CHILD/YOUTH ASSESSMENT AND PREPARATION

♦ Policies and Processes in Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation

♦ Transitioning from Foster Care to Adoption

♦ Older Child Adoption

♦ Adoption of Sibling Groups

Module: Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation

Trainer's Preparation

Module Contents and Training Process

This module includes information on:

- Self-assessment, Trends and Issues, Guiding Principles

- Caseworker Roles, Policies, Processes, and Procedures

- Older Child/Youth Adoption (designed to be a stand alone segment)

- Transitioning Children/Youth from Foster Care to Adoption

- Adoption of Sibling Groups

Preparing to Train

Before beginning this module, trainers should:

- Review and become totally comfortable with the content and delivery methods required for this module.

- Preview all DVD's and become totally comfortable with set up and debriefing.

- Gather and review all State-specific policies, procedures, and protocols.

- Modify handouts to include State-specific policies and procedures.

- Determine how the module will be delivered. This module can be trained in 16 hours. However, this time can be shortened or lengthened based on participants' knowledge and needs by shortening or lengthening the activities.

Required materials/equipment and room setup for this module:

- The basic materials needed for the training session irrespective of the modules to be trained are:

  - Trainer's Guide
  - Participant's Handouts
  - Pre-est and post test
  - Evaluation Forms
  - Wall Screen/laptop and LCD projector
  - PowerPoint presentation
  - Easel and easel paper
  - DVD/TV monitor
  - Pens/pencils, markers, erasers
  - Extension cords
  - Name tents
  - Post-it pads/index cards
  - Parking Lot poster/easel paper labeled "Parking Lot"
  - Masking tape
  - Sign-in Sheets

- An ideal size for a session is 20–25 participants. Round tables for five participants per table help to set the informal, interactive tone for the training. Additionally, since much of the curriculum involves Team Activities, this seating arrangement reduces the time required for participants to get into teams and be visible to one another as they complete activities. It is helpful for the trainers to move around the room while speaking and not stand behind a podium or table.

General Training Tips

Before the training day

- Talk with co-trainers about how to train as a team. Set ground rules for working together, and delineate roles.

- Arrange for the training room and room setup.

- Arrange for the needed equipment and training supplies.

- Ensure that there are copies of the participant handouts for each participant.

Read and review the Trainer's Guide

- The **Introduction: Objectives, Competencies, and Content** for each module and provide specific preparation instructions for the module.

Review the agenda for each training session

- Trainers should use the white space in the **Trainer's Guide** for summary bullets that will keep them on track and ensure that the content is covered in the time allotted.

- Trainers may find it helpful to underscore or highlight concepts and key points to emphasize, adding personal comments and anecdotes as appropriate.

- Watch the DVD's.

Practice with the video equipment to be used

- **Prior to each session, test the equipment.** Check the monitor or laptop/LCD to be sure you know how to connect and operate the equipment. Ensure that electrical outlets and power cords are packaged along with 2 extension cords. Play portions of the actual DVD that will be used, to make sure it is good working order. If possible, walk around the training room to view and hear the video from several of the positions that the participants will occupy. Adjust the picture (color, contrast, brightness, etc.) and volume accordingly.

- After checking the DVD, be sure to reset it to the beginning or to cue it to the appropriate place.

- Immediately prior to the session, play the beginning of the DVD again to double check that it is the correct one. Be sure to reset.

- If you are using a PowerPoint Presentation, make sure you know how to work the laptop and LCD and that you have an appropriate screen or projection surface in the training room. Test to ensure that everything is in working order before the training starts.

During the training

- Validate participants responses by rephrasing, reinforcing or repeating later in training, by smiling, making eye contact, nodding, gesturing in a nonjudgmental way. **Never say, "Yes but . . . or"**

- Take some risks in sharing information about your relevant personal experiences and feelings. Model that it is all right to do this. Make the group more comfortable and willing to take risks.

- Keep the training experiences lively. Do not read from the curriculum!

- Make clear transitions between segments of each session by bringing each segment to closure and introducing new segments by tying in concepts and ideas from previous materials. Use participants comments as transitions whenever possible.

- Be conscious of time. **Each subject need not be exhausted before you move on.** Move the group along without making participants feel rushed.

- Start and end each session on time. **Never keep participants for more than the time allotted for each module.**

After the training

- Send the pre-tests and post tests to Public Research and Evaluation Services (PRES).

- Review participant evaluations, note where you succeeded and where you did not do so well. Modify your future preparations and presentations based on this feed-back.

- Debrief with your co-trainer.

- Provide information to National Resource Center for Adoption on areas/issues that need further research or refinement.

Agenda

Review of Objectives, Competencies and Content & View Intro Video, "The Day Everything Changes"

Segment I: Policies and Processes in Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation

Definitions

The Framework, Processes and Tools for Quality Assessments and Preparation

Child Assessment and Preparation: A Framework and Process for High Quality Assessment

Preparation Process

Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation: Tools and Techniques

DVD: *Getting to Know You*

Large Group Discussion: Tools and Techniques

Segment II: Transitioning from Foster Care to Adoption

Review of Content

Large Group Discussion: Focusing on the Perceptions of Children/Youth

Team Activity: Harris Family Profile

Ways to Help Build Attachments during Transition from Foster Care to Adoption

Large Group Discussion: Helping Children/Youth Understand their History

Working Towards Redefining Relationships

Team Activity: Helping Children/Youth Transition from Foster Care to Adoption

Segment III: Older Child Adoptions

Review of Content

Definition of Older Child/Youth

Individual Activity: Personal and Professional Values

Large Group Discussion: Personal and Professional Values

DVD: *Isaiah's Story: Part 1*

Large Group Discussion: Isaiah - Part 1

Five Major Issues a Youth Needs to Address in the Process of Moving Successfully into a Family

What Does It Really Mean when an Youth says, "No, I Don't want to be Adopted"

What You Can Do Instead of Accepting "No"

DVD: *Isaiah - Part 2*

Addressing Issues Involved in Adoption of Older Children/Youth

Identifying Barriers: Child Welfare Practitioner Issues

Dynamics of Older Children/Youth Transitioning to Adoptive Placements

Attachment and Relationships

Working Strategies and Solutions

Segment IV: Adoption of Sibling Groups (approximately 3 hours)

Review of Content

Large Group Discussion: Harris Family Case Profile

Large Group Discussion: Sibling Relationships

Placement of Siblings: State Policies and Procedures

Team Activity: Advantages of Placing Siblings Together, Disadvantages of Placing Siblings Together

Promising Practices in Sibling Placement

Segment IV: Recording and Assessing Information in the Child Study and Assessment

Large Group Discussion

Wrap-up and Post Test

Child Assessment and Preparation

Objectives:
- *Examine the current needs of the adoption field and the participants within it.*
- *Build knowledge and skills in conducting an adoption process based on empowering children/youth and prospective adoptive parents.*
- *Build knowledge and skills in writing a child/youth assessment and preparation.*
- *Identify ways in which adoption impacts growth and development.*
- *Understand the unique needs of adopted children/youth.*
- *Heighten participant awareness of the need for preparation of children/youth who are being adopted by their current foster parents or relatives.*
- *Help clarify, from the child/youth's perspective, the differences between being a child/youth in foster care and being a child/youth who has been adopted.*
- *Practice reframing "problem" behaviors as "survival" behaviors.*

Competencies: Participants will be able to:
- *Complete a comprehensive child/youth assessment.*
- *Utilize an assessment and preparation process to make placement decisions, develop service plans, and prepare a child/youth for any change in placement or relationship with the current foster family or relatives.*
- *Utilize a variety of tools and techniques to engage, assess and prepare children/youth for better placement.*
- *Collaborate with others more effectively in the assessment and preparation process.*
- *Assist a child/youth in understanding the role the practitioner plays in the assessment and preparation process.*
- *Assist children/youth to gain a better understanding of what has happened and what will be happening, and engage children/youth in the planning for their present and future life experiences.*
- *Prepare children/youth to transition from being in foster care to being adopted in the same household.*
- *Engage the children/youth actively in preparing to be adopted by their current foster parents or other parents.*

Content Outline

This module contains the following segments:

- Policies and Processes in Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation
- Transitioning Children/Youth from Foster Care to Adoption
- Older Child Adoption
- Adoption of Sibling Groups
- Recording and Assessing Information in the Child Profile and Assessment.

Welcome and Overview

Trainer's Points

☐ Welcome to the Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation training. My name is . . . *(introduce self and give some background information).*

☐ Before we begin, let's take care of a few housekeeping details. The rest rooms are located . . ..

☐ Please turn off all cell phones or put them on vibrate. Take emergency calls outside the training room so as not to disrupt others.

☐ Your questions will be answered when asked or deferred to a later point in the training. If deferred, they will be written and posted in the Parking Lot to ensure that they are answered. If, during the course of the training, you have a question that you do not choose to ask aloud, feel free to write it on a post-it note and place it in the Parking Lot. If the trainer or someone in the group cannot respond to a question, the trainer will try to obtain an answer by the end of the training day or will forward the answer to all attendees after the training.

☐ Each of you has a packet of Participant's Handouts. These Handouts contain information to be discussed today as well as additional information for your review after the training.

☐ This training is designed to engage you in the training process through the use of team activities, large group discussions and individual exercises.

Pre-Test

Trainer's Points

☐ The agency requires a pre- and post test.

☐ You will have 10 minutes to complete the test. We will collect them at your table.

☐ Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

☐ Pre-tests and post tests to be sent to PRES who will compile and return the results to you and the designated State official.

Participant Introductions
(Select one of the options.)

Trainer's Points

☐ Now let's take time to get to know one another. (*Select one of the options.)*

Option 1: Walkabout

✓ Write the following questions on easel paper:

- What strengths do you bring to this training?
- What do you want to learn in this training?
- What is the greatest challenge in placing children from the child welfare system with adoptive families?

✓ As participants arrive, ask each to walk about and answer the questions.

✓ After answering the questions, participants find a space and complete the nameplate.

✓ When you get to this section, ask participants to share their names and places of employment.

✓ Review the answers to the Walkabout. Summarize and comment on the similarities and differences in the answers, how the strengths of the participants support the training and if the challenges will be addressed.

Option 2: Group Introductions

☐ Please share with us your responses to these four questions:

- Who are you?
- Where do you work?
- What tasks do you perform?
- What are your expectations for the training?

☐ I will write the expectations for the training on easel paper and post them. If there are expectations outside the scope of what we can accomplish today, I will tell you. We will check back during the course of the day to determine if we are meeting your expectations.

Option 3: Personal Introductions

☐ Find someone you don't know.

☐ You have 1 minute to identify two things not apparent that you have in common besides your job or workplace.

☐ Identify an adoption success you had in the last year.

✓ Ask volunteers to share some commonalities and successes.

✓ Summarize responses.

Segment I: Policies and Processes in Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation

Trainer's Points

☐ Today's training focuses on Child Assessment and Preparation. We will review State-specific policies, procedures and protocols for completing a child assessment and preparation. We will discuss issues of transitioning children/youth from foster care, issues specific to adoption assessment and preparation of older children and youth, and issues of sibling placements.

☐ The objectives and competencies for this training are:

Objectives
- Examine the current needs of the adoption field and the participants within it.
- Build knowledge and skills in conducting an adoption process based on empowering children/youth and prospective adoptive parents.
- Build knowledge and skills in writing a child/youth assessment and preparation.
- Identify ways in which adoption impacts growth and development.
- Understand the unique needs of adopted children/youth.
- Heighten participant awareness of the need for preparation of children/youth who are being adopted by their current foster parents or relatives.
- Help clarify, from the child/youth's perspective, the differences between being a child/youth in foster care and being a child/youth who has been adopted.
- Practice reframing "problem" behaviors as "survival" behaviors.

Competencies
- Complete a comprehensive child/youth assessment.
- Utilize an assessment and preparation process to make placement decisions, develop service plans, and prepare a child/youth for any change in placement or relationship with the current foster family or relatives.
- Utilize a variety of tools and techniques to engage, assess and prepare children/youth for better placement.
- Collaborate with others more effectively in the assessment and preparation process.

- Assist a child/youth in understanding the role the practitioner plays in the assessment and preparation process.
- Assist children/youth to gain a better understanding of what has happened and what will be happening, and engage children/youth in the planning for their present and future life experiences.
- Prepare children/youth to transition from being in foster care to being adopted in the same household.
- Engage the children/youth actively in preparing to be adopted by their current foster parents or other parents.

☐ Before we begin the discussion of child/youth assessment, let's make sure we all agree on the definitions of some familiar terms because we will be using them frequently in this and future segments.

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 1,** *Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation Definitions.*

Handout

Handout 1

Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation Definitions

- *Child/Youth Assessment* is the process of developing the document that reports information which is gathered and evaluated or assessed to identify or to understand the child/youth's past and current experiences, how they relate to current behavior, development and functioning, and make projections for the child/youth's future needs. It includes factual information and is child-focused. It has the child's needs for safety, permanency and well-being as primary concerns to facilitate timely decision making, planning, and placement with a permanent family. It is the foundation for developing service plans.

- *Child/Youth Preparation* is the process of information sharing with the child/youth to help him/her to understand past experiences and to engage in planning for the future, including placement with a permanent family.

  The process helps the child/youth understand, adjust and relate to adoptive placement. At the same time, it helps the practitioner to develop an adequate service plan and to identify appropriate resources to get the child/youth ready for adoptive placement. The best interest of the child/youth guides all decisions and plans.

- *Collaboration* is the structured cooperation of practitioner, family, other service providers, caregivers, and other relevant persons. Together, they work on shared goals to ensure that the child/youth's best interests are the primary consideration during the assessment, decision making, planning, preparation, and placement process. Collaboration is a partnership that blends services and resources to meet the child/youth's needs in the best way possible.

- *Concurrent Planning* is a process of establishing and acting on multiple, acceptable permanency plans at the same time. Concurrent planning rather than sequential planning efforts enable children/youth to move more quickly to the security of a safe and stable permanent family. (National Child Welfare Center for Organizational Improvement, 2001)

- *Reasonable Efforts to reunify* are efforts made by practitioners to and to preserve reunite children with the   families from which they were removed. Efforts should take place both prior to the placement of a child/youth to prevent or to eliminate the need for removal and, after placement, to return the child/youth safely home to the family. In making such efforts, the child/youth's safety and well-being are the paramount concerns. The Adoption and Safe Family Act of 1997 allows moving children/youth towards adoption or other permanent homes, if reasonable efforts to reunify are inconsistent with the child/youth's safety.

Adapted from *Child Assessment and Preparation* curriculum, Spaulding for Children, 1998.

Trainer's Points

☐ In this segment, we will discuss the common elements of completing a child study/assessment. In subsequent sections, we will discuss unique elements and issues of assessment and preparation for adoption of older children and youth and sibling groups.

☐ For the majority of children/youth unable to return home, adoption is the preferred permanency plan because it offers a lifetime commitment plus the sense of belonging and stability that a child/youth needs to develop into a healthy adult.

☐ However, for some children/youth, adoption is exceptionally challenging due to past relationships and experiences and the impact those have on current behavior. Some children/youth may resist forming new attachments because of unresolved losses or interruptions in parenting that make it difficult for them to trust adults.

☐ Other children/youth present significant behavioral issues that cannot be managed safely in a family setting without intensive, therapeutic intervention.

☐ It is therefore crucial to a child/youth's well being that a thorough assessment specific to adoption be completed. This assessment not only will assist in determining if adoption is currently an appropriate permanency option but also will provide valuable insight regarding the child/youth's future needs and anticipated challenges.

The Framework, Processes and Tools for High Quality Assessments and Preparation

Trainer's Points

☐ Now, we will focus on the information, documents, tools, and techniques used for a child/youth assessment.

☐ The (name of *State-specific child assessment format*) is the document that contains all the information on the child/youth necessary to make an adequate assessment as well as the assessment itself.

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 2,** *Child/Youth Assessment Format (State's specific format and policies for child assessment and placement.)*

☐ During this training, we will use this child assessment format to develop the assessments of Isaiah, Michael, and Elizabeth Harris, a fictitious sibling group that we will use as a case example.

☐ Let's now review the basic content of the child assessment document, and afterward, we will look at a DVD that provides the background for how the Harris children entered the child welfare system.

Trainer's Points

Data Needed

Handout

Handout 2

Child/Youth Assessment Format

(State's own specific format and policies for child assessment and placement)

Trainer's Points

☐ Assess the benefits and challenges presented in this document, based on your experiences.

- **What would you add or delete?**

- **Why?**

☐ Based on my assessment of this document and those used in several other States, I suggest including the following information *(taken out of State's own specific format for child/youth assessment).* This information will strengthen your ability to complete a child assessment.

Data Needed

☐ **Participant's Handout 3,** *Checklist: The Framework and Process for a High Quality Assessment,* and the ***Child/Youth Assessment Format*** are references to support completion of your State's child/youth assessment.

Handout

Handout 3

Checklist: The Framework and Process
for a High Quality Assessment

High Quality Assessment:

- Gather information that is accurate, complete and up to date.
- Identify the health- and safety- needs of the child/youth.
- Provide and/or clarify information about a child/youth's history and identity.
- Use an ecological perspective, identifying the impact of environmental factors on the child/youth.
- Reflect caseworker, family and child/youth's perceptions of the situation, including its strengths, problems and growth areas.
- Identify and use appropriate assessment tools to minimize gaps in information and to prevent misinformation.
- Individualize and empower the child/youth in the permanency planning process.
- Support concurrent planning to minimize trauma to the child/youth and the length of time that the child/youth is in the child welfare system.
- Provide the foundation for decision making and provision of services that best meet the needs of the child/youth.

The Assessment Process:

- Review case records.
- Review reports (medical, educational, social, developmental) and progress notes.
- Meet with previous and current resource families.
- Meet with other professionals who are and have been involved with the child/youth.
- Meet with other individuals who have significant relationships with the child/youth.
- Meet and observe the child/youth.
- Obtain information from the child/youth's birth family and kin.
- Identify and fill gaps in information.

Adapted from Child Assessment and Preparation curriculum, Spaulding for Children, 1998.

Child/Youth Assessment Format

Identifying Information
- Name
- Race
- Birthplace
- Current placement
- Physical description of child/youth
- Age (identify developmental issues that may have affected or are affecting this child/youth)

Legal Status
- State the reason the child/youth was removed from the birth family.
- Describe efforts to be made or that have been made to reunite the child/youth with birth family.
- Identify why efforts are not being made or were not made to reunify the child/youth with the birth family. (per ASFA)
- Describe, if relevant, events leading to termination of parental rights/permanent wardship.

Physical Description
- Describe the child/youth's physical appearance, such as height and weight, hair color, eye color, etc.
- Indicate any outstanding or unusual features or birthmarks.
- Describe the child/youth's level of physical functioning and activity.

Culture
- What is the child/youth's religion?
- What is the child/youth's cultural background?
- With what ethnic/cultural group does the child/youth identify?
- What experiences has the child/youth had with this ethnic/cultural group?
- Which language(s) does the child/youth speak or understand?
- Which cultural traditions, values and beliefs are important to the child/youth?

Daily Routine
- Describe the child/youth's daily routine.
- List the child/youth's favorite books, toys and games, foods, possessions, hobbies, interests, and special activities.
- Identify any special pet the child/youth has or had.
- Describe the child/youth's level of care of possessions.
- List suggestions that the child/youth's current caregiver has for future caregivers regarding what works best for this child/youth in terms of a daily routine.

Placement History (Child/Youth's Placement History Summary)
- List the child/youth's out-of-home placements (where, when and the age of the child/youth at the time of placement), including those occurring prior to entry into care (with relatives, hospitalizations, etc.).
- Identify significant people and events in the child/youth's life, explaining each relationship and what happened.
- Explain the child/youth's perception of these events and relationships; for example, describe messages to the child/youth.

Family History (Genogram)

Birth Family
- Family history information based on interviews with family members, current and prior caregivers, information from records, the initial service plan for the child/youth/family, etc.
- Factual, historical information about family members, including birth dates, physical descriptions, health information, relationship with the child/youth.
- Parents' and siblings' birth dates, ethnicity and last known location.
- Identify extended family members with whom the child/youth has had or has expressed an interest in having ongoing contact.
- Identify any extended family members who may be available for permanency planning or permanency supports.

