**

**Responding to discipline** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Expressing feelings** \_\_\_\_\_

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Adapted from Blome, Wendy W., Pasztor, Eileen M., and Leighton M. *Homeworks #3: Helping Children and Youths Manage the Impact of Placement*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, 1993, pp. 10-23.

## Did I Do Something Wrong?

In pairs discuss the following two situations that deal with loyalty conflicts.

- 1) You are supervising a visit in your home between eight-year-old Jimmy and his mother. They are in the middle of playing games together and are having a very good visit, when Jimmy turns to you and says, "Mom, where is the new game you got me?" You tell Jimmy where the game is, and he gets it and shows it to his mother. For the remainder of the visit, there is a noticeable change in the mother's behavior. She seems much quieter and withdrawn. Jimmy asks his mother if he has done something wrong, and she shakes her head no. She leaves at the end of the visit without saying much to you or to Jimmy.

What are the issues?

How would you handle this situation?

- 2) Ten-year-old Lisa has been living with your family for over a year. She visits regularly with her mother and younger brother. There is a plan for her to return home in two months. She has expressed both happiness and concern about returning home. One night Lisa refuses to come down for dinner. You find her crying in her room. Reluctantly she tells you that this was the night for the Girl Scout Annual Mother-Daughter Banquet. She cried, "I wanted to go, but I didn't know which mother to take. It's not fair. It's stupid to have two mothers."

What are the issues?

How would you handle this situation?

## Respecting and Supporting Child/Birth Family Ties

- a. While it may sometimes be necessary to separate children from their families to ensure their safety, the very act of separating children from their families places them at risk for many different kinds of loss.
- b. We strengthen a child's identity by helping the child stay connected to his or her family, past, culture, and community.
- c. The foster care team can respect differences among children, their families, and foster families by demonstrating respect for the cultural identity of children and their families, and by considering the family's cultural beliefs, needs, and values in planning and decision making.
- d. Children deserve every opportunity to work out issues with their families, even if termination of parental rights is likely. It is our job to help children come to terms with their past, family, and life.
- e. Loyalty conflicts are an integral part of the placement experience. Children cannot resolve the grieving process until they have accepted that they have two sets of parents. Just as parents can love all of their children at the same time, children can be attached to and love more than one mother and father.
- f. Children should be helped to understand that the parents who gave birth to them have a special and unique role in their lives, and the foster or adoptive parents who daily parent them can also have a special and unique role in their lives.
- g. Separating siblings in foster care or through adoption compounds the loss they must already face in being separated from their parents. Despite the growing recognition that it is healthier for brothers and sisters to remain together, child welfare agencies still struggle with the difficult reality of finding families willing to accept several children at once.
- h. It is the responsibility of the members of the foster care team to work with the family to protect children from abuse and neglect while at the same time preserving and maintaining those connections which have been important sources of strength and support to the child and family.

## Taking PRIDE Activity One

Traditions reflect ethnic, cultural, religious, and personal experiences. Traditions can give meaning to events because they tie us to the past and make the future more predictable.

*Think about your family. What traditions has your family developed regarding:*

Holidays \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Birthdays \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Vacations \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other special occasions \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Now let's think about the children in your care. You may choose to do this activity with just one child. What family traditions has this child brought to your family regarding holidays, birthdays, vacations, and other special occasions? If it is difficult to answer the questions, ask the child to help you answer them, if possible. The child may have lived with other families. What were their traditions? Gently talk with the child about past birthdays, holidays, expectations, happy occasions, and disappointments.

*What family traditions has the child brought to your family regarding the following? How do you, or could you, incorporate these traditions into your celebrations?*

Holidays \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Birthdays \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Vacations \_\_\_\_\_

-

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other special occasions \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Adapted from Blome, Wendy W., Pasztor, Eileen M., and Leighton M. *Homeworks #3: Helping Children and Youths Manage the Impact of Placement*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, 1993, p. 13, 21.

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## **Module Five, Session Two—Supporting Contacts Between Children and Their Families**

## Session Two Competencies and Objectives

### Competencies

The foster parent:

- Can support visits and other contact with child's family.
- Can support appropriate visits and contact between children and their siblings.
- Can prepare child for visits and help child to manage the impact of visits on the child's feelings and behavior.

