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Module Seven, Session One—

Valuing and Making a Commitment to Cultural Competence

Revised July 2012

Session One Competencies and Objectives

Competencies

Foster parents:

- Know how to promote a child's positive sense of cultural norms and values to help develop self-esteem.
- Recognize cultural, social and economic similarities and differences between a child's primary family and foster family.
- Know the importance of complying with the State's policy on allowing a child to practice the religion of the primary family.
- Know how to promote a child's positive sense of identity and history to develop self-esteem.

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 valuing and making a commitment to cultural competence is an essential task of the foster care team;
4. Identify ways to demonstrate valuing and respecting the cultural diversity of children, their families, and foster families;
5. Explain why promoting a child's cultural norms and values helps to develop self-esteem;
6. Describe the importance of seeking support as necessary from community members in addressing children's cultural concerns; and
7. Identify ways to incorporate children's cultural traditions, customs, and events into the everyday life of the foster family.

Session One Agenda

Part I: **Welcome and Introductions** (45 minutes)
- A. Welcoming remarks and participant introductions
- B. Purpose of this Foster PRIDE Module
- C. Review of Session One objectives and agenda

Part II: **Valuing and Making a Commitment to Cultural Competence** (2 hours, including 15-minute break)
- A. Understanding the relationship between culture and values, attitudes, and behaviors
- B. Enhancing self-esteem through promoting cultural values and norms
- C. Managing diversity in the home

Part III: **Closing Remarks** (15 minutes)
- A. Summary
- B. Preview of next session
- C. Taking PRIDE Activity
- D. End session

Defining Culture and Cultural Competence

Culture is:

the shared values, norms, traditions, customs, arts, history, folklore, and institutions of a group of people.[1]

Cultural Competence is:

the ability of individuals and systems to provide services effectively to people of all cultures, races, ethnic backgrounds, and religions in a manner that recognizes, values, affirms and respects the worth of individuals, and protects and preserves the dignity of each.[2]

[1]M. Orlandi (ed.), Cultural Competence for Evaluators. (Rockville, Maryland: Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1992.)

[2]Child Welfare League of America, Washington, D.C.

A Cultural Journey

What is your cultural or ethnic background?

What values did you learn to live by?

When you were a child, how did your family view cultural or racial differences?

Which of these views do you still share? Why? Which did you decide not to keep? Why?

How has your cultural background affected your perspective and behavior?

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Learning about a Child's Culture

Ask the child's caseworker for information on the child's ethnic and cultural background. Caseworkers can share information about children in family foster care, their families, or previous foster families, and provide insight into the child's past. Ask the caseworker about the child's religion, holiday traditions and celebrations, and ethnic and family traditions and customs.

Talk with the child's family about their cultural and ethnic heritage. Consider including some of these foods, customs, or celebrations in the life of your family.

Talk with children in your care about their families' cultural and ethnic heritage and customs. Ask children how they celebrate holidays, what they like to eat, and where they go to church. Even if you can't continue all these traditions, your interest shows respect for children's experiences and identity.

Promote cultural pride by researching and reading about children's history and heritage.

Participate in community activities with children to help them understand, accept, and feel proud of their heritage. Visit museums; attend cultural events, dances and festivals. Then discuss them with the child.

Talk with children to explore how their culture and yours are different or the same.

Talking about culture and emphasizing the value of children's customs can help them adjust to new situations. They can blend their history into a new setting, and stay connected to their families and history. You can explain how variations in race, ethnicity, culture, and custom contribute to the uniqueness of each person, and how boring the world would be if everyone looked and acted alike.

Community Supports for Cultural Identity

Seek positive role models for children from their own ethnic and racial groups.

Encourage children to form relationships with members of their own cultural group: join a Big Brother or Big Sister group, attend their local church, take part in cultural celebrations.

Encourage children to learn or continue speaking their family's language. Help may be available from community members or organizations.

If children are bilingual, try to learn some phrases in the child's language. This will make children entering your home feel more at ease, and they will appreciate the extra effort.

Seek out therapists, counselors, and service providers who reflect the child's cultural identity and speak the child's language.

Get to know other foster parents who are caring for children of the same ethnicity, race or culture as the children in your care.

Seek help from many different community groups. Think of ways for your local foster parent association to work with diverse groups to provide all possible supports and resources for the children in your care.

Use the child's extended family as a resource for celebrating the child's cultural traditions. The child's identity is strengthened when he or she remains connected to family, past, culture, and community.

Incorporating the Child's Culture and Tradition into Daily Life

Plan and prepare some foods that the child knows and likes. This will make the child feel more secure and accepted.

Choose books and movies that portray positive characters of similar race or ethnicity to the children in your care.

Select toys such as dolls that look like the child.