Siblings
- Indicate the current status of all siblings. Are they with parents, relatives, in placement, previously adopted, etc.?
- Indicate whether the siblings are in care; placed in same family as this child/youth; or, if not placed with this child/youth, why the child/youth and sibling(s) were not placed together and should not be placed together in adoption.
- What are the permanency plans for the other children?
- What is or will be the plan for contact between siblings?
- What is the expectation or plan for parental and sibling visitation if the permanent plan for this child/youth is not to return home or to be placed with siblings?
- If the child/youth has sibling-like relationships with children/youth who are not related by birth, describe each relationship and the plans for future contact.

Perception of Birth Family
- Define the child/youth's own understanding of why he/she was removed from the home and the permanent plan made for the child/youth.
- Indicate whether the child/youth currently has contact with the birth family.
- List the child/youth's stated feelings about the birth family.
- List the caseworker's impressions of the child/youth's true feelings about the birth family.
- What issues need to be addressed prior to and after permanent placement, such as close, open or semi-open adoption?
- What can the adoptive parent(s) or other permanent family expect in terms of the child/youth's attachment to the birth family?
- If not returned to parent(s), what interest does the child/youth's have in locating birth parents, either now or in the future?

(continued on next page)

- If the child/youth has a significant relationship with another family (relative, foster parent, etc.), describe the child/youth's perception of this relationship, possibility of permanency in this relationship, and plans for contact once the permanent plan is implemented if not with this relationship.

Relationships
Adult
- Describe the child/youth's interaction with birth parents during visits, or the nature of past visits with birth parents if there is no contact with them at this time.
- Who are the significant adults in this child/youth's life?
- Are any of the adults someone whom the child/youth considers as a "psychological parent"?
- How does the child/youth relate to the significant adults in his/her life and to strangers?
- How does the child/youth interact with the caseworker?
- Does the child/youth seem to express any significant differences in relating to males or females?
- How does the child/youth relate to authority figures, such as teachers, counselors, therapists, caseworker, etc.?

Others Living in Child/Youth's Home
- Indicate the child/youth's interaction pattern with other persons living in the home/residential setting.
- Are there persons to whom the child/youth feels closer to than others?
- Does the child/youth react to other children/youth being placed or leaving the foster home/residential setting? If so, how?

Peers
- What is the child/youth's level of interaction with peers?
- Describe any differences between the child/youth's interaction with school and neighborhood peers.
- Does the child/youth relate better to children/youth who are younger, older, or the same age?
- Is there a significant difference in relating to males or females?
- Does the child/youth relate better in large groups, small groups, or one on one?
- Does the child/youth have one or two special friends?
- Does the child/youth make friends easily, or is he/she a loner?

Community
- Is the child/youth involved in community or social activities such as, YWCA/YMCA, Girl/Boy Scouts, sports, dance, etc.?
- Does the child/youth identify with a specific community?
- Are there any other special relationships that the child/youth has in the community (church, teachers, etc.)?

Medical History
- Indicate all significant medical information on the child/youth including birth history and a record of the child/youth's immunizations. (*Ensure that medical records are in the child/youth's file.)*

- When was the child/youth's most recent physical examination?
- Are there any medical issues that require follow-up?
- Does the child/youth have any physical conditions requiring ongoing attention?
- Indicate any known family illnesses or history of disease, such as heart problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, sickle cell anemia, etc.
- Describe the child/youth's dental health.
- Are there any dental needs that require follow-up, such as braces, filling of cavities, or treatment of gum disease?
- What is the child/youth's level of eyesight, hearing, etc.
- Is there a need for corrective lenses or a hearing aid?
- List all injuries with dates, treatment, and long-term impact.

Developmental History
- Indicate developmental milestones. Were they age appropriate?
- Indicate any developmental delays or reactions to stress.

Sexual Development
- Indicate age appropriateness of the child/youth's sexual development.
- Is there a known history of sexual abuse?
- Is there a suspicion of sexual abuse?
- Is there a history of sexual acting out? *(be specific)* If so, has treatment been provided?
- Is there a current pattern of sexual acting out? If so, has treatment been provided?
- What is the child/youth's level of understanding of sexual behavior?
- What have been the child/youth's sexual experiences? Are they age appropriate?
- Are there any sexual identity issues with this child/youth?

Academic Functioning
Educational History
- What is the child/youth's educational history? *(Be as specific as possible about where and when the child/youth has attended school, starting with preschool. List reasons for changes in schools.)*
- What was the child/youth's level of scholastic achievement in each grade?
- Has special education ever been recommended? If so, has it been provided?
- What is the reason for special education?

Current School Placement
- Indicate the name of the child/youth's school, grade and teacher.
- Is there a school social worker involved with the child/youth?
- What are the child/youth's strengths and weaknesses in academic functioning?
- What are the child's academic interests?
- What are the child/youth's most recent report card grades?
- Would the child/youth benefit from academic tutoring?
- If the child/youth has been placed in special education, when was this determination made?
- What was the date of the child/youth's most recent Individualized Educational Planning Consultation (IEPC) Testing?

- What special education services are needed?
- What special education services are provided?
- What is the child/youth's level of accomplishment?

<u>Testing</u>
- Indicate results of all testing done with this child/youth. (*Ensure that copies of test reports are included in the child/youth's record.)*
- Who was the examiner? When and where was the testing completed? What were the findings?
- Is there a need for further testing of the child/youth?

<u>Educational Plan</u>
- What are this child/youth's educational goals or projection for the future?
- What do the child/youth's current family and eventual, permanent family need to do to assist the child/youth in meeting educational goals or projections?
- Also, note whether or not the child has developed a strong and positive relationship in the academic environment.

Emotional Functioning
- Give a brief history of the emotional development of the child/youth.
- How are the child/youth's emotional history and experiences impacting current behavior?
- What might the child/youth's permanent family expect in the future as a result of early experiences in the birth family, such as violence, neglect and the number and types of moves.
- What is the child/youth's self-image?
- What is the child/youth's level of self-esteem?
- Describe times or situations in which the child/youth regresses, is afraid, experiences loneliness, withdraws, is aggressive, or acts out.
- Describe what the child/youth needs from a parent (what type and amount of affection, attention, discipline, need for closeness or distance, bedtime preparation, support during night fears).
- What are the child/youth's relationships with adults and peers?
- Indicate the child/youth's existing attachments.
- With whom or what has the child/youth had a prior emotional attachment?
- Is there evidence that the child/youth has difficulty with attachment?
- Which defenses does the child/youth employ to cope with strong feelings of anger, rejection, abandonment, separation/attachment, etc.?
- Does the child/youth play appropriately with children/youth of the same age?
- Does the child/youth act out behaviorally in the foster home/residential setting? What is the acting out behavior?
- Is there a history of lying, stealing, fire setting or any destructive behaviors with the child/youth? If so, what has been done to address these behaviors?
- What is the child/youth's sense of right and wrong?
- What is the child/youth's level of cooperation and attention span?
- What controls need to be in place for this child/youth?
- Has the child/youth been in therapy? If so, when and where?

- If the child/youth is or has been in therapy, who is the therapist; and what are the findings and recommendations? *(Note any testing, medication, psychiatric history.)*
- How has the child/youth dealt with separation from these people/places/things?
- What does the child/youth need in order to separate from the current caregiver, if possible?
- What is the child/youth's level of emotional functioning?

Attitude Toward and Readiness for Placement
- What are the child/youth's stated feelings about returning home or another permanent placement?
- Has the child/youth identified any preferences and concerns about placement? If so, what are these?
- Has the child/youth identified situations and placements that would make her/him most comfortable? If so, what are these?
- What is the child/youth understanding of permanency options: return home, relative or foster care, become adopted and how each of these placement options does or does not provide permanency for him/her.
- What is the child/youth's ability to attach to new parents and at what level can the child/youth attach?
- Which services are needed to prepare the child/youth for placement with a permanent family?

Adapted from Child Assessment and Preparation curriculum, Spaulding for Children, 1998.

Transition

♦ Are there any questions or comments about anything we have discussed in this segment so far?

♦ Next, we are going to look at a video that provides the background for how the Harris children entered the child welfare system.

Intro DVD

DVD Description
"The Day Everything Changes" (7:00 min.)

☐ In this brief vignette, we witness the events that led up to 15-year-old Isaiah and 9-year-old Michael Harris entering foster care. When Michael accidentally starts a kitchen fire while cooking, police authorities are unable to locate the boys' mother. After a visit to the hospital to treat Michael's burns, the boys are placed in two separate foster homes, despite their protests. The vignette introduces the boys' paternal grandmother, Ernestine Harris, their younger sister, Elizabeth Harris, and the Harris family's closest friends, "Auntie" Lorita Webster and her son Jesse.

☐ As you watch this intro DVD, jot down any information that you feel would be helpful to include in starting their child assessment.

✓ Show the DVD.

Large Group Discussion

✓ Ask participants their reactions to the DVD.

✓ Ask participants what information they felt would be important to include in starting their child assessment and write participants comments on easel paper. Summarize them and add additional issues if they have not been identified.

✓ Inform participants that throughout the training they will get the opportunity to see more of Isaiah and hear his opinion on what is happening as well as hear from Michael and Elizabeth as they are engaged in various child assessment and preparation activities.

**Transition**

Now let's discuss the preparation process.

The Preparation Process

Trainer's Points

☐ Let's now examine some specific issues in child/youth preparation; but, as we do, be mindful that neither assessment nor preparation should be done in isolation. Both assessment and preparation are done simultaneously.

☐ Children/youth develop differently. Remember this as you make assessments of all children and youth. Child development is complex. **Participant's Handout 4,** *Developmental Milestones of Children,* is an adaptation of developmental milestones for children and adolescents published by the American Academy of Pediatrics and Georgetown University. These milestones can be used to guide your evaluations and assessments. We will not discuss this today; but you can review on your own.

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 5,** *Preparing Children/Youth for Permanency: 3-5-7 Model.*

Team Activity

☐ Break into teams.

☐ After you are in your team, read Participant's Handout 5.

☐ Discuss how this model promotes comprehensive assessment and preparation.

Trainer's Points

Handout
Handout 4

Handout
Handout 5

Team Activity
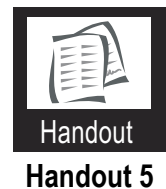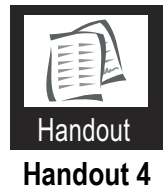
Developmental Milestones for Children

Growth and development are influenced by many factors including social, and cultural. Each child is an individual who will develop at his or her own pace. The milestones presented here are averages.

Age	Physical	Mental	Social	Language
Birth to 3 months	• Raises head slightly • Holds head up for a few seconds when supported • Lifts head and chest while lying on stomach • Uses sucking, grasping, and rooting reflexes	• Sees clearly within 13 inches • Focuses on and follows objects, including human faces • Sees all colors and distinguishes hue and brightness • Distinguishes sweet, sour, bitter, and salty tastes • Responds with facial expressions to strong stimuli (like odors) • Prefers high contrast items and geometric shapes • Begins to anticipate events (i.e., sucking at the sight of a nipple)	• Sucks own fingers • Observes own hands • Looks at the place on their body that is being touched • Can be comforted by a familiar adult • Responds positively to touch • Interacts best when in an alert state or in an inactive and attentive state • Benefits more from short, frequent interaction, more than long, infrequent ones • Smiles and shows pleasure in response to social stimulation	• Responds to speech by looking at the speaker • Reacts to changes in the speaker's tone, pitch, volume, and intonation • Responds differently to the voice of a parent than to other voices • Responds differently to their home language and another language • Communicates with bodily movements, by crying, babbling, and laughing • Attempts to imitate sounds
3 to 6 months	• Rolls over • Pushes body forward and pulls body up by grabbing the edge of the crib • Reaches for and touches objects • Reaches, grasps, and puts objects in mouth • Makes discoveries with objects (i.e., a rattle makes noise when moved)	• Recognizes faces • Differentiates between different people based on the way they sound, feel, or look • Reacts to and imitates the facial expressions of others • Responds to familiar sounds	• Can play peek-a-boo • Pays attention to own name • Smiles spontaneously • Laughs out loud	• Exchanges sounds, facial expressions, or gestures with a parent or caregiver • Listens to conversations • Repeats some vowel and some consonant sounds
6 to 9 months	• Crawls • Grasps and pulls things toward self • Transfers objects between hands	• Stares longer at "impossible" events (like ordinary objects suspended in midair)	• Expresses several clearly differentiated emotions • Distinguishes friends from strangers	• Begins repetitive babbling • Associates gestures with simple words and two-word phrases, like "hi" and "bye"

Age	Physical	Mental	Social	Language
6 to 9 months (cont.)		• Distinguishes among pictures that show different numbers or items • Uses the relative size of objects to show how close or how far away they are	• Responds actively to language and gestures • Shows displeasure at the loss of a toy	• Uses vocal and non-vocal communication to express interest and to influence others
9 to 12 months	• Sits without support • Stands unaided • Walks with aid • Rolls a ball • Throws objects • Picks things up with a thumb and one finger	• Understands that an object still exists even when it's not in view • Responds to simple directions and questions with gestures, sounds, and perhaps words • Imitates actions and gestures • Experiments with how an objects fits into a container • Enjoys looking at picture books	• Find themselves with finger foods • Holds a cup with both hands and drinks with assistance • Holds out arms and legs while getting dressed • Mimics simple actions • Shows anxiety when separated from primary caretaker	• Understands the names of familiar people and objects • Shows understanding with responsive body language and facial expressions • Says a few words • Responds to a firm "no" by stopping what they are doing
1 to 2 years	• Can walk alone • Can walk backwards • Picks up toys from a standing position • Pushes and pulls objects • Seats self in a child's chair • Can walk up and down stairs with assistance	• Imitates adult's language and actions • Understands words and commands and responds appropriately • Begins to match similar objects • Recognizes and identifies familiar objects in storybooks with adult assistance • Distinguishes between "you" and "me"	• Recognizes self in pictures or the mirror and smiles or make faces at self • Shows intense feelings for parents and shows affection for other familiar people • Plays alone and initiates their own play • Expresses negative feelings • Shows pride and pleasure at new accomplishments • Imitates adult's behaviors in play • Shows a strong sense of assertiveness of self through assertiveness, directing others	• Understands many words, as well as simple phrases and directions ("Drink your juice") • Follows a series of two simple but related directions • Responds correctly when asked "where?" • Says a few words clearly, and a few dozen additional words so that family members can understand • Says successive single words to describe an event • From about 18 months, begins learning about nine words a day

(continued on next page)

Age	Physical	Mental	Social	Language
1 to 2 Years (cont.)			• Begins to be helpful, such as by helping to put things away	• Uses "my" or "mine" to indicate possession; begins to use "me," "I," and "you"
2 to 3 years	• Can run forward • Jumps in place with both feet together • Stands on one foot, with aid • Walks on tiptoes • Kicks ball forward • Most children at this age are able to manipulate small objects with increased control: • Strings large beads. Turns pages one by one • Holds crayon with thumb and fingers instead of fist • Draws a circle	• Responds to simple directions • Chooses picture books, name pictured objects, and can identify several objects within one picture • Stacks rings on peg in order and size • Identifies themselves in mirror, saying "baby" or their own name • Observes and imitates more complex adult actions	• Shows awareness of gender identity • Indicates toilet needs • Helps to dress and undress themselves • Is assertive about preferences and says "no" to adult requests • Begins self-evaluation and develops notions of themselves as good, bad, attractive, etc. • Shows awareness of their own feelings and those of others, and talks about feelings • Experiences rapid mood shifts and shows increased fearfulness (fear of the dark, etc.) • Displays aggressive feelings and behaviors • Defends their possessions • Begins to play house • Participates in group activities, such as singing clapping or dancing • Knows gender identity	• Joins familiar words into phrases • Begins to use modifiers (adverbs and adjectives) • Points to common objects when they are named • Names objects based on their descriptions • Responds to "what?" and "where?" questions • Enjoys listening to stories and asking for favorite stories • Recounts events that happened that day
3 to 4 years	• Movement and balance improve. Most children can: • Run around obstacles • Walk on a line • Balance on one foot • Push, pull, and steer toys	• As children have more experiences in the world, their analytic abilities grow. Now most children can: • Understand concepts like grouping and matching, i.e., matching colors •	• As their dexterity and self-help skills improve, 3- year-olds become more independent. Most can: • Follow a series of simple directions	• Language usage becomes more complex. Most 3-year-olds can: • Make themselves understood to strangers, despite some sound errors

Age	Physical	Mental	Social	Language

3 to 4 years (cont.)	• Ride a tricycle
	• Use a slide without help
	• Throw and catch ball
		• Organizes materials on their own such as stacking blocks or rings in order and size
		• Draws, names, and briefly explains somewhat recognizable pictures that are meaningful to them
		• Actively seeks information through why and how questions
		• Tells their full name and age
		• Attends to activities for a longer periods of time
		• Learns both by observing and listening to adults' explanations
			• Complete simple tasks with food without assistance, such as spreading soft butter with a dull knife and pouring from a small pitcher
			• Wash hands unassisted and blow nose when reminded
			• They become more interested in other children; they are more likely to:
			  • Share toys, taking turns with assistance
			  • Initiate or join in play with other children and make up games
				• Use and understand sentences
				• Use more complex grammar, such as plurals and past tense
				• Understand sentences involving time concepts
				• Understand relationships expressed by "if…then" or "because" sentences
				• Follow a series of two to four related directions
				• Sing a song and repeat at least one nursery rhyme

4 to 5 years	• Children are now more confident, and most are able to:
	  • Walk backwards
	  • Jump forward many times without falling
	  • Jump on one foot
	  • Walk up and down stairs without assistance, alternating feet
	  • Turn somersaults
	• Children develop skills that will help them as they enter school and begin writing. Most children can:
		• At this age, children actively seek information and new experiences from the people in their environment. Most can:
		  • Play with words, mimicking and creating sounds, and make rhymes
		  • Point to and name many colors
		  • Understand order and process
		  • Draw a person with detail
		  • Draw, name, and describe pictures
		  • Tell you their street and town
			• At this age children are more aware of themselves as individuals. They:
			  • Show some understanding of moral reasoning (exploring ideas about fairness and good or bad behavior)
			  • Compare themselves with others
			  • Develop friendships
			  • Express more awareness of other people's feelings
				• 4-year-olds use language not only to converse, but also to exchange information. Most can:
				  • Retell a story (but may confuse facts)
				  • Combine thoughts into one sentence
				  • Ask "when?" "how?" and "why?' questions
				  • Use words like "can," "will," "should," and "might"

Age	Physical	Mental	Social	Language
4 to 5 years (cont.)	• Use safety scissors • Cut on a line continuously • Copy squares and crosses • Print a few capital letters		• Show interest in exploring sex differences • Enjoy imaginative play with other children, like dress up or house	• Refer to causality by using "because" and "so" • Follow three unrelated commands appropriately • Understand comparatives like loud, louder, loudest • Speaks clearly enough for strangers to understand
5 years	• Hops, somersaults, swings, climbs • May be able to skip	• Can count 10 or more objects • Correctly names more than four colors • Better understands concept of time	• Wants to please friends • More likely to agree to rules • Likes to sing, dance and act • Shows more independence and may even visit a next-door neighbor by herself	• Recalls part of a story • Speaks sentences of more than five words • Uses future tense • Tells longer stories • Says name and address
6 years	• May still be somewhat uncoordinated and gawky • Able to learn to ride a bicycle • Can move in time with music or a beat	• Moving toward abstract thinking • Develops reasoning skills	• Grows more independent, yet feels less secure • Needs to win and will change rules to suit her/himself • May be hurt by criticism, blame, or punishment	• Shifts from learning through observation and experience to learning via language and logic
7 years	• Hand-eye coordination is well developed • Has good balance • Can execute simple gymnastic movements, such as somersaults	• Demonstrates a longer attention span • Uses serious, logical thinking; is thoughtful and reflective • Can tell time; knows the days, months, and seasons	• Desires to be perfect and is quite self-critical • Worries more, may have low self-confidence • Understands the difference between right and wrong	• Uses a vocabulary of several thousand words • Able to solve more complex problems • Begins to grasp that letters represent the sounds that form words