### Objectives

Session Two will enable participants to:

1. Describe the importance of contacts between children and their families;
2. Identify the goals of visits for the child, family, foster parent, and social worker;
3. List factors involved in planning for visits between children and their family;
4. Identify age-appropriate, developmentally related activities for parent-child visits;
5. Describe ways to provide support to children after visits; and
6. Identify other contacts, in addition to visits, to strengthen the child/family relationship.

Resource 2-2

## Session Two Agenda

### Part I: Welcome and Building Bridges (30 minutes)

- A. Welcome and review of objectives and agenda
- B. Building bridges

### Part II: Supporting Contacts between Children and Their Families (2 hours 15 minutes, including 15-minute break)

- A. Preparing children for visits
- B. Providing support during and after visits
- C. Using contacts other than visits

### Part III: Closing Remarks (15 minutes)

- A. Summary
- B. Preview of next session
- C. Taking PRIDE Activity
- D. End session

## Location of Visits

Location	Advantage	Disadvantage
Agency	Easy for worker to observe. Controlled situation, if needed.	Can feel cold or sterile. Parents and children may feel uncomfortable; lacks privacy.
Foster family's home	Satisfies parent's curiosity about how child is living. Child is less disrupted.	May make parent feel uncomfortable. Some parents may not behave appropriately.
Parent's home	Parent and child may feel more comfortable.	Problems with safety or housekeeping may not have been resolved. Child may not be adequately protected or supervised by parent.
Relatives' home	Maintains kinship ties; the child may feel comfortable there.	Parent may feel criticized by family. Occasionally the extended family is not safe for child.
Neutral spot (e.g., restaurant or a park)	No emotional baggage.	Lack of privacy.

## Deciding Where Visits Should Be Held

Think about the most appropriate place for visits in each of the following situations. Should the visit be supervised or unsupervised? Give reasons for decisions.

- a. Jeremy's worker thinks that Jeremy's mother has made a lot of progress and will soon be ready to have Jeremy return home. The purpose of the visit is to see how Jeremy will adjust to a return home, and if his mother can handle it.
  
- b. Jason was sexually abused by his father. He is going to testify in court against his father. His father's attorney has gotten permission for a visit.
  
- c. Julie was neglected by her very young mother. The worker wants Julie's mother to learn how to feed and bathe Julie.
  
- d. Tyrone is going to move to his grandmother's home while his mother continues her recovery from addiction to crack. He misses his mother and begs to see her.
  
- e. Lauren's mother Ginny has been participating in parenting classes to learn ways to discipline her daughter without using physical punishment. She is still afraid that she may lose control if Lauren acts up. The team wants to see if Ginny's parenting skills have improved.

## Preparing for Visits

### I. Coordinating visit arrangements

- Everyone should know who will attend the visit and what each person's role will be.
- Transportation details should be worked out in advance, as well as a backup plan.
- All parties should know what the procedures are if visits are to be canceled—under what conditions, with how much notice, and who will contact whom. Because of the importance of the visits to the child, every effort should be made by all parties to follow through with the visiting plans.

### II. Preparing the parents

- Caseworkers have the primary responsibility for preparing the parents.
- Parents should clearly understand the visit arrangements as discussed above. These should be written into the service plan.
- Parents should be prepared for possible reactions by the child, according to the circumstances and the developmental level of the child. For example, an 11-month-old may cling to the foster parent if he or she has not seen the parents for a period of time. This could be very painful for a parent who has not been prepared for such a reaction, and could potentially cause unnecessary anger toward the foster parents.
- Parents should be assisted in planning appropriate activities for the visit. Visits are **not** natural situations—particularly if they are held in an office. The visit should be nurturing and pleasant for the child. The caseworker or foster parent can discuss games, artwork, or other play. The visit should include a meal or snack to allow the parents to provide nurturing.
- Parents should discuss how they will say good-bye, and be encouraged to provide a small gift, picture, or toy from home for the child to keep.