Ask children in your care about their past, culture, family traditions, likes and dislikes. This will help you gain insight into the child's family and customs. Your interest will also promote a healthy self-concept by valuing their past experiences and relationships. It shows children that their lives are worthy of interest, and that the past can be woven into the present and future.

Observe holidays and religious or family customs that are especially important to children in your care. Let these traditions enrich your own customs.

Remember that customs which seem strange or unusual may have ethnic or religious roots. Take time to learn about these and to appreciate them.

Managing Diverse Traditions in the Family

Record your family's traditions in two of the following areas:

Holidays:

Birthdays:

Anniversaries:

Religion:

Record traditions in the same two areas of a child placed with your family:

Holidays:

Birthdays:

Anniversaries:

Religion:

Describe how you fit your traditions and the child's together to support the child's cultural identity:

Holidays:

Birthdays:

Anniversaries:

Religion:

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Creating Special Occasions Within the Foster Family

Take steps to see that special occasions go well, such as:

- Respect the child's history.
- Learn the child's usual routines and traditions.
- Acknowledge any positive experiences the child had with his or her family of origin.
- Understand that routines and traditions bring comfort to everyone. New traditions can be practiced along with the old, creating a warm, accepting environment for the child.

Valuing and Making a Commitment to Cultural Competence

Children in family foster care have their own cultural identity. That is, they have beliefs, values, customs, food preferencs, ways of talking and interacting—all of which reflect their origins. Children need to have their identity supported and nurtured. It is part of their development and sense of self. We want children to feel confident and secure about who they are.

Cultural competence is the ability of individuals and systems to provide services effectively to people of all cultures, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, and religions in a manner that recognizes, values, affirms and respects the worth of individuals, families and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each.

Foster families are service providers. They offer foster care services to children of all cultures, races, religions, and circumstances. It is important for resource families to know how to support and develop the cultural identity of all children. Children have a range of strengths and needs, and they need caregivers who can support and nurture their identity.

Cultural competence may be difficult to develop. The first step is to appreciate the meaning and value of culture in your own life. Then you can become aware of your own values, assumptions, and possible biases. This self-awareness is critical in understanding how we act, react, and behave in response to those who are different from us.

Stereotyping ignores diversity within groups and the uniqueness of individuals. Children need to be supported and nurtured for all aspects of their identity and uniqueness.

You may struggle with how to meet the needs of children from all types of backgrounds and situations. A very old and uncomplicated guide to apply is the “Golden Rule”: treat others with the same respect and dignity with which you would like to be treated.

Taking PRIDE Activity: Supporting Cultural Identity

Think of a child placed with your family now or in the past. Answer these questions about how you can (or did) support the child's identity and cultural identity.

Child's first name:

Race/ethnicity: Religion:

Language: Special Food(s):

Information about child's cultural identity:

Characteristics that make this child special and unique:

Ways that this child's identity/culture/religion are similar to your family's:

Ways that this child's identity/culture/religion are different from your family's:

Ways your family supports the child's identity and cultural identity:

Any new ideas you have gained through this training on other ways to support the child's personal and cultural identity:

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Module Seven, Session Two—

Helping Children Develop Lifebooks

Session Two Competency and Objectives

Competency

Foster parents:

- Know the value of Lifebooks and how to prepare and maintain them.

Objectives

Session Two will enable participants to:

1. Describe the contribution of a Lifebook to a child's identity;
2. Describe the contribution of a Lifebook to a child's self-esteem;
3. Describe the contribution of a Lifebook to maintaining connections;
4. Describe the narrative contents of a Lifebook;
5. Identify items that can be included in a Lifebook;
6. Describe the interactive process involved in doing Lifebooks with children;
7. Identify reasons foster parents may find it difficult to discuss a child's history;
8. Demonstrate the ability to talk about difficult subjects such as abuse, neglect, and separation; and
9. Demonstrate the ability to talk about the differences between birth families, foster families, and adoptive families.

Session Two Agenda

Part I: **Welcome And Introductions** (30 minutes)
- A. Welcome and participant introductions
- B. Review of objectives and agenda
- C. Building bridges

Part II: **Understanding the Purpose of Lifebooks** (30 minutes)
- A. Definition and description of Lifebooks
- B. Understanding the contributions of Lifebooks to the child's self-esteem, identity, and maintaining connections

Part III: **Developing Lifebooks with Children** (1 hour 50 minutes, including 15-minute break)
- A. The Lifebook process
- B. Discussing sensitive subjects with children
- C. Recording positive aspects of a child's history

Part IV: **Closing Remarks** (10 minutes)
- A. Summary of session
- B. Summary of module
- C. Saying goodbye

A Lifebook Is . . . .

… a book developed for or with a child,

…that tells the child's life story, as understood by the child and the adult helping the child,

…that can move with a child as a permanent record, and

…that contains documents, souvenirs, photographs, drawings, prose, and poems that are concrete mementos of the child's experiences.