Age	Physical	Mental	Social	Language
7 years (cont.)		• Can describe points of similarity between two objects • Able to solve more complex problems	• Avoids and withdraws from adults • Is a better loser and less likely to place blame • Waits for their turn in activities • Starts to feel guilt and shame	• Individual learning style becomes more clear-cut
8 years	• Finger control is more defined • Stamina increases	• Reading may be a major interest • Seeks to understand the reasons for things • Begins to feel competent in skills and have preferences for some activities and subjects • Thinking is organized and logical	• Emotions change quickly • Impatient: finds waiting for special events tortuous • Makes friends easily; develops close friends of same sex • Favors group play, clubs, and team sports, wants to be part of a group • More influenced by peer pressure	• Can converse at an almost adult level • Begins to recognize concept of reversibility (4+2= 6 and 6-2= 4)
9 years	• Uses tools, such as a hammer or small garden tools, fairly well • Capable of fine hand and finger movements • Draws with great detail • May persist with an activity until exhausted • Interested in own strength; boys enjoy wrestling	• Memorizes and recites facts but may not show deep understanding • Reads to learn (rather than learning to read) • Keeps train of thought and will continues to work even after interruptions • Able to use dictionary • Beginning to be aware of right and wrong vs. good and bad • Critical thinking starting to emerge	• May experience mood swings • May be critical of self and others • May use physical complaints to avoid unpleasant tasks • Often dislikes the opposite sex intensely • Responsible: can be depended upon and trusted • Puts great importance on fairness, in self and in others	• Can communicate as an adult
10 years	• Has both skill and stamina for gross motor activities such as biking, skating, and team sports • Personality traits may be revealed by posture and movement habits	• Aware of time, but needs help to plan in a practical way • Still certain that own beliefs are correct and are universally shared by others	• Fears which was previously bothersome are now minimal • May be quick to anger but expression of anger differs according to situation	• Communicates as an adult

Age	Physical	Mental	Social	Language
10 years (cont.)	• Girls may show signs of approaching puberty		• Friendships are quite important; friends are of the same sex • Enjoys clubs and group activities • Still not interested in the opposite sex	
11 years	• Very active and energetic; constantly wiggles and moves • Boys show few outward signs of puberty • Boys show more muscle development than girls • Girls display more physical changes • Development of some soft pubic hair; breast development is still minimal, but of great interest; rapid height gains	• Combines oral, visual, and written material in school reports • Decision-making skills improves • Starts to realize that others may hold beliefs different than their own	• May be fearful, tearful, and full of worries • Relationship with mother is particularly thorny • Displays anger physically—fights, slams doors, kicks • Behavior is well-mannered when away from home • Friendships are still important but with more quarrels than before • May have a "best friend" • Not actively interested in opposite sex, but on the verge	
12 years	• Both boys and girls are always hungry • Girls are at the peak of physical change: • Still growing rapidly in height and weight • Growth may taper off toward the end of the year • Menstruation is likely to start • Breasts fill out • Underarm hair and pubic hair thickens	• Categorizes information in order to make sense of it • Summarizes information from a book into own words • Reads newspapers or magazines, particularly those sections about topics of special interest	• Generally pleasant and good natured • Very enthusiastic about likes and equally passionate about dislikes • Strong need to conform to peers • Friendships are calm, without turmoil seen at eleven • Shows interest in the opposite sex (girls more than boys)	• Language skills continue to increase

Age	Physical	Mental	Social	Language
12 years (cont.)	• Boys show a wide range of growth rates: • Soft pubic hair develops • Penis and scrotum enlarge • Erections are frequent, with or without an obvious case			
Adolescence	• Characteristically agile, but still has clumsiness • Rapid physical development and maturation • Feeling awkward and strange	• Uses thought more flexibly and can handle hypothetical issues • Can reason logically about statements, objects, events • Has well-developed perception of physical volume • Able to formulate ideals, to make assumptions, and to draw conclusions • Tends to intellectualize • Moody	• Disoriented by rapid physical growth, worries about being normal • Interested in opposite sex and may begin sexual activity • Emotional development swings from unstable to well-balanced, between 11-16 years • By 13, is generally withdrawn and pessimistic • Rapidly forms and dissolves relationships • Doesn't feel understood and distrusts adults • Is independent, yet dependent • Often idealistic • Often unaware of consequences of words or acts, rude to adults • Struggles between the security of childhood and the expectations of adult world, sense of identity • By 16, is adjusting to future role as an adult • Focuses on self, alternating between high expectations and poor self-esteem	• Can communicate as an adult

Adapted from Parenting corner Q&A: Developmental Milestones at American Academy of Pediatrics at www.aap.org/ publiced/BK0_DevMile_1mos.htm and www.pbs.org/wholechild/abc/cognitive.html and Developmental Milestones of Children, *Child Assessment and Preparation* curriculum, Spaulding for Children, 1998. Retrieved May 28, 2007.

Preparing Youth for Permanency: 3-5-7 Model

It is known that many children/youth in care have unresolved losses. The 3-5-7 Model incorporates activities to assist those working with children and youth in the reconciliation of those losses and the building of relationships through the attachment process. This can be accomplished through the exploration of three tasks, the answering of five conceptual questions, and the incorporation of seven critical-skill elements.

An abused and/or neglected child/youth has an enduring need for safety. The child/youth's perception of safety subsequently becomes a critical element in the placement of many children/youth. Although foster care is meant to provide a safe environment for the child/youth, the child/youth's perception is that foster care is a change that results in feeling unsafe.

The 3-5-7 Model is a method that provides an approach for those who work and live with child/youth in temporary care, who remain in care, and who are making the transition to permanency through reunification, kinship care, adoption, or permanent legal custody. (This Model was developed by Darla Henry of Temple University and Family Design Resources, Inc., Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.)

3 Tasks — CIA: Clarification, Integration, Actualization

Clarification

- Clarification is the task of assisting the child/youth in understanding what has happened in life.
- Clarification is a lengthy process. Progress depends upon where the child/youth is developmentally and cognitively as well as his/her readiness to accept information about his/her history and life events.
- Clarification is not a linear process. It ebbs and flows in the ongoing work being conducted with the child/youth.

Integration

- Integration is the process through which children/youth develop the ability to understand their membership in many families.
- Many children/youth in placement have lived with a variety of individuals or families prior to coming into care.
- Their membership in all these families needs to be explored so that the children/youth begin to understand who had meaning to them and for whom they have meaning.
- During integration, children/youth accept that they do not have to choose membership in one particular family.
- Children/youth begin to deal with loyalty issues towards their biological parents and biological family members if they are not going to return home.

(continued on next page)

<u>Actualization</u>

- Actualization is the ability of children/youth to begin visualizing their membership in one specific family.
- They visualize what it is going to be like to be a member of a family whether they move towards permanence through reunification, adoption, permanent legal custody, or kinship care.
- Ideally, this process would be conducted or completed during the pre-placement phase when children/youth are developing relationships with their new permanent family.

- Actualization is a life-long process of feeling a sense of belonging to a family or permanent relationship.

Five Questions

Many children/youth in the child welfare system have not grieved their losses. This can be related to behavioral difficulties and behaviors that are difficult to manage for child welfare staff, foster families and subsequently in permanency homes.

The impact of separation and loss influences the behaviors of children/youth who present behavioral reactions. It is imperative that workers have critical knowledge of the impact of loss on the children/youth in the child welfare system.

Children have many conceptual questions related to their losses, subsequent feelings, and uncertainties about where they will be living. The answers to these questions are critical to their readiness to transition to permanency.

In the 3-5-7 Model, five questions emerge to provide a framework of reference that addresses the issues of loss, identity formation, attachment, relationship building, and claiming/safety. Each question correlates to these five issues listed below:

1. **What happened to me? - (Loss)**

   This question addresses all children/youth's losses before and during placement. Children/ youth in the child welfare system experience the loss of their biological family members, friends, pets, schools, familiar environment, community, and established relationships.

   - Clarification makes efforts to answer why they may no longer be returning to the care of their biological family member.
   - Children/youth will grieve the loss of their family even though their life may have not been perfect.
   - Grief work should start during the clarification task.
   - Where possible, biological or previous families can assist children/youth in forming relationships with new caregivers by giving them their blessing to do so.

- Adults must understand the intensely painful response to trauma and loss by children/youth expressed through their behaviors.
- Children/youth who begin to resolve these issues of loss often start to move on.
- If children/youth are not assisted in grieving, they may experience increasing intensity of their unexpressed feelings and behaviors, deepening depression and the progression of protest into anger and ultimately into rage.
- Children/youth who do well in foster homes and adoptive homes may do so because of the conscious or unconscious ability of those foster or adoptive parents to assist children/youth in grieving their losses.
- Children do not understand the meaning of "temporary" and they are expected to absorb anger from all of the moves.
- Adults look at loss from an adult perspective and concerns of the child/youth frequently differ from the grief experience of an adult.
- Children/youth who work through grief issues are better able to bond with the new family.
- The use of life books, timelines, life maps and collages are excellent tools for this process.

2. Who am I? - (Identity)

Identity formation is a developmental process which traditionally culminates in adolescence with a sense of self. The loss experienced by adopted children/youth centers on self-identity as on the lost relationship with the birth parents. The lives of children in the child welfare system will forever be changed. Identity confusion can result from the loss of biological parents and subsequently having a variety of caregivers in the placement system.

The question of "Who am I?' is a difficult question to answer due to children/youth in care living in a variety of home environments. The challenge for children/youth in terms of knowing who they are, is putting together fragments of information in a confusing puzzle. Studies suggest that a clear achievement of a sense of identity and sense of knowing oneself are linked to several factors:

- The childhood experience of being wanted and loved within a secure environment with quality attachments.
- Knowledge and awareness about personal history, heritage, and genealogy.
- The experience of being perceived by others as a worthwhile person.
- The need for connectedness and continuity in family ties is crucial for emotional growth.
- Through clarification and integration, children/youth develop a more complete picture of self, a sense of identity, and an integration of life events and family memberships.
- The integration process involves dialogue and interactions with children/youth to help look at membership all of their families.
- It provides an opportunity for children/youth to think about their own family, what have been their memories of those individuals, and what messages they have been given about who they are.

3. Where am I Going? - (Attachment)

This question integrates aspects of all five questions for children/youth: losses, identity, and forming new relationships (attachment) in a perceived safe environment.

- Relationships are central to helping children/youth make the transition from the past to the present and develop a plan for the future.
- Children in the child welfare system know that there are no guarantees or assurances that when they wake up in the morning, that they will be sleeping in the same place at night.
- Children living in placement have experienced numerous disruptions to their relationships.
- If they receive prompt, accurate information about what has happened, are permitted to ask questions and receive honest answers, then they usually have the capacity to establish new relationships and form attachments within the construct of family settings.

4. How will I get there? - (Building Relationships)

"How will I get there?" is an extension of the third question, "Where am I going?" Children/youth grieve and reconcile losses in the context of a relationship. When the relationship building process is terminated, children/youth experience new loses and their grieving process continues. As the attachment process is recycled, the children/youth:

- Build relationships through establishment of trust and perceptions of security and safety.
- Safe relationships enable children/youth to reconcile losses as they move through placement into relationships within new families.
- As children/youth begin to reconcile losses, they are moving through integration into the actualization phase.

5. When will I belong? - (Claiming/Safety)

The fifth question advances the resolution of issues from the previous four questions. This question is answered in the claiming process that occurs between children/youth and families:

- It should be noted that feelings of belonging frequently occur at different times for a child/youth and family.
- Repetition of the attachment cycle ensures ongoing interaction between the caregiver and child/youth as they attempt to build a relationship around the meeting of needs.
- This is an ongoing life-long process for many children/youth and families that requires steady attention and conscious effort.
- When children/youth have a sense of safety and where family is sensitive to their loss issues, helps the child/youth with the process of recognizing who they are in new family relationships.

These five questions are intertwined and ongoing. The length of time needed to answer these questions to assist children/youth in their readiness for permanency is undetermined. It is specific to each individual child/youth.

The following is also specific to each individual worker in their engaging of the child/youth as they prepare the child/youth for permanency:

- understanding the grief process, child development, and response to abuse and neglect
- patience
- skills to work with children and adolescences

Seven Critical Elements to Preparing Children

Children/youth must be assisted in mourning their loss and separation from loved ones. For many this must mean going back and re-experiencing the traumatic events. Workers must set the tone and philosophy for working with children/youth by using the seven critical elements:

- Engage the child/youth in the process
- Listen to the child/youth's words
- Speak the truth
- Validate the child/youth and the child/youth's life story
- Create a safe place for the child/youth to do his/her work
- Allow that it is never too late to go back in time
- Acknowledge that pain is part of the process

Preparing children/youth for permanent placements depends on age and circumstances, the philosophy and techniques of those doing the preparation, and the agency's approach to the work done.

Several things must happen for children/youth before they are ready for adoption/permanency:

- Exploring feelings about their biological family and the separation from them.
- Dealing with feelings about various moves that may have occurred while in placement.
- Expressing feelings of sadness, anger, rejection about the moves.
- Understanding of adoption and their entitlement to a permanent family should also be addressed.

Children/youth are often presumed to be prepared for their move into an adoptive home, but they may have never been helped to understand their past separations and grieve their past losses.

Social work practitioners must deal with their own feelings of loss while preparing a child/youth for permanency. The key to implementing the preparation process rests on the knowledge and skills of the worker.

If workers have their own unresolved, unpleasant or threatening feelings, if they have avoided helping the child/youth to deal with loss and rejection, the child/youth may enter into a new family still hurting from the past.

More time is needed to heal and the trust-building relationship requires continuity, stability, and mutuality between the child/youth and their caregivers.

Darla L. Henry (2005). The 3-5-7 Model: Preparing Children for Permanency. The 3-5-7 Model is licensed and can be used only in this curriculum or by permission of the author. *Children and Youth Services Review, 27*, 197-212.

Trainer's Points

Trainer's Points

☐ Adequate preparation minimizes the stress/trauma of the move or the shift from foster care to adoption if the child/youth is being adopted by the current family.

☐ Preparation helps to ensure that appropriate resources are put in place to meet the known and expected needs of the child/youth before and after the adoption.

☐ Child/youth preparation is the process of translating information into understanding so the child/youth:

- understands the role that the caseworker plays.
- understands his/her past experiences.
- understands what will be happening to him/her.
- is empowered and engaged in planning for his/her own future.

☐ The preparation process involves:

- determining the child/youth's interest in and readiness for adoptive placement.
- sharing and discussing information about the adoptive placement possibilities.
- establishing and implementing visitation with the new family, where necessary.
- exploring with the child/youth his/her feelings, concerns, and reactions to the family as a potential adoptive family.
- troubleshooting any difficulties that may arise during the pre-placement process.
- planning for pre- and post-placement supports.

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 6,** *A Framework for Preparing Children/Youth for Adoption*. Read the handout.

Handout

Handout 6

A Framework for
Preparing Children/Youth for Adoption

Much of the work done by the practitioner in preparation mirrors the work done in assessment. All of the information gathered in the assessment affects decisions and planning. Neither should be done in isolation.

A child/youth has been prepared successfully for adoption if:

- He/she has an understanding of his/her family and placement history.

- His/her wishes have been considered.

- His/her emotional, physical, psychological, social and chronological development has been considered.

- He/she understands why the adoptive placement plan is needed and wants to proceed with it.

- Appropriate assessment tools have been used to gather accurate, comprehensive information about the child/youth and family.

- A treatment plan that reflects the needs and wants of the child has been implemented.

- The practitioner has collaborated with everyone who has involvement with the child/youth.

- Adequate documentation of past services provided, current services being received and future services needed has been made.

- A presentation plan has been made.

- The child/youth has been assisted to establish a transition plan.

Adapted from *Child Assessment and Preparation* curriculum, Spaulding for Children, 1998.

Large Group Discussion

☐ Let's answer the following questions:

What does the worker do in preparing the child/youth that is different from assessing the child/youth?

- *Assessing is identifying needs whereas preparation is intervening to address those needs.*

What is distinct about preparing the child/youth?

- *Usually, assessment and preparation are viewed as separate processes rather than one continuous process building from the assessment.*

What kind of preparation activities do you do in your role working with child/youth?

- *Try to tell the child/youth why they are being moved and something about the family he/she will be living with.*

- *Have to focus on child/youth safety and finding a placement; so there is little time to prepare the child/youth for the move. Explain to the child/youth that the placement is to keep him/her safe, but the child/youth is usually upset about the move.*

Trainer's Points

✓ Summarize participants' responses and point out that:

☐ Adequate preparation assists the caseworker in developing a thorough service plan and identifying appropriate resources to get the child/youth ready for placement.

☐ In both the assessment and the preparation process, *all* information, decisions and plans are gathered, developed, and made in *the best interest of the child/youth.*

Transition

♦ Are there any questions or comments on anything we have discussed thus far about assessment and preparation?

Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation:
Tools and Techniques

Trainer's Points

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 7,** *Communicating with Children of All Ages*.

☐ Communication is the core to eliciting information. Building rapport, keeping the child/youth informed, using age-appropriate terms/language, and acknowledging and normalizing the child/youth's feelings are very important to effective communication.

☐ Can you give an example of _____. *(Trainer: Elicit examples from participants for each.)*

☐ Several tools have been developed to assist in child/youth assessment and preparation. Turn to **Participant's Handout 8,** *Tools to Assist in Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation*. A more detailed description of each tool is in the Reference Section.

☐ Review the document.

Trainer's
Points

Handout
Handout 7

Handout
Handout 8

Communicating with Children of all Ages
Suggestions for Caseworkers

Build Rapport

Demonstrating respect, honesty, and understanding is a very important tool for building rapport. It is most important to put the child/youth at ease in order to communicate effectively. In establishing rapport, explain to the child/youth that you are there to help them in understanding the situation. Actively listen to the child/youth by responding to concerns they express. Ask clarifying questions so that the child/youth will know that you are listening and acknowledging their concerns and feelings. Use language that the child/youth can easily understand and let the child/youth direct you to the issues they would like to discuss. (Refer to Participant's Handout #4, *Developmental Milestones for Children,* the Language columns on pages 27-34).

Keep Children/Youth Informed

Be honest with the child/youth by informing them what you do or do not know in regard to their present situation. Children/youth need to know the truth, regardless of how difficult it may be. If the child/youth is uncertain about an event or the future, this may only produce anxiety in the child/youth. Convey to the child/youth that situations sometimes change and that you will update the child/youth on any new information you may receive.

Discuss Events in Age-appropriate Terms

A child/youth's development may not match their chronological age. Assess where the child/youth is developmentally and make sure that you share information with the child/youth that is appropriate for their developmental age and clarify when necessary. (Refer to Participant's Handout #4, *Developmental Milestones for Children,* the Language columns, pages 27-34).

Acknowledge and Normalize Children/Youth's Feelings

It is important to let a child/youth be able to express his/her feelings and concerns. Let the child/youth know that he/she is not alone in his/her present situation that many children/youth share the same experiences. Use empathy when listening to the child/youth expresses his/her concerns or feelings. A child/youth wants to be taken seriously when he/she finally gets comfortable enough to share his/her feelings and thoughts. Where appropriate, offer support and praise.

Tools to Assist in Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation

Life Book (0-18 years) is an account of the child/youth's life in words, pictures, photographs, and documents. Although Life Books can take many forms, each child/youth's Life Book will be unique to that individual. Caseworkers can assist in creating a Life Book for a child/youth by gathering information about the child/youth and taking pictures of people and places that are or were important to the child/youth.

Eco-Map (4-10 years) is a visual representation of a child/youth and the important people and activities in the person's life. A Eco-Map may have a circle in the middle of the page with a stick figure of a child/youth, along with the question, "Why am I here?" Lines are drawn out from the circle like spokes to other circles representing the court, other foster families, siblings, and school. An Eco-Map also can be used to address other topics such as, "Things I like to do," visually to represent what things and which people are important to the child/youth and to help the child/youth understand how he or she came to live with the adoptive family. (Fahlberg 1991)

Life Line or Life Path (6-18 years) is a visual representation to help the child/youth understand the paths that life has taken and the decision points along the way. There may be lines that go to a drawing of a house representing any foster homes where a child/youth has lived, the years that the child/youth lived there, and a mention of who lived with the child/youth in that house, if known. (Fahlberg, 1991)

Journal or Letter Writing (12-18 years) is a helpful way for children/youth to get their feelings and concerns out in the open. Journal writing can be private—something the child/youth uses only for himself/herself. Letter writing is less private because the child/youth expects others to read the letters. If the birth parents are unavailable to respond, the child/youth can write a response to his/her own letter. These writings can be discussed with adoption service providers and can be helpful in resolving past losses and facilitating attachment within the adoptive family. These tools can be modified to fit a child/youth's particular circumstances. If children/youth have difficulty writing down their thoughts, the post adoption service provider or an adoptive family member may act as recorder. Audio and DVD/videotape also can be used for these types of activities. Some people refer to letter writing as "role play," particularly when the child/youth responds to letters from a birth parent's perspective.