### III. Preparing the child

- Foster parents have the primary responsibility to prepare the child.
- The child should clearly understand the visit arrangements. Too often children are picked up and carried to and from visits with little idea of what is happening. The child should have as much information as possible ahead of time.
- The child should be prepared for the parent's reaction. If parents have frequently failed to show up for visits, or are likely to become very emotional, this needs to be discussed with the child.
- The child should be prepared for his or her own feelings and reactions. Emotions are complicated and unpredictable. Seeing the parents may bring on an overwhelming sense of guilt in a child who had made a seemingly smooth adjustment. Children who have not seemed to miss their parents may be overcome with grief at having to leave them. Children need to be told that the visit may bring up a range of feelings (rather than having just one possibility identified), and to be assured that this is all right.
- If the child has safety or protection concerns, he or she needs to be assured that the caseworker (or foster parent) will be there to help make sure everybody is safe.

#### **IV. Preparing the siblings**

- Siblings have varying reactions to seeing their brother or sister following placement. Often the events leading to placement have been traumatic. Siblings who remained with the birth family may feel angry with the child in placement. They may feel the child has abandoned the family or revealed a family secret. Or the sibling in care may feel abandoned. Children placed with different foster families may be curious about the reasons. The caseworker may need to talk with siblings before the visit to help them understand the situation.
- In some cases a sibling may need extra help in dealing with family issues. The caseworker can explore counseling for that child.
- Each sibling needs to be prepared for his or her own emotional response to seeing brothers or sisters, and be prepared to deal with how the brother or sister responds.

#### **V. Preparing the foster families**

- The foster parents should clearly understand the visiting arrangements. They may have several children in care, and coordinating activities can be a challenge.
- Foster parents should be prepared for the child's reactions both before and after visits. (This will be discussed in more depth in the next section.)
- Foster families also need preparation for their own feelings and reactions. When parents don't show up for visits and children are continually disappointed, foster families may feel angry. But even when visits go well, the foster family can be saddened, as it may signal that the time is approaching for the child to return home.

## Developing Age-Appropriate Activities for Parent-Child Visits

Age/Stage	Developmental Task	Developmentally Related Visiting Activities
<b>Infancy (Birth-2 years)</b>	Develop primary attachment	Meeting basic needs (feeding, changing, holding, cuddling)
	Develop object permanence	Peek-a-boo games
	Basic motor development (sit, reach, stand, crawl, walk)	_____
		_____
		_____
Word recognition	_____	
_____		
_____		
_____		
Begin exploration and mastery of environment	_____	
	_____	
	_____	
	_____	
<b>Preschool (3-5 years)</b>	Develop impulse control	Meeting and constantly enforcing rules
	Language development	Reading simple stories; playing word games
	Imitation, fantasy play	"Let's pretend" games; encouraging imitative play by doing things together such as "clean house," "go to store"
	Assert preference	Allow choices in activities, clothes worn, foods eaten
	Large motor development (run, climb, dance)	_____
_____		
_____		
_____		

Age/Stage	Developmental Task	Developmentally Related Visiting Activities
<b>School-Aged (6-8 years)</b>	Small motor coordination	_____ _____ _____ _____
	Develop basic sense of time	_____ _____ _____ _____
	Sex role identification	Be open to discussing boy/girl physical differences; be open to discussing child's perception of sex roles; read books about heroes together
	Begin development of conscience	Make and enforce consistent rules; discuss consequences of behavior
	Begin concrete operations (time, space, hierarchy)	Point out cause-effect
	Develop ability to solve problems	_____ _____ _____ _____
	Task completion	_____ _____ _____ _____
	Play games with rules	_____ _____ _____ _____

Age/Stage	Developmental Task	Developmentally Related Visiting Activities
<b>Latency (9-12 years)</b>	Skill development (school, sports, special interests)	Help with homework; sports together; demonstrate support of special interests, such as help with collections; go fishing; attend school conferences and activities
	Peer group development	Involve peers in visit activities
	Develop self-awareness	Be open to providing feedback
	Team play	_____ _____ _____ _____
<b>Adolescence (13-17 years)</b>	Preparation for puberty	_____ _____ _____ _____
	Cope with physical changes	Help with attention regarding: personal appearance, such as shaving, buying cosmetics; provide information regarding physical changes
	Begin abstract thinking	Planning, discuss future; discuss politics, religious ideas
	Interest in relationships, dating	Set clear rules, be open to discussing problems
	Become more independent of parents	_____ _____ _____ _____
Changes in peer group associations	_____ _____ _____ _____	

Age/Stage	Developmental Task	Developmentally Related Visiting Activities
<b>Young Adulthood (18-25 years)</b>	Explore options for careers, activities	_____ _____ _____ _____
	Separate from family	_____ _____ _____ _____
	Develop life goals and values	_____
	Develop capacity for intimacy	_____ _____ _____ _____

## The Grieving Process\*

Fill in the related feelings and behaviors as the stages are discussed during the session.