The Lifebook Process

The process of developing a Lifebook is as important as the product.

The Lifebook experience involves a *process and a product*.

The *process* of making a Lifebook involves talking with children about their memories and experiences in a way that helps them answer "Who am I? Where did I come from?" The Lifebook *product* is the written story that comes from these conversations. It is a collection of photographs, documents, and drawings that support the child's sense of identity, self-esteem, and connections.

The Lifebook is a tool to engage children in learning about themselves.

Remember that the Lifebook is a working tool for children to learn about themselves and to cope with difficult realities. The child's participation depends on his or her abilities and needs, including age, developmental and emotional abilities, and attention span. Children may contribute to the narrative by talking about their feelings and understanding of events, and perhaps by writing down some of the stories themselves. The Lifebook can also include drawings relating to important people and memories. The product belongs to the child, and is the child's to show and tell, or keep private. The child should decide and approve of any information included in the Lifebook.

The Lifebook is an ongoing process.

The foster parent must make a long-term commitment to developing the Lifebook. Gathering information and mementos is time-consuming and sometimes requires “detective work.” How children deal with the information varies according to their developmental age and the intensity of the information. The Lifebook may need to be written in small parts during short working periods.

The Lifebook must be completed in an environment that supports and accepts the child's identity, culture, and history.

It is critical that foster parents understand their own feelings and responses to the child's family, life experiences, and identity. There is no way to complete a Lifebook without discussing these issues. Children are very perceptive and will easily note if you are uncomfortable. The purpose of the Lifebook is to help children understand their history and who they are.

Guidelines for the Lifebook Process

Decide when to begin.

The child will most readily take part in the Lifebook process with a trusted adult. Depending on the child's age and the circumstances of the placement, welcoming the child to your home might include taking some first-day snapshots. Over the course of the next days and weeks, through shared experiences at home, the neighborhood, and school, trust begins to build, as well as a collection of information and mementos. These serve as a natural beginning for a book about the child.

Some children may resist the idea of a Lifebook or talking about their past. Some children begin the process and show definite signs that they want to stop. When a child resists (perhaps by seeming hyperactive, hostile, silent, or regressive), it may mean that the child isn't ready to discuss these issues. Don't push children who are giving signs they aren't ready. Ask the child's therapist and social worker for guidance.

Decide how to begin.

Some children open the door to beginning a Lifebook by raising a question about their histories or talking about a memory from their past. Foster parents can then offer to help find the answer or write down the memory so the child won't forget. Some foster parents present the idea of the Lifebook as a special book they do for every child in their home. Some foster parents ask children, at an appropriate time, what they know about themselves, and then present the Lifebook process as a chance to gather and save important information.

Decide where to begin.

Depending on the child's age, you can let the child choose where to begin. The choices may include starting with current life in your family, a positive memory about a person or event, or starting at the beginning of life with birth and infancy.

Before starting, however, prepare a timeline of events in the child's life for yourself as a reference so that the completed Lifebook can be put in chronological order. Make a list of people such as social workers, former foster parents, or birth family members to involve in the process, and list any other sources of information, pictures, and mementos you can think of.

Be open to questions. Ask questions and be a good listener.

The child has a right to ask questions. It's all right not to know the answers. Some information will never be available, and there may always be conflicting stories about some events. When the answers aren't clear, you might ask the child what he or she remembers, how you might find the answer together, or what some possible answers might be. Your questions will help the child remember. Listen for feelings as the child talks. Those of you who attended Module 1 will remember learning about the skill of "reflective listening," and how important it is to be able to talk with children about their feelings.

You might say to a child who lived in another foster home, "Tell me what you remember about living with that family. Who lived in the family? What did the house look like? Can you draw a picture for me? It sounds like you liked the family and were sad to leave. Why do you think you had to leave that family?" Often the child will tell you that he or she was bad, or was to blame. This is an opportunity to give the child a different explanation that involves adult behaviors and decisions.

Use information to help children understand painful feelings.

Children will not stop feeling guilty and responsible for the events of their lives because of what we say. However, the correct information and the perspective we offer will be one step in helping children understand their lives differently. At each new developmental stage the child may be able to take in new information, and over time develop an understanding.

Share information about a child's family, culture, and life experiences in a simple, straightforward, nonjudgmental, empathic way.

Giving "simple information" isn't always simple. We will spend the next part of this session practicing this skill.

Bobby

Bobby is a six-and-a-half year old boy who has been in your home three months. He entered family foster care at age four; before that, he lived with his mother. At times Bobby and his mother stayed with the maternal grandmother. Bobby's mother had a short-term relationship with Bobby's father, and has not had any contact with him since before Bobby's birth. The grandmother reported that Bobby's mother was excited about her pregnancy and managed to "stop drinking" while she was pregnant. However, after Bobby was born, his mother started drinking again and using other drugs. The grandmother called the agency, concerned about her daughter's increased substance abuse and a boyfriend's treatment of Bobby. An investigation revealed that Bobby's mother and her boyfriend often spanked and slapped him. Sometimes he became bruised. It was also found that Bobby had been sexually abused by someone.