Family Game (3-8 years) is a unique and unobtrusive way for a child/youth to begin talking about characteristics of families that are important to him/her. The caseworker asks the child/youth to picture what a grocery store looks like, on the inside, then tells the child/youth about an imaginary store that has mommies, daddies, sisters, brothers and animals inside. To help visualize the activity the worker draws, with the child, the inside of the store. This picture includes a description of the different "aisles" in the store. The caseworker explains that each "aisle" contains different components of a family. After talking about the different components of families (moms, dads, sisters, brothers, grandmas, etc.) the worker encourages the child/youth to talk about what kind of family he/she would pick out for himself/herself. After the child/youth has picked out the

components of the ideal family, the worker asks specific questions about the family: Why did the child/youth pick the family members that he/she did? What type of person is each member of the family? What does each family member do?

Caregiver Puzzle (6-18 years) increases the child/youth's understanding of the roles of current and former caregivers. This exercise is useful in assisting children/youth who are experiencing confusion as they enter or move through the child welfare system. Each caregiver is identified. The child/youth puts the caregiver in the sequence of their life, discusses their likes and dislikes relative to the caregiver, and receives information from the caseworker about that caregiver's role in the child/youth's life.

Adapted from *Child Assessment and Preparation* curriculum, Spaulding for Children, 1998.

DVD Description
"Getting to Know You" (25:10 min.)

☐ In this DVD, adoption worker Kate Woodbridge gets to know 9-year-old Michael and 7-year-old Elizabeth Harris by engaging them in various child assessment and preparation activities. The DVD demonstrates the use of helpful tools and techniques, including Life Books, journal writing, art therapy, the Caregiver Puzzle, the Child's Eco-Map, and a new activity, called the "Family Game," in which the child "goes shopping" to select ideal family members.

✓ Show the DVD.

Large Group Discussion – Recording Information

✓ Debrief the DVD. Ask participants the following questions:

- **What are your reactions to the DVD?**

- **What are your thoughts about the different techniques presented in the DVD?**

- **What have your experiences been using these tools?**

- **Do any of you use other tools that were not presented in the DVD?**

Individual Activity: Recording Information

☐ Take about 20 minutes to enter information in Michael's and Elizabeth's Child Assessments.

Trainer's Points

☐ For an assessment and preparation tool to be meaningful, it must meet certain criteria such as:

- Be compatible with the child/youth's style of communicating, relating and expressing herself/himself.

- Be appropriate for the child/youth's developmental level.

- Provide the caseworker an opportunity to review and to clarify information gathered with the child/youth.

- Enhance the child/youth's understanding of his/her life experiences.

- Engage and empower the child/youth in understanding the past and planning for present and future life experiences.

- Facilitate a trusting relationship between the child/youth and the caseworker.

- Facilitate the child/youth's move to and adjustment in an adoptive family.

☐ For any tool or technique to be useful, the caseworker must understand how to apply it and know how to interpret the information received from applying it.

Transition

Transition

♦ Are there any questions or comments about the tools and techniques we have discussed?

♦ Next, we will discuss specific issues in transitioning children/youth from foster care placement to adoption by their current foster care parent(s) or relatives. We will deal as well with general issues of transitioning from foster care to adoption.

Segment II: Transitioning from Foster Care to Adoption

Trainer's Points

☐ This segment focuses on helping children/youth transition from foster care to adoption. We will explore attachment issues of children/youth in the child welfare system as well as how practitioners may assist them in making a smooth transition from foster care to adoption. We begin this segment with a discussion of specific issues of transitioning with the same parents, be they foster parents or relatives.

☐ The practice of foster parent and kinship adoption is growing. More and more public, social service agencies are finding that a child/youth's foster family or kinship family often is the placement of choice when that child/youth becomes free for adoption. This provides for both continuity of care and continuity of relationships.

☐ In the past, policy precluded foster parent adoptions to prevent the use of foster care as a back door to adoption. Today, the majority of children/youth adopted from the child welfare system are adopted by a foster parent or relative.

☐ Of the children/youth adopted from the child welfare system over the last 10 years, approximately 92% were adopted by the caregiver at the time of the termination of parental rights. (AFCARS data)

- **Does anyone know what percentage of children/youth adopted in your state are adopted by foster parents or relatives?** *(Note: The trainer should gather this information for the last five years prior to the training.)*

Data Needed

☐ Both the foster/adoptive parents and the child/youth need to understand and to appreciate the changing role of the child/youth as this individual becomes adopted into the same family that previously had provided him or her with foster care.

Large Group Discussion

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 9,** *Focusing on the Perceptions of Children*.

☐ Take 5 minutes to write your responses to the questions.

✓ Reconvene and ask for responses to the questions. Some responses might be:

- **What do children/youth in foster care say about adoption in general?**

  - *"Can I keep my name?"*
  - *"I get to change my last name."*
  - *"I won't have to come back to the agency anymore."*
  - *"Will I get to see my mom again?"*
  - *"What will happen with my real mom now?"*

- **What does adoption mean to them?**

  - *"I get to stay here."*
  - *"My real mom will think I don't love her any more."*
  - *"My dad might not be able to find me if I change my name."*

- **What do children/youth in foster care say about being adopted by their foster parents?**

  - *"This is my family."*
  - *"I have to go to court, and we are going to have a party."*
  - *"I won't have to move anymore."*

.

- **What do children/youth in foster care say about adoption by their relatives?**

  - *"I get to stay with my blood relatives."*
  - *"I don't have to move anymore."*

Focusing on the Perceptions of Children

Please answer the following questions:

What do children/youth in foster care say about adoption in general?

What does adoption mean to them?

What do children/youth in foster care say about being adopted by their foster parents?

What do children/youth in foster care say about being adopted by their relatives?

Child/Youth Preparation in Foster Parent Adoption

Team Activity

Team Activity

- ☐ The purpose of this activity is to explore ways to engage children/youth in the family preparation process.

- ☐ This activity asks you to identify techniques that you would use to give this child/youth a voice in the adoption preparation process and why you would use these techniques.

- ☐ Break into teams.

Handout

**Handouts
10 & 11**

- ☐ Read **Participant's Handout 10,** *Harris Family Summary*. Then answer the questions in **Participant's Handout 11,** *Child/Youth Preparation in Foster Care* Adoption.

- ☐ If one team member proposes a technique or strategy that others have not tried, it is appropriate for interested team members to take time to discuss and to understand the technique, its use and its effects.

  - **What might you do with the Harris children/youth to help them prepare for adoption?**

  - **What might you do with the Williams family to help them prepare for the Harris children/youth adoption?**

  - **Which techniques would you use to give the Harris children/youth a voice in the foster parent adoption process? Why?**

  - **Where would you record the information in your child assessment format?**

Harris Family Summary

Isaiah, age 15; Michael, age 10; and Elizabeth, age 7, are biological siblings who are in foster care. The children currently live in two different homes. The boys have been with their foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Williams, for about nine months, while Elizabeth has been living with her paternal grandmother since she was 4 years old.

The birth parents, Malcolm and Christine, are married. Malcolm was incarcerated at the time of Elizabeth's birth and has been since that time. According to the mother, she was able to take care of Isaiah and Michael while controlling her bipolar disorder. After the birth of Elizabeth she found it increasingly difficult to care for three children without the help of her husband. At that time, Christine began self-medicating with drugs and alcohol. Many times the children were left in the care of a family friend, "Aunt Lorita Webster," who lives nearby or, with their paternal grandmother.

The family's first incident with Protective Services occurred when Elizabeth, age 4 at the time, was found wandering the streets, trying to buy food. Her mother was found passed out on the bathroom floor. Elizabeth was placed in the care of her paternal grandmother, while Isaiah and Michael remained with their mother.

Three years later, Isaiah and Michael were unsupervised when a kitchen fire started. Michael received third-degree burns on his arm. Unable to locate the mother and not being able to place the children with the paternal grandmother, Protective Services placed Isaiah and Michael into two different foster homes.

Within the following three months, Isaiah moved two more times due to his behavior. He then was placed in the Williams home, where his brother, Michael, joined him. Meanwhile, Elizabeth continued to live with her grandmother.

Contact with the birth mother was not consistent, nor was she able to meet the recommendations of the treatment plan. Parental rights were terminated. All three children are available for adoption.

Elizabeth has a difficult time forming healthy attachments and has a tendency to build emotional walls. She is a very active child, living with her diabetic grandmother and developmentally disabled uncle. Although Elizabeth has spent almost half of her life, three years, living with her grandmother and Uncle Billy, she has indicated that she would prefer to live with her brothers.

At the time of the fire, Michael felt as though the fire and resulting situation were completely his fault. During his first foster placement, with Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, Michael formed a bond with another boy, Alexander, who lived in the Hamilton home. It was difficult for Michael to say good-bye when he moved to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Williams. Michael has been living for the past nine months with Mr. and Mrs. Williams, along with his brother, Isaiah. Michael is very attached to both Mr. and Mrs. Williams, but also is attached to his brother and always wants to be with Isaiah.

Isaiah was placed initially in the Thompson home, but the Thompson's requested that he receive a new placement due to his behavior. Isaiah shared a room with a younger boy named Brandon, but there were a number of conflicts between the two. When the altercations between them turned physical, Isaiah was placed into another foster home. Although Isaiah has been living with Mr. and Mrs. Williams for nine months, he has said that he does not want to be adopted.

Child/Youth Preparation in Foster Care Adoption

Please answer the following questions:

What might you do with the Harris children/youth to help them prepare for adoption?

What might you do with the Williams family to help them prepare for the Harris children/youth adoption?

Which techniques would you use to give the Harris children/youth a voice in the foster parent adoption process? Why?

Where would you record the information in your child assessment format?

Large Group Discussion

✓ Ask each team to present its techniques. Allow participants to ask for clarification or additional information about items that they do not understand or wish to explore in more depth.

✓ Ask participants to comment on this list of techniques in light of the concepts of attachment and separation.

✓ Share any particular techniques you have used with children/youth in the foster parent/relative adoption process, if these have not been raised by the teams.

✓ Summarize the techniques, and comment on challenges in the process of preparing the child/youth for adoption by the foster parents/relatives. Specifically, address the challenge of the child/youth and the foster parent saying, "nothing's changing."

✓ Ask participants to take five minutes to record information in the children's assessments.

Transition

♦ Are there any questions or comments about anything we have discussed thus far in this segment?

♦ We are going to discuss ways to help building attachments during transition from foster care to adoption.

Ways to Help Build Attachments During Transition from Foster Care to Adoption

Trainer's Points

☐ Transitions can be viewed positively as opportunities to address attachment issues and to build strong bridges from detachment to attachment.

☐ To help children/youth understand these differences, caseworkers can:

- Talk with them.

- Help them to understand their own history.

- Help them adjust to losses.

☐ **Talk with the children/youth about the changes.** (The following Trainer's Points are taken directly from, Helping Your Foster Child Transition to Your Adopted Child, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005, www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_transition.cfm):

- "In preparing a child/youth to talk about the changes that occur in adoption, caseworkers need to engage the child/youth in the process and to listen carefully to the words that the child/youth uses and to the questions the child/youth asks."

- "Questions about the birth family and their status should be addressed in terms appropriate to the child/youth's developmental capability."

- "The caseworker needs to tell the truth, even if it is painful, and to validate the child/youth's memories, experiences and feelings."

- "Helping children/youth grieve the memories of their past experiences, particularly losses, can help them to move on to a feeling of permanency in their adoptive family."

- "These talks with children/youth about the differences in their status within their foster family and their adoptive family probably will need to be repeated several times and in a variety of ways so the children/youth can understand fully at their own level."

- "The adoptive parents need to be informed of the issues the worker and child/youth are discussing and to be engaged in supporting the child/youth as she/he processes the information and associated feelings."

☐ "Here are a few suggestions for making the talks beneficial for the child/youth:"

- "**Plan the discussion**. In collaboration with the foster/relative parents, the *caseworker* needs to decide who will talk with the child/youth and prospective adoptive parents first and have the other reinforce what was said during the earlier conversation. Another possibility is talking to the child/youth and prospective adoptive parents together about the change from being in foster care to being adopted. Parents and *workers* should be prepared to answer the child/youth's questions."

- "**Help the child/youth to talk about the perceived difference** in his or her own words. The *caseworker* needs to ask open-ended questions of the child/youth, such as, "How do you think being adopted will be different from being in foster care?" "What do you think the biggest difference will be when you're adopted?"

- "**Help the child/youth to draw analogies** to a prior experience in the child/youth's own life. For instance, *caseworker* might say, "This is like the time when. . . .""

☐ "There are a number of changes in status that will affect the child/youth. These should be discussed, depending on the child/youth's developmental level."

- "In order to help the child/youth understand the *legal differences* between foster care and adoption, caseworkers need to explain the adoption hearing process and the changes that will occur once the court has approved the process. Specifically, the child/youth should be told that once the adoption is final, there will be no more court hearings; and the child/youth welfare worker no longer will visit the home."

- "To help a child understand the *parenting differences* between foster care and adoption, the adoptive parents might remind the child/youth that when in foster care, the parents had to get a permission slip signed by an agency caseworker before the child/youth could go on a field trip, spend the night at a friend's house, or travel across state lines. Now that the foster parents are the child/youth's legal parents, they can sign permissions for these types of things without needing to go through an agency or court."

☐ Turn to your **Participant's Handout 12,** *Aspects of Parenting Changes for Children/Youth in Placement.*

☐ "One way to explain the changes from foster care to adoption is to talk about the roles that different parents play in the child/youth's life."

☐ "Older children/youth's awareness of the foster care payment or adoption assistance that their parents receive might be of help in understanding the *financial differences* inherent in foster care and adoption. Older children/youth should be told that the payments are continued so that the adoptive parents have sufficient resources to meet the child/youth's needs. Experienced adoptive parents note the importance of honesty, compassion, and developmental appropriateness in conversations with children/youth regarding these issues."

☐ **"Help children/youth to understand their own history."**

- "*Caseworkers* can help children/youth to review and understand previous life experiences by clarifying what happened to them in the past and helping them to integrate those experiences so they will have greater self-understanding. Eco-Maps, Life Books, Journals, and visits to birth family members are some of the tools or techniques that can be used."

- "*Foster/adoptive parents, children's therapists and social workers* can help children/youth to answer important questions about the children/youth's lives—both to assess their readiness for adoption and to prepare them for staying permanently in their foster home or relative care home."

Aspects of Parenting Changes
For Children/Youth in Placement

Birth parents give the children/youth life, gender, physical appearance, and predisposition to certain diseases, intellectual potential, temperament, and talents. These predispositions remain throughout their lives.

Legal parents provide financial responsibility, safety, and security. They make major decisions (where to live and go to school) and are legally responsible for the children/youth's actions. While children/youth are in foster care, the court/agency plays this role. Upon adoption of a child/youth in foster care, this role is transferred to the adoptive parents.

Parenting parents provide love, discipline, daily needs (food, clothes, toys, etc.), homework help, transportation, life skills, values, religion, and more. Foster and adoptive parents, relatives, caregivers and birth parents play this role for the children/youth in the child welfare system. If children/youth are in residential care, this role might be played by house parents or childcare workers.

Trainer's Points

Handout

Handout 13

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 13,** *Questions for Children/Youth to Assess Where They Are on the Permanency Continuum*. Review this handout.

✓ Connect this discussion to the 3-5-7 Model discussed previously.

Questions for Children/Youth to Assess Where They Are on the Permanency Continuum

Children/youth's answers to these questions will change, depending on their developmental stage. Their responses can guide parents and caseworkers in helping the children/youth to achieve feelings of permanency. (Henry, 2005)

Who am I? (question related to identity)

What happened to me? (question related to loss)

Where am I going? (question related to attachment)

How will I get there? (question related to relationships)

When will I know I belong? (question related to claiming and safety)

Large Group Discussion

☐ **Would one of you share an experience that you had while helping a child/youth to understand his/her unique history? Describe the experience, the tools and techniques you used, how the child/youth responded, and how you felt during and after the experience.**

☐ (The following Trainer's Points are taken directly from, Helping Your Foster Child Transition to Your Adopted Child, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005, www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_transition.cfm):

☐ "The most important information to give children/youth to help them understand past history are facts about their birth, an explanation of why and how they entered foster care, and how explanations about decisions about moves and new placements were made."

☐ "A baby picture, pictures of the child/youth at various ages, pictures of birth parents, and pictures of other relatives, "fictive kin," and friends, and significant adults should be included in Life Books, if possible."

☐ "Caseworkers need to make every attempt to locate information about the birth parents, if the case file does not contain this information. The child/youth, if age/development appropriate, should be engaged actively in this "search" process. If no information about one or both of the birth parents can be found, such as when the child/youth was abandoned without identification, this should be discussed with the child/youth. Statements such as, "There is no information about Sarah's birth father in her file," at least acknowledges the father's existence. For a child/youth with no identified permanent family resource, this "search" may be to identify possible, permanent, placement options such as relatives or other significant adults in the "family circle.""

☐ "Honesty, developmental appropriateness, and compassion in any explanation of difficult and painful circumstances that bring children/youth into foster care are important for the children/youth."

☐ "Engaging in this process provides an opportunity for the children/youth to experience and to work through the feelings of loss. It is a beneficial therapeutic method to help children/youth understand that it is acceptable to grieve and that grieving is a process that continues throughout life—it is normal."

Helping children/youth adjust to losses

☐ "Adoption experts acknowledge the importance of helping children/youth to integrate their previous attachments to important people in their lives so that they can transition that emotional attachment to a new family. (Donley, 1988; Fahlberg, 1991; Henry, 2005)"

☐ "Integration is a way of helping children/youth to cope with the painful realities of the separation from their birth families. These realities often impact the children/youth's future behaviors and can create extraordinary stress between them and their foster/adoptive parents."

Steps in helping children/youth adjust to losses are as follows:

☐ "Create an accurate reconstruction of the child/youth's entire placement history. Creating a Life Book, Lifeline, or Eco-Map with a child/youth can help the child/youth to see and understand his or her own history. If your State's policy allows, you may even want to share the entire case file with the child/youth."

☐ "Identify the important attachment figures in the child/youth's life. Foster parents might be able to learn who these important people are by listening to the child/youth talk about the people from previous placements. These attachment figures might be parents; but they also could be siblings, former foster parents, other family members, fictive kin, a minister/priest, teacher, coach, etc."

☐ "Gain the cooperation of the most significant attachment figures available. If possible, develop an open relationship between the foster parent and any important family members within the child/youth's birth family. Even if the birth family is not happy about a child/youth's permanency goal of adoption, the birth families might be willing to work with foster/adoptive parents or the agency to make a child/youth's transition to adoption easier."

☐ "Clarify the permission message. It is important for a child/youth to hear and feel from people who are important to him or her that it is all right to love another family. The important people in a child/youth's life who are available to give the child/youth that message should be sought out to do so."

☐ "Communicate the permission message to the child/youth. The 'permission to love your new family' may come in the form of a letter or a phone call from grandma or from the birth parent during family visits. However, it is important that the child/youth hear from that person that being in foster care is not the child/youth's fault and that it is all right to love another family. This 'permission' will go a long way toward helping a child/youth to relax and to transfer his/her attachment to the new family." (Donley, 1988, Henry, 2005)

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 14,** and read the article, *Working Towards Redefining Relationships*.

Working Towards Redefining Relationships

As children/youth make his/her transition from foster care to adoption, child welfare practitioners can be extremely helpful by aiding the child/youth through the process of "redefining relationships" with the birth family and the adoptive or kinship family.

Furthermore, adoption competent caseworkers can make the most impact in accomplishing this goal by understanding:

- children/youth in general and "normal" child development. (Spaulding for Children, 1998)
- the child/youth's emotional, physical, psychological, social and chronological development and how that plays a role in preparing the child/youth for adoption. (Spaulding for Children, 1998)
- the need to consider the child/youth's wishes and perspectives. (Spaulding for Children, 1998)
- survival behaviors and their underlying emotional issues as well as their underlying needs. (Spaulding for Children, 1998)
- the need to include the child/youth in establishing the transition plan.