Stage	Related feelings and behaviors
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Shock/denial	
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Bargaining	
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Anger	
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Despair	
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Resolution or acceptance	
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\*Kubler-Ross, E. *On Death and Dying*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1969.

## Helping Children Deal with their Reactions to Visits

At the end of a visit:

- Tell the child when the next visit will be.
- Identify someone to remove the child from the visit quickly, quietly and efficiently.
- If a volunteer or staff member not involved with the child provides transportation, he or she should not ask the child questions about the visit.
- Make a statement that allows the child to know that he or she is free to express personal feelings.
- Be prepared to pick up the child's cues—some children want to be left alone, others need to be with someone; many children need to sleep.
- Don't force the child to eat. Don't push the child to be affectionate.

## What Would You Do If. . .

In small groups discuss the following three situations that occur after visits. Include the following questions in your discussions:

What feelings might the child be having?

In what stage(s) of grief might the child be?

How can you handle the immediate situation?

What long range tasks might you identify for the foster care team?

*What would you do if:*

- Fifteen-year-old Michele has refused to go back to your home following a visit with her mother in the office, supervised by the caseworker. She is sitting in the caseworker's car outside your home, crying hysterically that she hates the caseworker and her foster parents.
  
- Four-year-old Mike has been biting, banging his head, and wetting his pants since yesterday's visit with his brother Tommy, age 10, and sister Melissa, age 12.
  
- After returning from a visit with her mother, nine-year-old Tina chatted merrily about her visit while demanding that you take her out for some ice cream. She tells you she loves the visits, and she needs a "double dip chocolate cone really bad."

## Supporting Contacts between Children and Their Families

- a. The overall purpose of visits is to strengthen the child/family relationship. Visits also serve a different purpose for the members of the foster care team. It is important to understand the goals of visits for the child, birth family, foster family, and worker.
- b. Planning of visits between children and their families should minimally address the following issues: (1) supervised vs. unsupervised visits; (2) where the visit will take place; (3) frequency and length of visits; (4) transportation details; (5) procedure for canceling visits, if necessary.
- c. Decision-making about visits should take into account the permanency goal, child safety factors, and the objectives to be achieved in the service plan.
- d. Visits between children and their parents are required at least once a week when the goal is to return home. The first visit must take place within 14 days after the child enters care, and should usually happen as soon as possible.
- e. Every effort should be made to place siblings with the same foster family. When siblings are placed with different foster families, visits must be arranged at least once a month.
- f. Caseworkers should prepare parents for visits by: (1) ensuring that parents clearly understand the visit arrangements; (2) helping parents anticipate possible reactions by the child; and (3) helping parents plan age-appropriate, developmentally related activities for the visit.
- g. Foster parents should prepare the child for visits by: (1) ensuring the child clearly understands the visit arrangements; (2) helping the child deal with parents' reactions to visits; (3) helping the child deal with his or her own feelings and reactions; and (4) if the child has safety concerns, ensuring that the caseworker (or foster parent) will provide the necessary support.
- h. Foster parents should clearly understand the visit arrangements, should be prepared for possible reactions by the child before and after visits, and should be prepared for their own feelings and reactions.
- i. The foster care team should support other contacts in addition to visits, such as scheduled telephone calls, letters or postcards, pictures, and sending and receiving gifts.

# Taking PRIDE Activity Two

Think about the current visiting arrangement for each child in your care, and assess whether it is an appropriate visiting plan. Specifically, think about the details we discussed today.

- Are the visits supervised or unsupervised? Is that appropriate given the current circumstances?
- How often do visits take place? How often should they take place in light of the current goal?
- Are the details clearly spelled out? Has there been any confusion about the details of the visit?
- If the child has siblings, are visits taking place at least monthly?
- Are there other significant family members or friends that the child should be having contact with?
- How has the child been responding to the visits?

Remember, visiting plans should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they continue to meet the goals set forth.