When he came into foster care, Bobby was placed with the Stone family, where he stayed until he was placed with you. Mrs. Stone requested Bobby's removal due to Mr. Stone's approaching retirement, Mrs. Stone's need to work outside the home, the slim chance of Bobby's return to his mother, and an increase in bed-wetting and soiling. Mrs. Stone had provided after-school care for her three grandchildren who liked Bobby and interacted well with him.

The Stones were a family of mixed religious background. Mr. Stone was Jewish and the family celebrated some traditional Jewish holidays such as Hanukkah that Bobby remembered and enjoyed.

During Bobby's first year and a half in care his mother completed a detox program and visited with Bobby fairly regularly. Shortly before Bobby's move from the Stone's, Bobby's mother appeared intoxicated during a scheduled visit. She began to miss visits and appointments with her social worker. The agency has decided to terminate parental rights, and the plan for Bobby is adoption. You do not plan on adopting Bobby, and want to help him make the transition to an adoptive home.

Bobby had one social worker, Miss Watson, from his initial placement until six months ago, when his current social worker was assigned. Miss Watson is very fond of Bobby.

Bobby is an attractive little first-grader with red hair and blue eyes. He was baptized in the Catholic faith. He is delayed in speech and language, and fine motor control. He loves rough and tumble active play. His attention span for quiet activities is limited. He is having difficulty academically at school. He has friends and a very supportive teacher.

Planning the Lifebook

It can be helpful to outline the significant events in the child's life, and the information you want to include about them. You can involve children by asking them to make a list of the questions they want answered and what information they might like to include in the Lifebook.

Part 1 - Gathering Information

The Lifebook might include information about the following:

Birth parents, siblings, and extended family members.

Birth and the early years of life

Reasons the child was separated from parents

Extended family and the role they played in the child's life

Each foster family with whom the child has lived

The child's life and development with each foster family

Why the child left any placement situation

The child's social worker(s)

The birth parents' lives since the child has been living away from them

Your family

The child's life now

What is going to happen to the child

List of potential sources of information for the Lifebook

Birth parents

Siblings

Extended birth family

Previous foster families

Former caseworkers

Current caseworker

Current and former medical care providers

Teacher and school records

List of some items you may want to obtain

Child's baby pictures

Pictures of birth family

Birth certificate

Baby book

Pictures of other foster families and their homes

Pictures of caseworkers

Part 2—Preparing To Talk with the Child

Possible sensitive issues for a child

Parent's alcoholism and/or substance abuse

Parent's inability to protect and care for child

Parent's unavailability or noninvolvement

Family members unwilling or unable to care for child

A foster family's decision not to continue caring for a child, or not to adopt a child

Physical abuse

Sexual abuse

Soiling and/or bed-wetting

Adoption by another family as a plan for the child

A child's difficulty in school

A child's need for medication or special medical treatment

A child's involvement in therapy/counseling/treatment

Exercise in Planning a Lifebook

This activity will help you plan a Lifebook for a child in your care. In the space below, list topics and events in the child's life that should be included. Write down ideas about sources of information and items you want to include in the Lifebook to accompany the narrative.

Topics	Source of Information	Items to Include
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

List one topic involving the child and an adult that is difficult to discuss. Think through the process of explaining it to the child.

Topic:_____

What questions do you think the child might have about this topic?

_____

Left on his or her own, how might the child explain why this happened?

_____

How can it be explained in terms of the parents' or other caregivers' abilities, lack of abilities, or decisions?

_____

What do you think the adult might have been feeling?

_____

What do you think the child might have been feeling?

_____

Write a simple narrative that might go into a Lifebook about this topic.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Developing Lifebooks with Children

The Lifebook is a valuable tool which we can use to support a positive sense of identity and self-esteem, and to help maintain connections for the children in our care.

The Lifebook experience involves a *process and a product*. The *process* of making a Lifebook involves talking with children about their memories and experiences, in a way that helps them answer difficult questions. The Lifebook *product* is the written story that comes from these conversations. It is put together with photographs, documents, and drawings that support the child's sense of identity, self-esteem, and connections.

Developing a Lifebook requires planning and preparation.

Developing a Lifebook is an ongoing process that takes a commitment of time and consistency.

Each child in our care has experienced difficult circumstances. We need to talk with children about sensitive subjects in a way that acknowledges feelings, and helps a child develop healthier ways of understanding what has happened.

It is important to identify positives in children's lives, and to help them see the way some of their life experiences are like other children's.

The Lifebook's contents must fit the child's abilities.