Caseworkers and families can be instrumental in helping the child/youth successfully transition to an adoptive placement by also being mindful of the needs of the child/youth in the context of his/her age; mental and physical health; personality; and cultural, ethnic and/or racial experiences.

- Help the child/youth and adoptive family to anticipate needs during transition periods, and facilitate discussions about the strengths and needs of both the child/youth and family so that needs can be addressed. (Franke, 2002)

- Be aware of the issues that may impede the child/youth's attachment with a new family. This could possibly help in anticipating the family's future needs after placement and also help in developing future plans for crisis.

- Develop a "crisis plan" or "anticipatory guidance plan" based on the child/youth's previously exhibited survival behaviors. This plan can be developed during team meetings that include the family, the child/youth, and any other adults or supports to the family that are appropriate.

- Support adoptive parents who are feeling rejected by the child/youth's withdrawn or acting-out behavior. Adoptive parents can be helped to understand and to anticipate the child/youth's needs underlying such behavior and, therefore, not feel diminished or discounted as parents because of it. When behavioral triggers can be anticipated, supports can be developed for the child/youth to avoid the trigger; if the trigger is not or cannot be a voided, then the behavior can be managed in a nurturing, supportive way. Then, for example, when a child/youth says, "I wish I was never adopted," the adopting parents can set aside their egos and empathize with their child/youth. The parents can allow the child/youth to mourn the loss of birth parents without feeling threatened or wounded. (Franke, 2002)

- Involve siblings and extended family members , as appropriate, in the family team meetings. Nurture their bonding process with the adoptive parents and the adopted child/youth. Include them in the transition support plan. (Franke, 2002)

- Honor the adopted child/youth's family and origins. The positive feelings that a child/youth has about his/her parents allow a more positive self-concept and increased self-esteem. If the child/youth is of a different race or culture that the adoptive parents, connect the child/youth and the whole family to those communities and the sense of pride it creates. This is essential to strong bonding and healthy attachment in current relationships. (Franke, 2002)

Educating adoptive parents on both the age-appropriate behaviors of children/youth, as well as survival behaviors that some children/youth display caused by prior abuse and/or neglect, can also prove helpful in the transition. The child welfare practitioner can perform this educator role by doing the following:

- Address the "real" mental health issues of the child/youth; but do not "pathologize" normal reactions of grief and loss, divided loyalties, identity crisis and other predictable adoption issues that occur in transitions. Labeling a child/youth as disordered based on the adoption-related issues is inaccurate and a disservice to both the child/youth and the family. Avoid therapists and therapies that take the view that the child/youth who has been adopted and his/her transition issues are more pathological than they truly are. Families need to be educated to discriminate between age-appropriate, acting-out behavior and inappropriate behaviors due to an underlying, mental health problem. (Franke, 2002)

- When developing the "crisis plan" or "anticipatory guidance plan," take into account the needs and/or feelings of the adoptive parents and also help them to understand that the child/youth may "reject the family," in an effort to protect themselves as they are struggling to adjust to the new situation.

- Help families to develop and to maintain realistic expectations for relationships. At the same time, help the child/youth and adoptive family not to sell each other short" on how much they might achieve together. Patience, time and positive shared experiences are the keys to success in any parent-and-child/youth relationship. (Franke, 2002)

- Keep the family informed about adoption support networks, respite care opportunities, and other resources to help them achieve success. Specifically, identify at least one person that the family can call for support when feeling overwhelmed. A caseworker who empowers a family to utilize resources in the community helps lead a family to success. (Franke, 2002)

Although on the surface it may seem that the transition would be easier for the foster family who is adopting the foster child/youth that has been in their care, the process can actually be more complicated than it appears. Changing the role from foster parent/child to adoptive parent/child can bring about the same issues that are faced from a child/youth who transitions into a newly recruited adoptive family. Furthermore, as placements with relatives are increasing, so is the potential for increased adoptive placements with relatives. However, the research on relative adoption continues

to be minimal. Some relatives have known the child/youth prior to placement, and some have not. Some relatives continue to support the birth parents and also allow ongoing contact and some do not.

Child welfare placements with relatives are increasing so are adoptive placements with relatives. There is very little research to inform our adoption practice concerning adoption with relatives. We do know that some relatives were known to the child/youth prior to placement, and some were not. Some relatives continue to support the child/youth's birth parents, and some do not. Some relatives will permit ongoing contact by the birth parents after the adoption, and some will not.

Allowing a child/youth just to "drift" into adoption, without acknowledging the significant changes occurring for the child/youth and the previous foster family or relative, may lead to later difficulties. (Helping your foster child transition to your adopted child. Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005)

Caseworkers, as well as foster, adoptive and relative adoptive parents, need to help children/youth consider and understand their own history and the reasons why they cannot live with their birth parents or birth family any longer. This can help the children/youth adjust to their loss, transfer their attachments to their foster, adoptive and relative adoptive family.

Adapted from *Child Assessment and Preparation* curriculum, Spaulding for Children, 1998, and *Adoption Support and Preparation* curriculum, Spaulding for Children, 1996.

Franke, LeRoy, Keeping Children Attached Through Transitions (2002). Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005.
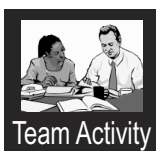
Team Activity

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 15,** *Helping Children/Youth Transition from Foster Care to Adoption*.

☐ Break into groups and answer the following questions:

- **What techniques have you found helpful in bringing birth family and the adoptive family together in support for the child/youth?**

- **What other ways can you think of to help children/youth redefine attachments during transition?**

Helping Children/Youth Transition
from Foster Care to Adoption

Which techniques have you found helpful in bringing the birth family and the adoptive family together in support of the child/youth?

What other ways can you think of to help children/youth redefine attachments during transition?

Handout

Handout 16

☐ In assessing successful approaches, please turn to **Participant's Handout 16,** *Transitions in Foster Care to Adoption: Team Guidelines*. (These guidelines were developed by the U.S. Department of Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services, Salt Lake City, Utah.*)* These guidelines help to facilitate healthier bonding during times of transition for children/youth and their adoptive families. Review them on you own.

Transitions in Foster Care to Adoption:
Team Guidelines

1. Transition for Birth Families

- Support is provided to the birth family after termination of parental rights.
- The team addresses the family's anger, grief and loss.
- The family is helped to reach resolution and a renewed sense of control, direction and purpose.
- The team or mediator facilitates sharing of information between the adoptive and birth families (when appropriate).

2. Transition for Adoptive Families

- The family's commitment to permanency is explored and understood.
- Full disclosure of child/youth's information, including short- and long-term needs is made.
- The family's and the child/youth's strengths identified to meet those needs are identified.
- The family's existing supports are identified.
- Additional, necessary supports and resources are identified.
- All family members are included in decision making.
- There is a realistic description of which supports will and will not be available.
- The adoptive mother understands her unique role as a target of the child/youth's anger and is prepared to deal with the child/youth's pain while not losing confidence in her mothering.
- The adoptive family members can temper their expectations and understand the need for patience over time, foremost with themselves and their own ambivalent feelings.
- The adoptive family knows how and where further help can be obtained in the future.
- The foster/adoptive family are supported if the child/youth is transitioned out of their home.

3. Transition for Adopted Children/Youth

- The team understands that there is no good way this child/youth came to adoption.
- The team can view this adoption "through the eyes of this child/youth."
- The child/youth's grief and loss are assessed and addressed.
- The child/youth's attachment to the new family is assessed and addressed.
- A structured transition experience is facilitated with the child/youth, the adoptive family and the birth family (if appropriate).
- The team has adoption expertise and employs it to manage.

1. The child/youth's grief and loss
2. The child/youth's sense of rejection and abandonment
3. The child/youth's guilt and shame
4. The child/youth's loss of trust
5. The child/youth's loss of identity
6. The child/youth's loss of control
7. The child/youth's divided loyalty

4. *System Steps for Transition to Adoption*

- Change the permanency goal to adoption when reunification is ended, by amending or creating a new service plan.
- If a concurrent adoption plan is not already in place, implement or initiate one with the adoptive family.
- If the child/youth is not legally free, work with the State's attorney general to have a Terminate Parents Rights (TPR) request filed with the court. Enter the TPR filing date in the Child/Youth Assessment report.
- Establish the adoptive foster care agreement and enter the agreement date.
- If the child/youth is legally free (both parents have relinquished their rights, parental rights were terminated or parent[s] are deceased), enter the TPR finalized dates in the Child/Youth Assessment report.
- Establish the adoption agreement (formal adoptive placement), and document the adoption agreement date (even if the case is under appeal). If the case is under appeal, indicate this prior to finalization of the adoption; then prepare adoption subsidy agreements, and have them signed and put in place.

Adapted from Transitions in foster care to adoption: Team guidelines, U.S. Department of Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2006.

Transition

♦ Are there any questions or comments about anything we have discussed in this segment?

♦ Thus far, we have focused on the underlying knowledge needed to assist a child/youth in transitioning from foster care to adoption.

♦ In the next segment, we are going to focus on older children/youth adoption. We will apply that knowledge to a specific case example.

Segment III: Older Child/Youth Adoption

Understanding the Issues in Preparing Older Children/ Youth to Transition Successfully into a Family

Trainer's Points

Trainer's
Points

✓ Note to trainer: This segment is designed to stand alone or be trained as part of this module. If trained as part of module, note but do not repeat aspects of 3-5-7 Model.

☐ The next two segments of the Child Assessment and Preparation module focus on older child/youth placement and sibling group placement.

☐ When we speak of "older child/youth," we mean any child/youth age 9 years of or older. This is the age defined in federal policy.

☐ In this segment, we will continue our discussion of the Harris children, their mother, grandmother, uncle, aunt, foster parents, and other adults with an interest in them.

Individual Activity: Personal and Professional Values and Biases

Individual Activity

Handout

Handout 17

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 17**, *Personalizing Adoption Work Sheet*. You will have 15 minutes to answer the four questions on this work sheet:

- **What are your values and beliefs concerning adolescent adoption?**

- **What is your agency's internal attitude and message regarding adolescent adoption?**

- **What are your thoughts about engaging older child/youth in decision making regarding their permanency options?**

- **Do you believe that older children/youth can be adopted?**

Personalizing Adoption Work Sheet

You will have 15 minutes to answer the following questions:

What are your values and beliefs concerning older child/adolescent adoption?

What is your agency's internal attitude and message regarding older child/adolescent adoption?

What are your thoughts about engaging older child/youth in decision making regarding their permanency options?

Do you believe that older children/youth can be adopted?

Large Group Discussion

✓ Ask for volunteers to share their responses.

✓ Use their experiences to transition to the following comments about personal and professional values in relation to adolescent adoption.

Trainer's Points

☐ Most individuals have values, beliefs and biases about older child/youth and adolescent adoption that may have been influenced by their work and/or personal experiences.

☐ Value systems, individual and professional, guide behavior.

☐ In (*state*), there are (*number*) children/youth available for adoption.

☐ Of these children/youth, (*percentage*) are white, (*percentage*) are African American, (*percentage*) are Hispanic, (*percentage*) are Asian/Pacific Islander, (*percentage*) are multiracial, and (*percentage*) of are undetermined race.

☐ Of these children, (*number*) are under 1 year, (*number*) are ages of 1 through 5 years, (*number*) are ages of 6 through 10 years, (*number*) are ages of 11 through 15 years, and (*number*) are 16 years or older.

☐ As we can see by the numbers, the majority of the children/youth waiting to be adopted are ages of (*age range shown by data*).

☐ When we say "older child/youth," we are referring to a child/youth who is 9 years of age or older.

☐ In this state, there are (*number*) older children/youth.

☐ Can older children/youth be adopted? The answer is YES, YES, YES!

☐ Success starts with the caseworker believing that there is a family for the older child/youth who wants to make a lifelong connection with the child/youth, even to adopt!

☐ Let's begin with the Harris children's journey through foster care to adoption.

DVD Description
Isaiah's Story - Part 1 (24:15 min.)

☐ Told entirely from the perspective of 15-year-old Isaiah Harris, this DVD uses the device of a video Life Book to describe the experiences of one African American adolescent in foster care. Addressing the camera throughout, Isaiah uses storytelling, flashbacks, and original rap lyrics to communicate his experiences since entering care. He relates the meetings with social workers, supervised visits with his mother, therapy sessions and, finally, the landmark day when he and his brother learn that their mother's parental rights are going to be terminated.

Individual Activity

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 18,** *Isaiah Part 1.*

☐ As you watch the DVD, jot down some issues to the first question:

- **What might be some issues involved in preparing Isaiah to transition successfully into an adoptive family?**

Large Group Discussion

✓ Ask participants their reactions to the DVD.

✓ Ask the above question and write participants' comments on easel paper. Summarize them and add additional issues if they have not been identified.

Individual Activity

✓ Next, give participants 15 minutes to enter information to the next question:

- **What information from this DVD should be recorded in your child assessment, and where would you record it?**

DVD Description

Individual Activity

Handout

Handout 18

Large Group Discussion

Individual Activity

Isaiah - Part 1

(Jot down your answers to the following questions.)

What might be some issues involved in preparing Isaiah to transition successfully into an adoptive family?

What information from this DVD should be recorded in your child assessment, and where would you record it?

Trainer's Points

☐ Children/youth in the child welfare system have experienced traumatic events. These events are caused as a result of their removal from their birth family and also from the events which caused their removal. These experiences, including neglect and/or physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, may cause the child/youth to have feelings that compare with being in a fight for life and many have been expected to deal with these feelings on his/her own. Allowing the child/youth the opportunity to discuss and express his/her feelings in an appropriate way may be the catalyst to help him/her move on. Furthermore, child welfare practitioners need to recognize that these children/youth have been through traumatic events that have enabled them to put a protective shell around their feelings, allowing them to isolate from the pain of past hurtful experiences. (Spaulding for Children, 1998)

☐ Even in the homes that we may feel are not safe or conducive to their welfare, children/youth know what to expect in these homes, and to be disrupted from what is known can be traumatic in itself. These previous experiences may represent a sense of permanence for the child/youth, and this misinformed definition needs to be redefined. (Spaulding for Children, 1998)

☐ Through the abuse and neglect that children/youth have suffered, the child/youth may begin to feel that the world is unsafe. This causes him/her to create a protective shell over his/her emotions which are difficult to break. This behavior is the child/youth's way of coping and surviving the world. As a result, it is carried over into his/her life in foster care, and the child/youth sees anyone who is trying to remove this shell as a threat. (Spaulding for Children, 1991 and 1996)

☐ Placement into foster care is only one dramatic event in a chain of losses. To repair the damage and to restore the children/youth to permanent family connections, we have to deal with certain fundamental issues, previously identified in the 3-5-7 Model.

☐ To effectively prepare and transition a child/youth into a new family the issues of loyalty, loss and grief, self-esteem, behavior management, and self-determination need to be addressed. (Spaulding for Children, 2000)

☐ It is important to understand that even if the child/youth addresses these issues, it takes time to master the understanding that he/she needs in order to move on. The child or youth may have difficulty in attaching to a new family at first, and the attachment process itself facilitates some of the preparation work. (Spaulding for Children, 1998)

☐ Let's discuss these five issues in more detail.

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 19,** *Five Major Issues a Child/Youth Needs to Address in the Process of Moving Successfully into a Family*.

Handout

Handout 19

Five Major Issues a Child/Youth Needs to Address in the Process of Moving Successfully into a Family

1. **Loyalty**

2. **Loss and Grief**

3. **Self-esteem**

4. **Behavior Management/Survival Behaviors**

5. **Self-determination**

Adapted from the *Family Bound* Curriculum, 2000, Spaulding for Children.

I. Loyalty Issues

☐ Loyalty issues may impact a young person's beliefs about his or her relationship with parents and/or other relatives. Some children/youth are still waiting after many years for someone to come to rescue them. (Spaulding for Children, 2000)

☐ Many believe that allowing anyone else to care for them will cut them off irrevocably from those they love. (Spaulding for Children, 2000)

☐ Others remember threats and promises about being faithful to their "own family" and feel they dare not move on. In fact, they may be afraid that if someone else cares for them, or worse, if they care for someone other than their birth parents, their birth parents will be lost to them forever. (Spaulding for Children, 2000)

☐ Some older children/youth may have negative feelings or resentment toward the child welfare system, especially after a termination of parental rights hearing. These youth may also have a different viewpoint on the reasons why they are in care or what their parents might have done or not done to contribute to the termination of their parental rights. (Mallon, Lakin, Lyons, and Khoury, 2006)

Large Group Discussion

✓ Write responses from the group to the following question on easel paper:

- **Can any of you give an example where Isaiah was addressing a loyalty issue?**

Trainer's Points

II. Loss and Grief

☐ Loss is a big issue with children/youth in the child welfare system.

☐ Upon placement into the child welfare system, these losses can include loss of biological families, loss of control, loss of connections with siblings and/or other loved ones, and loss of community to name a few. (Spaulding for Children, 1996)

☐ Although knowing that others have gone through and felt the pain of loss may not necessarily relieve it, this knowledge may help to minimize the shame and guilt associated with loyalty and loss issues.

☐ Children/youth need to have the opportunity to bring the shame they feel about their own losses out into the open in order to recover. (Spaulding for Children, 2000)

☐ Furthermore, recovery from loss, usually involves passing through the stages of grief. (Spaulding for Children, 1996)

☐ These stages include "shock/denial, anger/blame, guilt/bargaining, sadness/depression, and understanding/acceptance." (Kubler-Ross and Kessler, 1969)

☐ Many young people have never learned that everyone goes through stages of grief and that sometimes we get stuck. (Spaulding for Children, 2000)

☐ It should be understood that:

- All children/youth grieve.
- Grief is a normal reaction to loss.
- Expression/intensity is unique for each child/youth.
- Grief is a process, not an event.
- Grief is revisited in each developmental age.

☐ Expressions of grief can be sporadic bursts and unexpected or longer term, such as depression or isolating oneself.

☐ Grief cannot be fixed. It is a process that requires time.

☐ Culture and ethnicity influence the grief process.

☐ Grief is stressful and lacks context for children. The older child/youth knows and experiences grief in various ways, but often does not show it.

Large Group Discussion

☐ Write the group's responses to the following question on easel paper:

- **What losses do children/youth in the child welfare system experience?**

    - *loss of childhood*
    - *loss of family – termination of parental rights*
    - *loss of history – lack of documentation in case files*
    - *loss of trust – failure of adults to honor promises*
    - *loss of control – no say in what happens to themselves*
    - *loss of innocence – neglect and abuse by caregivers or others*
    - *loss of community/friends – changes in placements*
    - *loss of social workers, judges, foster parents, child care workers while in the system*

Trainer's Points

☐ With each loss, there is grief.

☐ Rarely do we encourage or support older children/youth with the grieving process. Perhaps this is because we are uncomfortable with the grieving process ourselves. Let's look at the five common stages of grief. Please turn to **Participant's Handout 20,** *The Five Phases of Grief.*

Directions

✓ After each phase is described, ask participants whether they ever have experienced these feelings and, if so, whether they would be willing to share their experiences.

The Five Phases of Grief

1. Shock/Denial

The first in the five common phases is shock/denial. During this stage, the child/youth doesn't wish to believe the loss. They cannot endure the pain. They pretend it is not so, or that it does not really matter. Sometimes, they use excessive activity to defend against the pain, or they may withdraw and sleep a lot.

2. Anger/Blame

When the loss can no longer be denied, another emotional response is anger. The child/youth may ask, "Why did this happen to me?" " It is not fair!" "Somebody will pay for my pain!" Sometimes the fear that their anger will hurt someone causes them to block their expression and turn it inward which can result in depression.

3. Guilt/Bargaining

During this phase, the child/youth may attempt to regain control and to prevent the finality of the loss. They may think that they did something to cause the loss, or that they could have done something to prevent it. They feel responsible for the loss that they are experiences.

4. Sadness/Depression

With the realization that the loss occurred and that it cannot be undone, there is an intense awareness of how much the lost person is missed—particularly at moments that had been shared and treasured (mealtimes, bedtime, holidays, etc.) The child/youth may outwardly show emotion through tears or express their feelings inward via depression.

5. Understanding/Acceptance

During this phase, acceptance of the loss finally comes, but there is always the possibility that it may not be total acceptance.   Emotionally, the child or youth may display more energy and be able to grow and change developmentally through this stage.   Each new loss, however, generates a new round of feelings.