**CHILD #1**

Age \_\_\_\_\_

**Visiting Plan Assessment**

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**CHILD #2**

Age \_\_\_\_\_

**Visiting Plan Assessment**

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**CHILD #3**

Age \_\_\_\_\_

**Visiting Plan Assessment**

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## **Module Five, Session Three— Becoming Partners in Parenting**

## Session Three Competencies and Objectives

### Competency

The foster parent:

- Can describe how to work with and help primary/birth families.

### Objectives

Session Three will enable participants to:

1. Define partnership and describe how the term relates to parenting in child welfare;
2. Identify the advantages of parenting shared by foster families and birth families;
3. Describe the process of defining roles, defining responsibilities, and shared decision-making;
4. Identify concrete ways to implement shared parenting;
5. Describe ways to be supportive and helpful to birth families;
6. Identify "Parenting Partners" programs in the area and determine interest in working within a formalized program.

Resource 3-2

## Session Three Agenda

### Part I: Welcome and Building Bridges (30 minutes)

- A. Welcome and review of objectives and agenda (15 minutes)
- B. Building bridges (15 minutes)

### Part II: Being Partners in Parenting (2 hours 15 minutes, including 15-minute break)

- A. Developing a partnership
- B. Sharing the parenting role
- C. Supporting and helping birth families

### Part III: Closing Remarks (15 minutes)

- A. Summary of Session Three
- B. Summary of Module Five
- C. Instructions for participant evaluation
- D. End session

## **Building Partnerships**

- Be clear what the goal is.
- Define one another's parenting roles.
- Respect and understand one another's roles in accomplishing the goal.
- Reach an agreement as to the tasks/responsibilities for each person.
- Share decision-making.

## **Grett and Amy**

Eight-year-old Grett and three-year-old Amy were placed with you seven months ago. They had both been physically abused by their stepfather and were placed after their mother failed to follow through on obtaining a restraining order against the stepfather. Their mother, Gretta, had been a repeated victim of the stepfather's violence.

You are a single foster parent, and these are the first two children placed with you. You have no children of your own. Grett and Amy have done extremely well in placement. Grett is now working at grade level. Amy, who was severely withdrawn and developmentally delayed, has gained from play therapy and speech therapy. She can now speak in sentences. The children visit regularly with their mother and look forward to visits. Gretta provides a lot of nurturing during visits (hugs, brings them snacks, reads to them), and the children are very attached to her. Gretta speaks with you often to keep track of their progress.

Gretta has been involved in therapy and services with the Women's Center, but the stepfather remains in the home. You find yourself becoming increasingly attached to the children, and at times angry with the mother for staying with her husband. Maybe that is why some of the things that have happened recently have really confused you.

Resource 3-5

## **Parenting Role Confusion**

Discuss the following situations and how you might respond.

### **"A message from the school"**

Grett brings home an invitation addressed to you for the "Annual Parents Reception."

How might you feel about this and why might this be confusing?

### **"It's time to enroll for confirmation classes"**

You are leaving services at your church. Your minister approaches you and asks if you plan to enroll Grett in confirmation classes. You explain to the minister that Grett is of a different religion.

How might you feel about this and why might this be confusing?

### **"I'd love to have grandchildren"**

You and your mother are washing dishes after Sunday dinner and your mother says, "You've done a beautiful job with these children. I'm so proud of you. You need to talk to the caseworker about adoption. It's clear that mother isn't going to straighten out her situation."

How might you feel about this and why might this be confusing?

### **"Therapy isn't the answer to everything"**

Your best friend Anna says to you over the phone, "Amy's speech is so much better. You need to get her out of all that counseling and therapy stuff or she's going to be messed up for life. You can't tell me a three year old doesn't just need some stability and a big hug. She's flourishing because of your love and care—not because of all that therapy."

How might you feel about this and why might this be confusing?

## ***Parenting Role Responsibilities***

Roles were defined for each of the parenting partners for Grett and Amy. Now determine the specific responsibilities that would be assumed by that role. To help you in identifying responsibilities, there are several categories listed. You may need to refer back to *Resource 3-3 Grett and Amy*.

### **Birth mother's role responsibilities:**

School/education

Health

Nurturing

Meeting child's developmental needs

Permanency planning

**Foster mother's role responsibilities:**

School/education

Health

Nurturing

Meeting child's developmental needs

Permanency planning

**Agency's role responsibilities**

School/education

Health

Nurturing

Meeting child's developmental needs

Permanency planning

## Shared Decision-Making: Casey Smith

Seven-year-old Casey Smith has been in placement at the Norville home for five months. She has regular visits with her mother, and there is a plan for her to return home during the next six months. Her mother is progressing well in drug treatment. Casey misses her mother but has adjusted well in foster care. The Norville's daughter Lisa, age six, gets along well with Casey.

The Norvilles have involved the girls in many activities including summer day camp and swimming at the athletic club. Mrs. Norville has worried about Casey's self-esteem, as the child refers to herself as stupid, and seems afraid that she'll make a mistake. Mr. and Mrs. Norville feel strongly that Casey should be treated just like their own daughter. This is why Mrs. Norville enrolled both Casey and Lisa in the town's dance school for the fall term.

When Mrs. Norville invited Mrs. Smith to the dance school's "Nutcracker," Mrs. Smith was outraged. She screamed at Mrs. Norville that she didn't want her child to have dance lessons, and didn't want her dressing up in those stupid outfits. Mrs. Norville was very hurt, and became angry at Mrs. Smith for not wanting something that had already proven to be good for Casey.

Mrs. Smith called the caseworker and demanded that Casey be taken out of the Norville home. Mrs. Smith explained, "I will never be able to afford dance lessons. Casey is seven years old. She won't be able to understand that. But the Norvilles are adults. They should be able to understand. If Casey stays in that home she'll never want to come home to me."

Mr. and Mrs. Norville were shattered by Mrs. Smith's response. They had only tried to do what was best.

## Considerations for Implementing Shared Decision-Making

**The caseworker, as the coordinator for the foster care team, needs to be involved in any efforts toward shared decision-making.**

Child welfare cases can involve many complicated clinical and legal issues. The caseworker is in the best position to understand all aspects of the case, and to know the circumstances most appropriate for shared decision-making.

If you are interested in initiating shared decision-making, discuss your ideas with the caseworker. Some decisions may be simple, such as deciding who will accompany a child to an appointment. Other decisions—such as how and where visits will be established—may be complicated and involve a number of parties.

**A plan for shared decision-making needs to establish the role for all involved parties, and ensure adequate communication.**

The caseworker can help determine what parties need to be involved in shared decision-making. Specific parenting concerns, such as haircuts, dress, etc. may involve only yourself and the parent. Broader issues, such as visiting and treatment, require the entire team. Other issues may require participation by the three parenting partners—the agency, foster family, and birth family.

You can write into the service plan how you will implement shared decision-making. The plan can outline the areas in which the foster family and birth family will share decisions, and it can establish methods of communication. (For example: Foster parents and birth parents will discuss child's progress in school on a weekly basis. The foster mother will call the birth mother every Saturday morning. They will jointly determine who is to attend Joey's Parent/Teacher conferences.)

**Shared decision-making is not always possible, and in certain circumstances is not desirable.**

In some situations, shared decision-making is not possible. Parents who are mentally impaired because of mental illness or substance abuse may be unable to participate in decision-making. In that case, the foster care team will focus on treatment efforts to enable the parent to eventually participate in shared decision making.

## Establishing Rapport with Birth Families

- Ask for input on parenting issues.
  - How can I help get Johnny to sleep?
  - What kinds of food does Mary like to eat?
  
- Compliment their child.
  - Johnny is a very smart boy.
  - Mary has a wonderful sense of humor.
  
- Compliment their child and relate it to a parenting skill.
  - Johnny has such good manners. You've really done a good job teaching him.
  - Mary's hair always looks so pretty when she comes back from her visit. You do such a good job fixing her hair.
  
- Share their parenting concerns.
  - I worry about Johnny too. You're right. His behavior is hard to control sometimes. I can see how hard it must have been for you.
  - Mary can be frustrating. She'll make a joke out of anything.
  
- Express empathy.
  - I know it's hard for you to have Johnny in placement.
  - Being a parent can be very difficult.
  
- Express hope.
  - I know you'll be able to do the things in your service plan so that Johnny can come home.
  - You may have to work hard, but I think you can make the changes needed.
  
- Convey your respect and understanding for their role as the parent.
  - You will always be Johnny's mother (or father). I promise we'll care for him and love him. But you will still be his mother (or father).
  - Mary loves you very much.