Trainer's Points

☐ Although these stages of grief are presented sequentially, it is important to remember that each person experiences grief differently and might stay in one stage longer than another and might seemingly progress to another stage and then regress again.

☐ It is also important to remember that each child/youth is different. Even though a child/youth might appear to have worked through the various stages of the grief process, the loss remains; and grief symptoms related to this loss could appear again.

Team Activity

Team Activity

✓ Note to trainer: This is an exercise to be done in class with the participants and then later to be used by workers with pre-adolescents and adolescents to help prepare them for their transition into families.

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 21, Loss and Grief: Preparing Older/Youth for Their Transition Into Families**.

Handout

Handout 21

☐ Each team is to identify:

- **What each child/youth lost.**
- **Which stage of grief he or she is in.**
- **What each child/youth needs to do to move on to the next stage.**
- **What you, as the caseworker, might do to help the child/youth move on.**

☐ Pay particular attention to how Isaiah and Michael are experiencing and reacting to their losses. Both Isaiah and Michael are "older children." How are their individual reactions different from each other? How are they similar? How are they different from Elizabeth's?

☐ Please select a recorder and a reporter.

☐ You will have 20 minutes to complete this exercise. Then we will reconvene and have each team report.

Loss and Grief: Preparing Older/Youth
for Their Transition Into Families

What each child/youth lost.

Which stage of grief he or she is in.

What each child/youth needs to do to move on to the next stage.

What you, as the caseworker, might do to help the child/youth move on.

Large Group Discussion

✓ Reconvene the group, and have teams report.

✓ Discuss the teams' responses and summarize.

✓ Write the participants' responses on easel paper.

Transition

♦ Are there any questions or comments about anything we have discussed about loyalty, loss or grief?

♦ We now will talk about the issue of self-esteem.

Trainer's Points

☐ Self-esteem is defined as feeling good about oneself. (Davies, 2004)

☐ Without self-esteem, it is difficult for children/youth to move forward. Low self-esteem may prevent a child/youth from believing that someone would care for him or her. Such a child/youth might have the self-perception of not being good enough to be cherished. (Spaulding for Children, 2004)

☐ Self-esteem is a precious possession obtained through learned skills and repeated practice. (Spaulding for Children, 2004)

☐ Addressing this issue can be difficult for the caseworker because no one can give young people self-esteem; they have to get it for themselves.

☐ Self-esteem is pivotal, not just one of the fundamentals of permanency planning contributing to a child/youth's growth through adolescence. A healthy amount of self-esteem means less defensiveness and, therefore, more behavior control. More control means more ability to take charge of one's life and connections.

☐ Probably the best way to help a child/youth to develop self-esteem is to provide opportunities for his or her strengths and skills to be magnified. Placed in such situations, the child/youth can feel successful. (Spaulding for Children, 2004)

☐ There are several other ways to help adolescents build self-esteem. They are: (Cline & Fay, 1992)

- Provide both stated explicit and unstated implicit messages that show you have unconditional love for the child/youth.
- Model your own healthy self-concept to the adolescent.
- Provide both stated and unstated messages that say, "I value you."
- Provide both stated and unstated messages that say, "You can think."
- Provide both stated and unstated messages that say, "You have control."
- Provide opportunities for the child/youth to accept responsibilities, to take ownership of personal decisions, and to struggle through their consequences.

☐ Children/youth look to adults for positive or negative affirmations, whether or not they acknowledge them. (Spaulding for Children, 2004)

Large Group Discussion

- **How do you help the children/youth on your caseload to develop self-esteem?**

Transition

♦ Are there any questions or comments about self-esteem?

♦ Now, we will discuss the issue of behavior management.

Trainer's Points

☐ The management of one's behavior is closely related to self-determination. Older children/youth understand that behaviors have consequences. (Spaulding for Children, 2004)

☐ Behavior management can be compounded with children/youth, who may have had multiple foster home placements. They are expected to adapt to each home that they have been moved to and expected to modify their behaviors, which can create further confusion. They may contribute to them not developing normal healthy attachments to parental figures. (Fahlberg, 1991, Spaulding for Children, 1996)

☐ Children/youth with attachment issues have learned to mistrust the adults that they are living with. For the child/youth in foster care placement who thinks, "I am not here to stay," they may attempt to disengage from adult authority by displaying acting out behaviors. (Fahlberg, 1991, Spaulding for Children, 1996)

☐ The constant need to adapt to the expectations of adults with whom they will not continue to be with makes no sense, so they may pull away when these adults attempt to reach out to them and resist any display of love and affection. (Fahlberg, 1991, Spaulding for Children, 1996)

☐ When these children/youth do feel some form of attachment, they may panic and start to misbehave. Unconsciously, they have developed a defense mechanism which tells them to keep away emotionally for fear of feeling or becoming rejected by their caregivers. (Fahlberg, 1991, Spaulding for Children, 1996)

☐ Many use aggressive or acting-out behavioral responses to maintain distance, to prove that they are not wanted and to have some control. A child/youth who feels a lack of control, recognition and/or appreciation finds ways to sabotage relationships with others because of a determination to get control. (Cline and Fay, 1992)

☐ For example, these responses might include obnoxious and defiant behaviors, running away, offensive behavior such as stealing or causing intentional damage to other's possessions, or intentional violation of the rules. (Fahlberg, 1991)

☐ It is important to understand that the child/youth's need to control is usually a reflection of his/her feeling of not being able to control anything. It is important for parents to assist the child/youth to develop age-appropriate autonomy by selecting areas they can legitimately manage. (Fahlberg, 1991)

☐ Lastly, it is important to focus first on identifying the behavior, or how the child/youth learned the behavior. If the underlying issue/need behind the behavior is acknowledged, then the adoptive parent can help the child/youth learn better coping, and adaptive behaviors to meet their underlying needs. (Fahlberg, 1991)

Large Group Discussion

☐ Identify a situation in the DVD and the survival behavior used by Isaiah or Michael.

- **What would you advise the foster/adoptive parent to do in response to the behavior?**

- **How might this approach help Isaiah or Michael to face a similar situation in the future?**

☐ *If the following responses do not come from the group, discuss them. (The following responses were taken from Spaulding for Children, 1991 and 1996, unless otherwise indicated.):*

Testing and Control

- *Because of the abuse and neglect, the child/youth has experienced, he/she may expect the abuse and neglect to continue, even after he/she has been placed in a foster or adoptive home. (*Delaney, 2006)

- *The child/youth may feel a lack of control over the situation, and will display behaviors that may push his/her foster or adoptive parent's patience to the limit.*

- *The child/youth may feel that his/her life is out of control and has a need to exert his/her own control over the situation.*

Loyalty Issues

- *These issues impact how a child/youth feels about his/her relationship with his/her caregivers.*

- *The child/youth may have a desire to continue to wait for years for his/her birth parents to come back and rescue him/her.*

- *The child/youth may have been raised to believe that loyalty to his/her own family is more important than being in a safe and loving environment.*

- *The child/youth may be afraid that if he/she cares for someone or if someone other than his/her parents cares for him/her, the child/youth's birth parents will be lost to him/her forever.*

- *Interwoven with loyalty issues is the painful reality of the losses the child/youth has experienced.*

- *If the child/youth struggles consistently with loyalty issues, the adoptive parents may feel threatened in their attempts to bond and build an attachment to the child/youth.*

Overcompetency

- *The child/youth may not trust that the foster or adoptive parents will adequately care for him/her so he/she overcompensates by doing everything for themself.*

- *Due to the experience of abuse and neglect, the child/youth may be "parentified." The child/youth is used to being the caretaker and finds it difficult to allow someone to care for him/her; or if it is a sibling group, the child/youth may feel that he/she can better care for his/her siblings than the foster or adoptive parents.*

- *The foster or adoptive parents may feel inadequate caring for the child/youth due to the child/youth overcompensating. They may want to take on the role of the nurturing parent but feel isolated due to the child/youth's rejection.*

Anger/Aggression

- *There is an underlying tension in the older child/youth that cannot be identified or expressed into words. The child/youth may lash out at his/her foster or adoptive parents. It's like, "I'll hurt you before you hurt me."*

- *The child/youth may view his/her present caregivers as undependable, unresponsive, and even dangerous.* (Delaney, 2006)

☐ Other behaviors seen often in children in the child welfare system, but not in the DVD include:

Lying and Stealing

- *Due to numerous moves, the child/youth may take something of the foster or adoptive parents to maintain some form of attachment. The child/youth may fear that his/her present home is not permanent.*

- *Because of the abuse and neglect the child/youth has experienced, he/she may have been conditioned to lie to prevent any further abuse from the child/youth's parents.*

- *Foster or adoptive parents may need to overlook the lying and focus on when the child/youth tells the truth. They need to encourage and reinforce any honest expression of a need or opinion from the child/youth.* (Delaney, 2006)

- *Stealing an object may give the child/youth a feeling of comfort and security. This may also reduce feelings of anxiety and insecurity.* (Delaney, 2006)

- *Unless the foster or adoptive parents understand the underlying issues of survival behaviors, they may feel embarrassed or even angry by the behaviors displayed by the child/youth.*

Inappropriate Sexual Behaviors

- *A child/youth who has been sexually abused may display inappropriate sexual behaviors because he/she feels this is the only way to get close to a person.*

- *A child/youth may not have been taught appropriate sexual behaviors.*

Large Group Discussion

- *The child/youth may be in danger of becoming a perpetrator themself. This is especially threatening to foster or adoptive parents who have younger children in the home.*

  Food Hoarding

- *Due to the abuse and neglect the child/youth has suffered, he/she may have been deprived of food on a regular basis.*

- *The child/youth may hide or hoard food for fear of not having food when he/she becomes hungry.*

- *The child/youth may overeat to the point of "making himself/herself ill."*

Trainer's Points

☐ We have addressed the behaviors and offered suggestions for changing the behavioral responses in the future. What we have not done yet is to address the underlying issues that resulted in the chosen survival behavior.

☐ Clearly, some behavioral responses occur because the child/youth "doesn't know any better" or "hasn't been taught how to handle" certain situations or emotions.

☐ Some behavioral responses of children/youth in the child welfare system are related directly to the children/youth's experiences in the child welfare system.

Large Group Discussion

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 22,** *Underlying Socio-Emotional Issues of Survival Behaviors*.

✓ Review this handout with the group.

Underlying Socio-Emotional Issues of Survival Behaviors

Survival Behaviors	Underlying Emotional Issues
Lying/ Stealing	Value Issues **"What I learned in my birth family and through the system about how to behave is very different from how your family behaves."**
Hoarding food	Control, fear of dependency **"I don't know when I'll eat again. There was never any food in my house.**
Isolation, distancing	Fear of trust/attachment **"I don't want to get close to other people. They'll just hurt me."**
Defiance, testing	Need of control **"I feel that my life is out of control."**
Hitting, aggressiveness	Anger, communication **"I'll hurt you before you hurt me."**
Bossy, stubborn, overcompetency	Overcompensation **"I am not a child! I have been taking care of myself and my brothers and sisters for years. I don't trust you to take care of me."**
Inappropriate sexual behavior	Seeking love, attention **"This is the only way that I know to get close."**
Identity issues	Poor sense of self-esteem **"Because of my abuse/neglect, many moves, or believing I was given away, I feel like a nobody."**
Anger/Depression	Underlying tension that can't be identified or described in words. **"I'm afraid to get close to you. You may hurt me too."**
Separation/Anxiety	Emotional or developmental delays. **"You will leave me just like everyone else has."**

Adapted from the *Adoption Support and Preservation* curriculum, Spaulding for Children, 1996.

What Can We Do to Help the Older Child/Youth Modify Survival Behaviors?

Trainer's Points

☐ The child/youth's sees survival as his/her primary job in out-of-home placement. Survival behaviors are so named because they help the child/youth fend off ultimate disaster. They tend to be reasonable responses to unreasonable situations, although they may appear to be dysfunctional to most adults who are unfamiliar with the effects of early childhood trauma. (Spaulding for Children, 1996)

☐ Survival behaviors are pervasive and impact on many aspects of life. They tend not to be isolated incidents. They tend to be persistent and can last over time. (Spaulding for Children, 1996)

☐ Our job as child welfare practitioners is to not only understand survival behaviors and their underlying issues, but to also discuss with the child/youth and his/her family how these behaviors can help and hurt.

☐ Furthermore, because survival behaviors can be perceived as only helpful by the children/youth that display them, standard behavior management techniques are not always successful. It is critical to address the reasons the behaviors were established and to focus interventions on these underlying emotional issues. (Spaulding for Children, 1996)

☐ The experiences and behaviors the child/youth brings to the adoptive family need to be acknowledged, accepted, allowed, and adapted over time. For the older child/youth an effective behavior management approach for the adoptive family is to understand the child/youth's frustrations and desired outcomes and show him/her better ways to achieve the desired results.

Large Group Discussion

☐ Think of a specific situation that you have addressed with an adolescent.

☐ Describe the situation. Tell the group what you did and how the adolescent responded.

☐ Do you think this intervention got to the issues underlying why the adolescent behaved as he or she did?

Transition

♦ Are there any questions or comments about behavior management?

♦ Now, we will discuss the issue of self-determination.

V. Self-determination

Trainer's Points

☐ No older child/youth at the age of consent can be placed in adoption against his/her own will.

☐ Many times, when an older child/youth is simply asked, "Do you want to be adopted?" the answer is "No."

☐ This "No" does not necessarily mean that the child/youth doesn't want a family but could be associated with his/her desire to be in control of his/her own life.

☐ This "loss of control" may be represented by the prior decisions that were made for these children/youth by others. Examples include:

- Circumstances that caused their removal from their birth families and their birth families' inability to provide a safe and stable environment.

- The original decision by the court, child welfare agency, and/or law enforcement for their removal from the birth family.

- The court or agency's decision regarding termination of parental rights.

- The prospective adoptive parents' decision or agency's decision regarding matching and placement for adoption.

☐ Therefore, the only decision that some children/youth feel they have is the choice on whether or not to be adopted.

☐ It is a good idea that when given a "No" to adoption by the child/youth, clarifying questions be asked to determine what that "No" might really mean.

☐ The definition of self-determination means that they child/youth feels empowered and is given choices or options about having a family in his/her life. The caseworker should clearly explain to the child/youth his/her options and processes to obtain those options. The caseworker and the child/youth should equally guide each other in the decision on whether adoption will or will not be an option.

☐ Older children in many States must consent to their adoption. In this State, age of consent for adoption is _____. (*Note: The trainer should find out whether this applies to the state where the training is conducted.*)

☐ Children/youth should be engaged in a discussion about adoption at the very beginning of the process so that they are involved in the decision making process at every step.

☐ It is imperative that older children/youth be given the opportunity to have input and are offered choices about the things that directly affect them. This illustrates to them that they do have some control over their lives.

☐ We need to teach our children/youth decision making skills, allowing them to own the consequences—positive or negative—for the decisions they make.

☐ The child/youth who feels like he/she has some control over his/her life, may decrease his/her attempts in trying to control his/her perspective adoptive parents or other adults/significant others. (Cline and Fay, 1992)

Large Group Discussion

✓ Ask participants:

- **When a child/youth says, "No, I don't want to be adopted," what does it mean?**

☐ Some of the responses may be:

- *"I already have a family, even if you say they have no rights!"*
- *"I don't want to give up my past connections."*
- *"I'm too bad for a family."*
- *"I can take care of myself."*
- *"No one really wants me anyway. Why do you think I'm here?"*
- *"I don't want to change my last name."*
- *"I don't want somebody else telling me what to do all the time."*

Large Group
Discussion

Trainer's
Points

☐ In the event of termination of parental rights, it is important for caseworkers to recognize that many children/youth do not see that court order as truly terminating the relationship between them and their birth parents. Furthermore, many may try to contact or visit members of their birth family and may harbor the belief that one day they will go home to be with their family. (Mallon, 2005)

☐ This belief is often one of the reasons for the "No" response the adoption question.

☐ In this case, the child/youth could be supported in a positive way to have safe contact with members of his/her birth family that the child/youth feels are important. This could also alleviate a concern by the child/youth that his/her birth family was being replaced by another family. (Mallon, 2005)

☐ Another reason for a "No" response could be that older children are exposed to various sources or information, including their own caseworkers and others telling them that "Older children are not adoptable and that there are no families who would want to adopt an older child." So, instead of waiting to be rejected, they reject.

☐ Caseworkers may be ambivalent in pursuing the underlying issues behind a "No" response. This could be due to past failed attempts at securing a adoptive family for an older child or the fear of disappointing the child/youth.

☐ However, fostering a positive belief that older children/youth are adoptable can go an extremely long way into securing loving adoptive homes for these children/youth.

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 23,** *What You Can Do Instead of Accepting "No";* and review the strategies in it that may be helpful.

Handout

Handout 23

What You Can Do Instead of Accepting "No"

- Review the child/youth's entire case record. Speak with any and all people to uncover clues about possible connections. (This can include previous child welfare workers, foster parents, therapists, teachers, and even the birth family, including paternal members.) (Spaulding for Children, 1998; Mallon, Lakin, Lyons, and Khoury, 2006)

- Find out the child/youth's perception of what has happened to him or her, including personal feelings about legal status and what adoption means to them.

- Clarify any misconceptions or misinformation that the child/youth has and address the feelings underlying the desire not to be adopted. (Spaulding for Children, 1998)

- Empathetically discuss with the child/youth where he/she might like to belong. Address the feelings underlying the desire not to be adopted. (Mallon, Lakin, Lyons, and Khoury, 2006)

- Actively involve the child/youth in the permanency planning process.   Include him/her in the decision that needs to be made and the actions that need to be taken on his/her behalf and actively listen to what the child/youth has to say. (Spaulding for Children, 1998; Mallon, Lakin, Lyons, and Khoury, 2006)

- During court hearings, case planning meetings, school decision making meetings, etc, encourage the child/youth to have input on what he/she wants and needs. (Mallon, Lakin, Lyons, and Khoury, 2006)

- Ask the child/youth about the important people in his/her life. Help the child/youth to recall those people with whom he/she felt most comfortable or would like to re-establish a connection. (Spaulding for Children, 1998; Mallon, Lakin, Lyons, Khoury, 2006)

- Ask with whom the child/youth wants to spend holidays, birthdays, etc. (Mallon, Lakin, Lyons and Khoury, 2006)

- Help the child/youth "look into the future," by visioning with him/her where he/she would like to be 5, 10, or 15 years from now. Ask them "who would they like to be connected to at that time or what would their family look like?" (Mallon, Lakin, Lyons and Khoury, 2006)

- Model trustworthiness for the child/youth by following through on all commitments and verbal agreements. (Spaulding for Children, 1998)

DVD Description
"Isaiah - Part 2" (21:45 min.)

☐ Continuing where "Isaiah - Part 1" left off, this DVD follows Isaiah Harris through the permanency planning process after the TPR decision. The DVD takes place on one single afternoon as Isaiah and his caseworker, Kate Woodbridge, drive around town so that Isaiah can record DVD footage of the places that have been significant to him—especially his foster homes. Kate uses this activity to explore Isaiah's feelings about permanency and to help him think about the long-term implications of his decisions.

☐ Now, let's watch the DVD.

Directions

✓ Reconvene participants.

✓ Ask participants their reactions to the DVD.

✓ Debrief.

- **Which techniques did Kate Woodbridge use to guide Isaiah in making his decision about adoption?**

Individual Activity

☐ Take about 15 minutes to enter information on Isaiah's assessment.