## My Role in Supporting and Helping Birth Families

Thinking about the birth family of a child you have in care, answer the following questions.

- What would you like to do to help or support this birth family?
- Why do you see this as a need?
- What strengths do you have that would make it possible for you to provide this help?
- In what concrete ways do you think you could be helpful?
- What steps would you take to initiate this process?
- How would you approach the family about what you want to do? What would you say?

## Supporting and Helping Birth Families: An Example

To help you think about ways you can support the families of children in your care, here is a sample worksheet completed by a foster parent of a child whose mother is chemically involved.

- What would you like to do to help or support this birth family?

*I would like to help the mother to be able to feed her Failure to Thrive infant.*

- Why do you see this as a need?

*The baby came into care because of being diagnosed "failure to thrive." The mother has not been able to get the baby to eat. I'm afraid that if the baby returns home, the mother will still not know how to feed the baby.*

- What strengths do you have that would make it possible for you to provide this help?

*I have been able to successfully feed this baby. It was very hard at first. I have worked with the hospital.*

- In what concrete ways do you think you could be helpful?

*I think I would be less threatening to the mother than the people at the hospital. They're the only ones who have tried to help her with the feeding. She never followed through. I could sit with her at her apartment or after a visit. I think it'd be worth a try.*

- What steps would you take to initiate this process?

*Talk to the caseworker I guess. I would also talk to the doctor about it. I guess the hospital team is supposed to be teaching her. I wouldn't want to step on toes. But they're not making any progress with her.*

- How would you approach the family about what you want to do? What would you say?

*I would just say, "Linda, if the baby is going to come home sometime, the two of us need to sit down and work on some things together. She's eating now. That's been a big problem in the past. It was real hard for me to get her to eat, but I've finally been able to. I would like to show you the things that I do. I want you to be able to feed her. That way we'll know she'll get to stay with you once she goes home."*

## Becoming Partners in Parenting

- Partnerships are helpful for accomplishing work that is difficult to do alone. When you work in partnership, you have the advantage of the special skills and knowledge of each partner.
- When birth families and foster families work in a parenting partnership, the pressure of attachment and loyalty conflicts is dramatically reduced for the child.
- Being a partner in parenting means sharing the parenting role. This is different from just parenting. It is also more difficult, because it requires the skills of parenting **and** the skills of working in partnership.
- There are four skills involved in developing a parenting partnership:
  - (1) defining one another's parenting roles,
  - (2) respecting and understanding one another's parenting roles,
  - (3) reaching an agreement regarding the responsibilities that each role entails, and
  - (4) shared decision making.
- Foster families are in a unique position to provide help and support to birth families. Through being open, nonjudgmental, respectful, and patient, the groundwork can be laid for a helping relationship.

## What I Believe About Supporting Family Relationships

Below are some questions about your feelings, attitudes, and beliefs regarding children in foster care and their family connections. Mark your answers. The higher the number, the stronger your agreement with the statement. No one else will see your responses.

1. It is easier for children to accept having two sets of caregivers (i.e., parents and foster parents) than it is for the adults involved.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
 disagree nor disagree agree

2. Children can be attached to, and love, more than one mother and father.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
 disagree nor disagree agree

3. We strengthen a child's identity by keeping him or her connected to family, culture, and community.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
 disagree nor disagree agree

4. A child adjusts better to placement if allowed to continue his or her own routines, patterns, and/or traditions.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
 disagree nor disagree agree

5. When a child senses he or she is being cut off from family or important connections, the child may feel there is something "bad" about who he or she is.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
 disagree nor disagree agree

6. While placement may be necessary to ensure a child's safety, the very act of separating children from their families places them at risk for many kinds of loss.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
disagree nor disagree agree

7. Visits with parents need to be initiated immediately upon placement.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
disagree nor disagree agree

8. It is the responsibility of the foster care team to try to ensure that visits are positive for the child.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
disagree nor disagree agree

9. A child's tantruming and regressing after visits, while difficult to handle or watch, may actually indicate a strong and healthy attachment to parents.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
disagree nor disagree agree

10. Foster families are in a unique and ideal position to provide support to birth families.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Disagree Neither agree Agree Strongly  
disagree nor disagree agree