Addressing Issues Involved in
Adoption of Older Children/Youth

Trainer's Points

☐ There are several issues when considering adoption of older children/youth. These may include caregiver and caseworker attitudes. Possible caregiver attitudes are as follows:

Non-Related Foster Families

- Being trained as a foster parent, it is always reiterated during training that foster care is "temporary." Foster parents may feel that they are not in it for the long term but only for the short term and may feel ambivalent about making a permanent commitment. (Spaulding for Children, 1999)
- For the child/youth that has contact with his/her birth family, that the family may be uncomfortable with continued contact after termination of parental rights. (Spaulding for Children, 1999)
- They may not feel that they have the capacity to meet the needs of the older child/youth as an adoptive parent. As long as the child/youth remains in his/her home as a foster child, they don't have to make the commitment to care for the child/youth until adulthood. (Spaulding for Children, 1999)
- There may be a concern from the foster parents that they may not receive the same level of support from the agency after the adoption is finalized. (Spaulding for Children, 1999)

Kin/Relative Families

- They may feel that the child/youth would be better in their home due to the abuse and/or neglect the child/youth has suffered but feel conflicted over the termination of the biological parents' parental rights. (Lyons, 2006)
- Kin providers may lack the "system" experience that other non-kin providers receive through orientation or pre-service training and may be less able to effectively navigate the system like these families can. (Lyons, 2006)
- They may be angry with the biological parent for being in the situation that they are in and feel that they should parent their own child. (Crumbley and Little, 1997)
- Some kin have raised their own children to adulthood and don't want to commit to caring for the child/youth long term. (Crumbley and Little, 1997)

- They may not want to give up hope for the biological parent and may feel that they will eventually get their "act" together. (Crumbley and Little, 1997)

Newly Recruited Adoptive Families

- Some perspective parents feel that an older child/youth does not fit "their fantasy" or expectation about the type child they hope to adopt. (Spaulding for Children, 1999)
- They may feel that an older child/youth will not fit into their family due to the child/youth's past life experiences. (Spaulding for Children, 1999)
- For the child/youth that has contact with his/her birth family, they may be uncomfortable with continued contact after termination of parental rights. (Spaulding for Children, 1999)
- They may fear that they will not have any influence over the child/youth as he/she is already "set in their ways." (Spaulding for Children, 1999)
- There are several issues when considering adoption of older children/youth. These may include caregiver attitudes and caseworker attitudes.

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 24,** *Child Welfare Practitioner Issues*.

✓ Review the handout with participants.

Handout

Handout 24

Child Welfare Practitioners' Issues

Feel that adoption is not an achievable option for older children and youth. (Charles and Nelson, 2000)

At times, caseworkers believe that the older a child/youth is, the least likely they will become adopted. They may feel that the child/youth has too many mental health issues as a result of the abuse and neglect they have suffered. Some workers feel that there are not very many families that are willing to make the commitment to the child/youth to help them deal with the issues they have suffered. They may feel that if a structured program doesn't seem to help and meet the child/youth's needs, than how can a family help? If a worker believes a child/youth can't be adopted, then they probably won't be.

Possible Solution: Diligently recruit families who may want children/youth who are older or might have mental or physical challenges. Make contacts with agencies that specialize in finding homes for these children/youth. Utilize media to campaign for appropriate homes. Use support systems to assist in searching for a home for the older child/youth. Avoid over promising to the child/youth. Be realistic. Explain that finding the right home will take time and persistence. Make sure the child/youth has a supportive caregiver. Lastly, once a potential adoptive family is secured, provide all appropriate information regarding the child/youth to the family so that they can make an informed decision.

Feel that it is easier to accept a "No" response to adoption versus pursuing an adoption plan with and older child/youth. (Mallon, et.al, 2006).

If a caseworker truly believes that it is "way too hard" to accomplish an adoption plan for an older child/youth is, he or she will not take the effort to diligently find a family that fits. Caseworkers who believe that a child/youth will never change their mind about adoption or accept at face value a "No" response to the adoption question may contribute to the growing numbers of older youth who are aging out of the foster care system without any permanent family connection. It is our responsibility to secure permanent family connections for our youth.

Possible Solution: Encourage the child/youth to participate in his/her adoption plan. Talk with the child/youth regarding his/her feelings about belonging to a family. Ask the child/youth to identify desired family characteristics and the time to begin recruiting.

Fear that a family may be intimidated or not engage in the treatment process.

Sometimes, caseworkers believe that since foster families have been trained to become foster parents and cared for a foster child, they may feel that they are more adept about deciding what is best for the child/youth. Some caseworkers may feel that introducing a child/youth to a new family may cause the child/youth to regress after making progress in their treatment.

(continued on next page)

Possible Solution: Encourage current caregivers to participate in the youth's treatment process. Remember, caregivers might know more about a child/youth's feelings and attitudes concerning adoption. The caregiver might have more insight into the needs of the child/youth. Discuss the child/youth's treatment process openly with the caregiver, and allow him/her to verbalize their thoughts and concerns.

Addressing Your Own Internal Issues

Issues of loss and grief may trigger emotional memories in the caseworkers themselves, and they may over-identify with the child/youth. These feelings may be challenging for the caseworker and he/she may focus on their own issues instead of the child/youth.

Possible Solutions: Know yourself and the personal values that you bring to your work. What are your strengths and weaknesses in working with children/youth who might not be much younger than you? How can you get the support and training that you need to do your job now and in the future? Ask every child/youth what they want—don't assume you know! Listen, hear, and act on their answers.

Transition

♦ Does anyone have any other issues that were not discussed yet?

♦ Are there any questions or comments about anything we have discussed so far?

♦ Next, we will discuss the dynamics of older/youth transitioning to adoptive placements.

Dynamics of Older Children/Youth Transitioning to Adoptive Placements

Trainer's Points

Trainer's Points

☐ Now, we are going to shift gears and to conduct an exercise that illustrates issues unique to older children/youth placements.

Large Group Discussion

Large Group Discussion

✓ Ask participants to think of as many characteristics of older children/youth as they can and to shout them out.

✓ Write their responses on easel paper.

✓ After you have exhausted the responses, go through the list:

- **Is this characteristic positive, negative or both?**

☐ Typical responses may include:

- wanting new experiences
- idealistic
- fearless
- responsible
- self-centered
- self-conscious
- self-absorbed
- critical of self and others
- defiant and angry
- believe they are immortal
- opinionated
- confused
- shortsighted
- false independence
- aggressive
- concerned with peer
- group
- loyal to friends
- striving for independence
- independent
- defensive
- omnipotent
- moody
- easily influenced
- insecure
- indecisive
- attitudinal
- stubborn
- creative
- challenging

Adapted from Special Issues for Teens, *Understanding Infant Adoption* curriculum, Spaulding for Children, 2005.

Trainer's Points

☐ The fact that a behavior can be interpreted as both a positive characteristic and a challenge is an example of the contradictions that typify the turmoil of adolescence.

☐ So, navigating situations with adolescents is difficult enough with all of the "normal" characteristics affecting how older children/youth think, feel and act.

☐ This difficulty is compounded when one takes into account the issues of loss, grief and learned helplessness common amongst adolescents in the child welfare system.

☐ If we can remain mindful of this, we can begin to build positive and mutually beneficial relationships with older children/youth who are transitioning to adoption.

☐ Remember, all of this takes time, patience, understanding, flexibility, and realistic expectations.

Large Group Discussion

☐ We've talked about some of the characteristics of older children.

- **How are these characteristics related to the normal developmental tasks of adolescence?**

- **How might these normal developmental tasks be impacted by experiences in the child welfare system?**

Transition

♦ Are there any questions or comments about anything we have discussed so far?

♦ Next, we will discuss the issue of attachment in adolescence.

Attachment and Relationships

Trainer's Points

What Is Attachment?

☐ Attachment is the formation of stable, emotional connections by the child/youth with the significant people in his/her life.

☐ Attachment is a physiological, emotional, cognitive and social phenomenon.

☐ This process begins in early infancy as the child/youth bonds with one or more primary caregivers.

☐ There is an instinct to attach. Babies instinctively reach out for the safety and security of a "secure base" with caregivers. Parents instinctively protect and nurture their offspring. Instinctive attachment behaviors in a baby are activated by cues or signals "social releasers" from the caregiver .

☐ Attachment profoundly influences every component of the human condition—mind, body, emotions, relationships and values. Forming attachment is not something that is done to children; rather, it is something that children/youth and others create together in an ongoing, reciprocal relationship.

☐ Attachment to a protective and loving caregiver who provides guidance and support is a basic human need.

☐ Failure to establish these types of important connections before the age of 5 can result in difficulties with a wide variety of social relationships for significant periods of time later in the child/youth's life.

☐ Severe cases of lack of attachment can fit within the definition of a permanent condition known as "reactive attachment disorder."

Why Attachment Is Important

☐ An individual without a solid attachment will not learn trust and empathy or develop a conscience.

☐ Trust is formed in early childhood from the bonding between the caregiver and the child/youth.

☐ Individuals who have not experienced such bonding might feel empty and unloved, just as they view the rest of the world to be.

☐ These individuals will not allow others to be in control of their feelings to others due to lack of trust.

☐ Unattached children/youth might appear to be bossy, manipulative, resistive to attachments and precociously self-reliant loners.

☐ Such children/youth might not want to form a truly unconditional, loving relationship with anyone.

☐ They can appear connected and compliant for weeks, as long as there is no demand placed on them for commitment or attachment. This is especially true if there is no investment in a relationship with extended family members, neighbors, strangers, and peers. This can be especially damaging to the immediate family.

☐ In fact, these children/youth might have learned many ways to manipulate others to get what they want. To strangers or acquaintances, they can appear quite charming and loving.

☐ Lack of trust, empathy or conscience greatly hampers the ability of a child/youth to function within the norms of traditional family relationships. This can be threatening to an adoptive parent who expects the child/youth to function in customary ways. Children/youth who have not experienced attachment are cautious, as they should be.

☐ Children/youth in the child welfare system, even when they have developed positive attachments, might experience several disruptions in those attachments. For example:

- Separation from birth parents through placement in foster care.

- Multiple, foster care placements requiring changes in caregivers, teachers, community contacts, friends, caseworkers, etc.

- Adoption after attachment to another parent figure has occurred.

- Traumas such as sexual abuse, physical abuse and domestic violence.

- Prolonged hospitalization of either a parent or the child/youth during which access to parents is lost.

(Adapted from Adoption of children over the age of nine years: Developing plans and placement for preparation, recruitment. Spaulding for Children, 2004.)

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 25,** *How Does Attachment Develop?*

☐ This is the first of two cycles of parent and child/youth interactions that contribute to attachment.

☐ As you can see, this cycle is initiated by the child/youth's needs, which can be physical or psychological.

☐ The cycle can be explained as follows: (Spaulding for Children, 1996)

- The child/youth has a need that is expressed as displeasure. The parent or caregiver satisfies this need, and the child/youth returns to contentment. Then the child/youth has another need, and the cycle repeats itself hundreds of times each day. The successful completion of this cycle leads to trust, security and attachment of the child/youth to the caregiver.

- Many factors can interrupt the successful completion of this cycle or can cause failures in the cycle. These include caregivers who may be emotionally or physically unavailable to their children/youth who are medically fragile or unable to signal displeasures. A change in primary caregiver is another factor. When this cycle is impacted by such factors or circumstances, attachment will be affected. Reciprocity is the key. Some adopted children/youth are products of poor attachments. Assessing this possibility when providing post adoption services is critical.

How Does Attachment Develop?

Cycle of Attachment
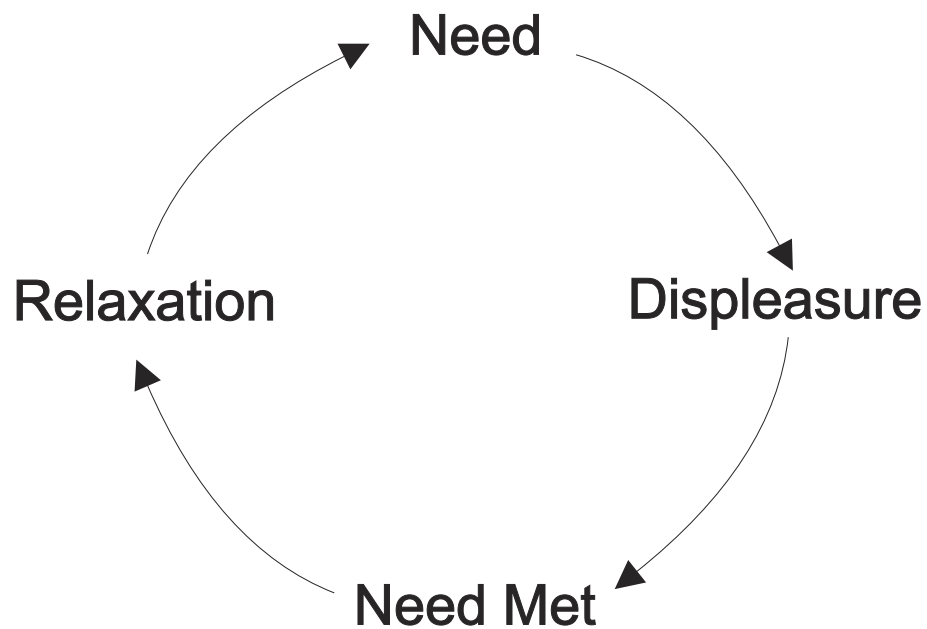
Need

Displeasure

Need Met

Relaxation

Reprinted with permission from Vera Fahlberg, MD, *Attachment and Separation: Putting the Pieces Together*.
Michigan Department of Social Services, 1979, pp. 14-17.

Important Functions of Attachment for Children/Youth

Trainer's Points

☐ (The following Trainer's Points are taken directly from Attachment, trauma, & healing: Therapy for children & families, Levy, T.M., & Orleans, M., 1998.)

☐ Attachment has several important functions. It helps the child to:

- learn basic trust and reciprocity. They serve as a template for all future emotional relationships.

- explore the environment with feelings of safety and security (secure base). This leads to healthy cognitive and social development.

- develop the ability to self-regulate. This results in effective management of impulses and emotions.

- create a foundation for the formation of a self-identity. This includes developing a sense of competency and self-worth, plus a balance between dependence and autonomy.

- establish a pro-social, moral framework that involves empathy, compassion and conscience.

- provide a defense against stress and trauma that incorporates resourcefulness and resilience.

☐ Children/youth who begin their lives with the essential foundation of secure attachment fare better in all aspects of functioning as their development unfolds.

When the Cycle of Attachment Goes Wrong

Trainer's Points

☐ Difficulties in the attachment cycle can result from any of the following:

- A baby who doesn't give cues, and/or a caregiver who doesn't pick up on the baby's cue, including the parent whose mental impairment, mental illness or substance use/abuse inhibit their capacity to recognize and respond to the baby's cues.

- Depression or other environmental factors influencing the caregiver.

- Not allowing the child/youth to experience a need.

- An infant exposed to drugs and/or alcohol who as a result doesn't make eye contact or dislikes being touched.

- Prematurity or a disabling condition that results in separation of the caregiver and the child/youth or exhaustion of the family.

- Inexperienced parents who do not know of how to meet a child/youth's needs.

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 26, *The Positive Interaction Cycle.***

☐ In this cycle, the parent initiates positive interaction with the child/youth who responds positively. This leads to further interaction and, ultimately, to feelings of self-worth and self-esteem within the child/youth and the parent. Either the child/youth or the parent can initiate this cycle. It requires that both be responsive. This cycle forms the basis for all relationships into adulthood. When the parent or the child/youth is not responsive and, therefore, the positive interaction cycle is not reciprocal, breakdowns can occur.

☐ When the positive interaction cycle is not completed:

- Children/youth might assume that adults are not trustworthy and will not respond consistently . Their self-esteem will be affected, which can lead to lifelong struggles in relationships.

- Most children/youth from the child welfare system have not experienced success with this cycle. As a result, their responses to caregivers and expectations regarding interactions will be issues that their adoptive families need to address. Most post adoption work centers around helping families to establish positive interactions.

The Positive Interaction Cycle
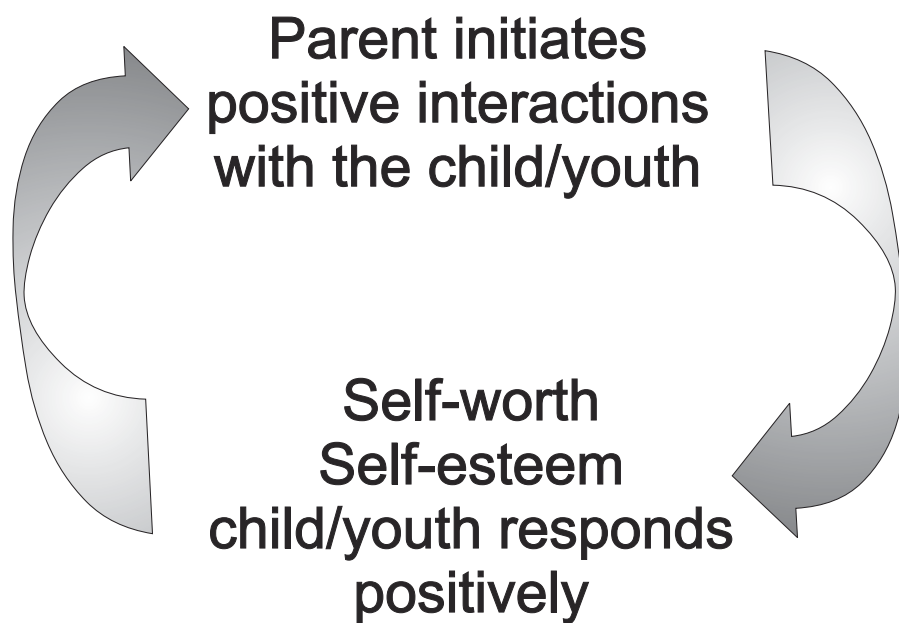
**Parent initiates
positive interactions
with the child/youth**

**Self-worth
Self-esteem
child/youth responds
positively**

Reprinted with permission from Vera Fahlberg, MD, *Attachment and Separation: Putting the Pieces Together.*
Michigan Department of Social Services, 1979, pp. 14-17.

The Negative Working Model

Trainer's Points

☐ The Negative Working Model helps to explain many of the difficult behaviors displayed by children/youth who have been adopted, particularly those who have been abused, neglected and/or exploited. (Based on the Negative Working Model by Dr. Richard Delaney and adapted by Spaulding for Children.)

☐ To understand the Negative Working Model, we need to look first at the Positive Working Model. This Model, which is how many of us view the world, sets forth the idea that the world is okay and that people are basically good. However, sometimes bad things happen.

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 27,** *Negative Working Model*, and review.

☐ In contrast, the Negative Working Model presumes that the world is a bad place and that people are basically evil. Therefore, bad things are likely to happen.

☐ This is how the Negative Working Model plays out in adoptive families:

- After the child/youth settles into the adoptive family, some of the survival behaviors that he/she has developed might begin to surface. These "conduct problems" can prompt the adoptive family to respond in ways similar to those of the maltreating birth family. Without intervention, most adoptive families do not realize that this is happening. They might find themselves feeling out of control, offering less opportunity for negotiation with their child/youth, delivering more dictatorial edicts. They might appear rigid and blaming. In time, they might distance themselves from the child/youth, and such families might become increasingly estranged.

- Dr. Delaney says that these feelings in the adoptive parents result from re-enactment on the part of the adopted child/youth. Re-enactment means that the child/youth creates old relationships with new people. The child/youth might sabotage placements and set up barriers to attachment. Most children/youth who have been adopted do not realize that this is happening; not do their adoptive families.

- The Negative Working Model helps families to interpret "acting out behavior" more objectively. It enables them to work toward changing the patterns of interaction with their children/youth and forming positive attachments. Delaney states that the parents must be the change agents, and that post adoption service providers must coach and empower parents to take on this role.

Negative Working Model
The Child's Attempt to Repeat the Past

Past Negative
or New Positive
Experiences

Education

Support for
New Behaviors
or Re-evaluate
Intervention

Conduct Problems/
Survival Behaviors

Re-enactment
or New Behavior

Open
Working Cycle

Assessment
of Response

Planning
Response

Parental
Response
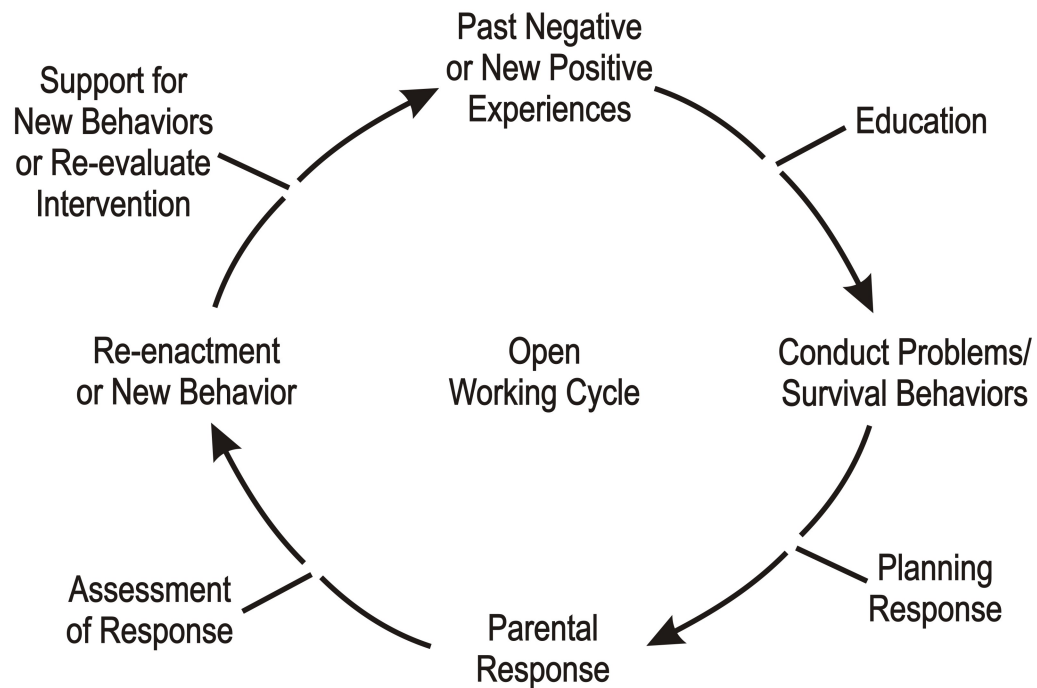
The *Negative Work* Model was developed by Dr. Richard Delaney and
adapted by Spaulding for Children, Southfield, MI, 2007.

Techniques for Intervening in the Negative Working Model

Trainer's Points

☐ Here are techniques that you as an caseworker can use to intervene:

- Contain the acting-out behaviors by resolving the underlying emotional problems, realizing that behavior modification alone does not work.

- Encourage problem-solving strategies and discussions about the Negative Working Model within the family.

- Foster the communication of needs and feelings between family members and their adopted child/youth.

- Teach family members negotiation skills.

- Promote positive encounters between the adoptive parents and the child/youth.

- Help the family to set realistic, achievable goals.

- Use concrete, tangible ideas rather than abstract ones.

- Remind the family that just because the child/youth calls someone "Mom" or "Dad" and says, "I love you," does not mean that the child/youth is attached or even attaching.

- Explain that saying, "I love you" can be different from knowing how love really feels.

- Describe attachment as a process.

- Remind the adoptive family and the child/youth that attachment takes time.

- Explain that the key to its formation is trust and that trust becomes secure only after repeated testing.

- Describe normal attachment as a process that usually takes a couple of years of cycling through mutually positive interactions before it becomes a solid bond.

Trainer's Points

- Point out that the child/youth learns that he/she is loved and can love in return.

- Point out that the adoptive parents need to give love and to learn that the child/youth loves them.

- Explain that the child/youth needs to learn to trust that personal needs will be met in a consistent and nurturing manner in the adoptive family. Point out that over time the child/youth will realize that he/she "belongs" to this family, and they to him or her.

Attachment and Adoption of Older Children/Youth

Trainer's Points

☐ So what does all of this talk about attachment mean in relation to the adoption of older children/youth?

☐ A caseworker needs to assess carefully the level of attachments that an older child/youth has experienced. Then, with the child/youth, determine how these prior experiences will affect the child/youth's acceptance of and adaptation to an adoptive placement.

☐ Older children/youth who have been adopted need time to make adjustments on their own terms.

☐ If a child/youth says, "No" to adoption, the caseworker must acknowledge honestly that the child/youth cannot be forced into adoption.

☐ At the same time, the caseworker needs to explain that their job is to tell the child/youth about adoption and about other options for permanency, to answer any questions, and to assist him/her in making the best decision. Let the child/youth know that you understand that this could take some time.

☐ If the child/youth says, "Yes," to adoption, the caseworker needs to acknowledge honestly that there may be challenges to finding a suitable family if the current caregiver does not want to adopt him/her. Engage the child/youth in identifying prospective adoptive parents. Understand what made the child/youth identify these people. —what is the child/youth's attachment to the identified person(s).

☐ If adoption of an older child/youth is consummated, the adoptive parents' expectations regarding immediate attachment and conformity to family roles need to be tempered with the understanding of the child/youth's previous experiences with relationships.

☐ If the adoption means a change to a new family, the child/youth needs to become familiar with caregivers, friends, relatives, neighbors, teachers, and others in the new environment with whom he/she will have repeated contact.

☐ The child/youth needs to learn the "ins and outs" of the new household's routines and to adapt to living in a new physical environment.

☐ The child/youth might have cultural or language hurdles to overcome.

☐ Until most of these tasks have been accomplished, the child/youth might not be able to relax enough to allow the work of attachment to begin.

☐ As the adults demonstrate that the child/youth is loved unconditionally, he/she can love in return.

☐ Eventually, the child/youth learns to trust that his/her needs will be met in a consistent and nurturing manner. Then the child/youth realizes that he/she and the adoptive family "belong" to each other.

(Adapted from Adoption of children over the age of nine: Developing plans for preparation, recruitment and placement presentation, Spaulding for Children, 2004.)

- **What are some of the other things that caseworkers can do to begin the work of promoting attachment and building healthy relationships?**

Large Group Discussion

Large Group
Discussion

Handout

Handout 28

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 28,** and read the *Placement History Summaries for Isaiah, Michael and Elizabeth.*

Isaiah's Placement History Summary

Age (*When?*)	People and Events in Isaiah's Life (*Who? What?*)	Why Things Happened (*Why?*)	Possible Messages Perceived by Isaiah
12 yrs.	Birth mother. Christine, left Isaiah, Michael and Elizabeth alone. Child Protective Services put Isaiah and Michael in an emergency foster home. Elizabeth was placed with their paternal grandmother, Ernestine Harris.	Sister Elizabeth was found wandering the streets alone, trying to buy food. Mother was nowhere to be found and could not be contacted by phone.	He should have been more attentive to his sister. He should be more responsible. He needs to take better care of his family.
12 yrs.	Isaiah and his brother, Michael, were returned home to their mother.	In-home services were provided to Christine, Isaiah and Michael.	Mother does care, but he needs to be more attentive and responsible.
15 yrs.	Mother left Isaiah and Michael alone. Child Protective Services put Isaiah in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thompson.	Michael was cooking dinner and started a fire. He received third-degree burns. Child Protective Services was called.	It is his fault. He should have paid more attention to his brother. He should have cooked dinner. He is a failure as a caregiver.
15 yrs.	Isaiah moved to the home of Mrs. Butler.	Moved because he couldn't get along with another boy in the home. Foster parents requested his move.	No one wants him. He is just bad. He has to move when there are problems. He can't get along with anyone.
15 yrs.	Isaiah moved to the Williams' foster home and was reunited with his brother, Michael.	Moved because he was having a relationship with a foster sister while in the home.	He shouldn't get close to anyone. Whenever he tries to care, he has to move somewhere else.
15 yrs.	Mr. and Mrs. Williams want to adopt Isaiah and his brother, Michael.	Christine lost her parental rights. Grandmother Ernestine Harris feels that she is too old to adopt the boys.	Don't attach. He isn't worth adopting. His own grandmother doesn't want him.

Michael's Placement History Summary

Age (*When?*)	People and Events in Michael's Life (*Who? What?*)	Why Things Happened (*Why?*)	Possible Messages Perceived by Michael
6 yrs.	Mother, Christine, left Isaiah, Michael and Elizabeth alone. Child Protective Services put Isaiah and Michael in an emergency foster home. Elizabeth was placed with their paternal grandmother, Ernestine Harris.	Sister Elizabeth was found wandering the streets alone, trying to buy food. Mother was nowhere to be found and could not be contacted by phone.	His mother didn't care enough about him to stay and make sure they were okay. His grandmother cares more for his sister than she does for him and Isaiah.
6 yrs.	Michael and his brother, Isaiah, were returned home to their mother.	In-home services were provided to Christine, Isaiah and Michael.	Mother does want him.
9 yrs.	Michael moved to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, foster parents.	Michael was cooking dinner and started a fire. He received third-degree burns. Protective Services was called.	Mother doesn't want him. It's his fault; he should have never started the fire.
9 yrs.	Michael moved to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Williams and was reunited there with his brother, Isaiah.	The Hamilton's asked for Michael's removal. They described him as being emotionally draining, and they were unable to deal with his behavior.	No one wants him. He is just bad. He gets to stay with his brother.
9 yrs.	The Williamses want to adopt. Isaiah is adamant about not being adopted. Michael wants to be with Isaiah.	Christine lost her parental rights. Grandmother Ernestine Harris feels that she is too old to adopt the boys.	He might as well stay with Mr. and Mrs. Williams. His mother doesn't want him.

Elizabeth's Placement History Summary

Age (*When?*)	People and Events in Elizabeth's Life (*Who? What?*)	Why Things Happened (*Why?*)	Possible Messages Perceived by Elizabeth
Birth to 4 years of age	Lived with birth mother.	Mother had physical contact with Elizabeth only when necessary, such as feeding, diaper changes or baths.	My mother doesn't really care. She doesn't help me.
4 yrs. to 7 years	Moved to her paternal grandmother's home.	Elizabeth was found wandering the streets alone, trying to buy food. Mother was nowhere to be found and could not be contacted by phone.	My mother didn't care, but she didn't want to believe that she would let her go hungry. Her grandmother and Uncle Billy love her and wants to take care of her.

Trainer's
Points

☐ Now, answer the following questions:

- **Which child/youth do you believe is the most securely attached? Why?**

- **Which child/youth do you believe is most at risk for attachment difficulties? Why?**

☐ The Placement History Summary is a helpful tool for showing that all three children have had separate, individual and different experiences despite their common family of origin.

✓ Inconsistencies in case vignettes are purposeful and reflect reality. They often serve to engage participants in a discussion of the assumptions made when information is in conflict or missing.

Handout

Handout 29

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 29,** *Working Strategies and Solutions*. These are strategies used in States that have been successful in increasing the number of adoptive placements for older children.

✓ Review the document.

Working Strategies and Solutions

(Taken directly from *Best Practices on Permanency for Older Youth Workshop Reports, National Youth Permanency Convening.* California Permanency for Youth Project. Sturgeon, V., Heffernan, M., Badeau, S. & Bell, R. (2003) Retrieved December, 2007, from http://www.cpyp.org/Files/Best%20Practices%20on%20Permanency%20for%20Older%20Youth.doc

Concurrent Planning for Youth Permanency: For older youth in the system, a number of activities should occur simultaneously and on an ongoing basis until a permanent family is identified. For instance, while it is often likely and best that a family can be found among those already known to the youth, the utilization of traditional recruitment resources should not be delayed pending the outcome of those efforts. Similarly, the other supportive interventions described below should also be provided in order to maximize every opportunity to find, nurture and sustain permanent families.

Preparing a Child/Youth for Permanency

- Listen as the child/youth expresses hopes and fears about family life.

- Understand that a child/youth's initial "No" to adoption is only the beginning of the conversation. In should not diminish efforts to identify a permanent family whom may or may not adopt the child/youth.

- Provide individual and group therapeutic and educational interventions to help the child/youth understand his/her life and to plan for the future. Make permanency considerations a part of this planning.

- Teach interpersonal and family skills. Address emotional and behavioral issues that impact relationships.

- Provide the child/youth with opportunities for contact with other children/youth who have achieved permanence.

Identifying Potential Family Connections Already Known to the Child/Youth

- Listen for family connections that the child/youth may have already or for existing relationships that have the potential to become family.

- Contact significant adults identified by the child/youth. Engage them in helping to plan for the child/youth's permanency. Not all of these adults will have the potential to become permanency resources; but some might have the potential to form long-term, caring relationships.

- Review records carefully to identify any significant adults now or previously in the child/youth's life who can be engaged in helping with permanency planning.

- Make a thorough search for relatives, using case record information plus specialized locator services and technology. Update searches that may have been unsuccessful in the past.

- Don't rule out adults whose relationships with the child/youth began on a professional level— therapists, teachers, child care staff, etc. Do not allow policies regarding dual relationships, which are designed to protect children/youth, to be used as a barrier to pursuing what may be the only option for permanency.

Support the Process of Family Making

- Avoid power struggles whenever possible while persistently working towards permanency. For instance, understand a child/youth's reluctance to consider adoption when there is, as yet, no specific, identified family to meet. At the same time, keep looking for a family.

- Provide reassurance that the child/youth has power in the process, but ask that he or she be willing to meet a potential family when one is identified.

- Recognize that relationship building is a process. Provide ongoing interventions and support to the child/youth and caring adults in order to move the adoption forward.

- When moving towards permanency for the older child whose birth parents or other caregivers have difficulties in functioning, develop safety plans. Provide individualized education about mental health issues, chemical dependency, and personal safety .

- Do not allow a child/youth's need for treatment in a group care setting to undermine potential connections with a permanent family. Remember, that permanency is a relationship, not a place. Encourage treatment/residential facilities to participate in planning for the child/youth's future by recommending that the child/youth have at least one visiting resource family. This can be a relative, foster family or other resource family who can assist the child/youth in forming relationships outside the facility and in "practicing" family relationships and/or family living.

- Recruit, train and pay young people who have been adopted as adolescents by the agency to serve as peer mentors or case consultants in adolescent cases.

Pursue Traditional Adoption Recruitment Avenues

- Utilize all available recruitment resources, such as state, regional and national exchanges; adoption events; recruitment via media; etc.

- With reluctant child/you, keep the conversation going regarding his/her participation in recruitment.

- Empower the child/youth to take charge of using as many recruitment tools as possible. For example, let the child/youth produce a DVD or write a vignette, etc.

- Update photos and materials at least yearly to reflect the child/youth's growth and development.

- Provide opportunities for the older child/youth to meet and to interact with prospective adoptive families. For example, involve the child/youth in picnics, agency mentoring programs, visits to families in residential facilities, etc. if the child/youth is comfortable with these recruitment strategies or activities.

- Implement an adoption preparation program that addresses the child/youth's questions and fears, assists the child/youth in accepting permanence and prepares him/her to move into a permanent family.

Cultural Competence

- Culture strongly impacts the meaning and boundaries of family.

- The racial and cultural characteristics of staff should reflect the racial and cultural characteristics of the children/youth and families served.

- Cultural competence is necessary to identify and to evaluate permanency options.

- Among factors that should be considered are the child/youth's sense of identity and preference regarding the racial/ethnic makeup of a potential adoptive family, as well as ways to keep the child/youth connected to his or her heritage.

Quality Assurance

- Incorporate monitoring and measurement of permanency interventions into each agency's case review and quality assurance programs. Develop such programs where they are not already in place.

- Assure that all computer-based, monitoring systems include questions that will remind caseworkers and supervisors to revisit the discussion about permanency for the child/youth in foster care. Caseworkers need to continue their efforts to find permanence for that child/youth.

- Review cases of children/youth older than a certain age for progress on permanency planning and implementation *more* frequently than other cases.

Transition

- ♦ Are there any questions or comments regarding anything we have discussed adoption of older children/youth?

- ♦ In the next section, we will discuss specific issues concerning sibling group placement.

Segment IV: Adoption of Sibling Groups

Trainer's Points

☐ In this segment, we will:

- explore the uniqueness of the sibling relationship and bond.
- explore reasons for placing siblings together in adoptive homes.
- explore reasons for separating siblings at adoptive placement.
- review best practice methods for sibling placement.
- Discuss a decision-making model for sibling group placement.

☐ In our sibling group discussion, we'll talk about sibling alliances and relationships with "outsiders." Typically, relatives in a kinship placement are not "outsiders" but rather people with whom the children/youth already are familiar.

☐ Since the 1980s, researchers have focused increasing attention on the importance of maintaining sibling ties. It is troublesome that children/youth already deprived of so much (the care of the parents who give them birth, the security of an extended family well known to them, the assurance of a young life filled with loving constancy) also can be deprived of their brothers and sisters.

☐ As you consider the sibling issues that we will explore, begin to add issues of your own and to draw from your professional experience or personal speculation. Cover all the bases. You never will regret the time spent exploring everything pertinent to the specific children/youth under consideration. But as you work, keep the time frame of the children/youth in mind.

☐ Be prepared to concentrate your energies on gathering the necessary information as quickly as possible so that the children/youth do not end up negatively impacted by the delay in decisiveness.

☐ Let's make sure that all of us are all using the same definitions, which are:

- **Biological sibling group**: A group of two or more children/youth related by birth who might or might not live together.

- **Sibling group**: A group of two or more children/youth who have been raised together or have lived together but are not related by birth.

□ As we will see, "siblings" doesn't always refer to children/youth who share biological parents. It also may refer to who have been raised in the same home by the same parents, but who do not share biology. Increasingly we are becoming aware that a shared life experience can have as great an impact as shared biology.

Large Group Discussion

□ Turn to **Participant's Handout 30, *Harris Family Case Profile*.**

□ Sibling groups can provide challenges to securing adoption placement for a number of reasons.

- **When you look at the Harris family, what are some of the challenges to securing adoptive placements for the children?**

- **How would you address these challenges?**

- **What are other challenges that you have experienced in placing siblings for adoption?**

✓ Write responses on easel paper.

✓ These are possible responses:

- *The permanent placement of siblings requires that there must be multiples in terms of everything from beds to bicycles, shoes to seat belts.*
- *The Harris family presents multiple, complex past and present relationships and issues involving birth parents and foster parents.*

- *The relationships among the Harris children have their own unique qualities.*

- *The children have separate relationships with three different families.*

- *Elizabeth is placed separately from her brothers and has a unique relationship with her paternal grandmother.*

- *Isaiah has feelings of responsibility to care for his siblings, yet expresses his desire not to be adopted.*

Harris Family Case Profile

(Please write you answers to the following questions on this handout:)

When you look at the Harris family, what are some of the challenges to securing adoptive placements for the children?

How would you address these challenges?

What are other challenges that you have experienced in placing siblings for adoption?

Sibling Relationships

Trainer's Points

☐ Let's talk about the nature of the sibling relationship and what makes it a special consideration in placement.

Large Group Discussion

- **How many of you have siblings?**

- **How would you describe the contributions, either positive or negative, that your siblings have made to your life?**

- **What impact have your siblings had on you?**

- **What is different about the relationship you have with your siblings compared with other relationships in your life?**

Trainer's Points

☐ In recent years, well-deserved attention has been focused on the importance of the parent-and-child/youth relationship and the loss that a child/youth experiences when placed in out-of-home care. At the same time, very little attention has been paid to sibling relationships, even though we know that the bonds among brothers and sisters are unique.

☐ Sibling relationships generally are the longest relationships that most people have. Most sibling relationships last longer than the relationship between parent and child/youth. Often, sibling relationships even last longer than that between husband and wife.

☐ There are several important contributions that siblings can make. Some of these we've already identified. As we discuss sibling contributions further, feel free to share any examples that you think might illustrate these characteristics of sibling relationships.

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 31, *The Sibling Relationships.***

☐ Review the handout.

The Sibling Relationships

1. Siblings provide a **sense of connectedness**. They help to ground us in our place of belonging.

2. Sibling relationships are **lifelong.** They might have the longest duration of any human relationship.

3. The sibling relationship has the following characteristics:

    • It maintains shared memories and provides a sense of the familiar.

    • It provides a sense of support.

    • It has a different power base than the parent-and-child/youth relationship.

4. For most of us, our siblings are in the same generation as we are. They are within 5 to 10 years of own age; so, they *share memories* about our family and help us to maintain a *sense of the familiar.* For example:

    • Family stories are maintained through the sibling connection.

    • Siblings help us to maintain a sense of what is known and comfortable. There may be shared experiences between the siblings, inside jokes and the like, known only between themselves. Only siblings can reminisce about these details of their lives as children.

    • In cases where children/youth have been removed from their birth families, what remains familiar for the siblings is the relationship that they share each other.

    • Regardless of whether that relationship is positive or negative, at least it is familiar.

5. Siblings provide each other with a **sense of support** by acting as confidants and counselors for each other. For example:

    • They often act as trusted advisors for one another. They share secrets.

    • The mutual support that is developed throughout their childhood often continues into their adulthood.

    • Because siblings usually are close in age and consider themselves at the same level, they will share things with each other that they might not feel safe enough to share with a parent or other adults. They might rely on each other for support to make the successful transitions through changes in placements.

6. The sibling relationship exists within a different **framework of power** than does the parent-and-child/youth relationship:

In most cases, our parents were authority figures in the family, even when they exerted little authority. We still had certain expectations of them as our parents that were different from our expectations of our siblings.

Therefore, the sibling relationship is a stage for the practice of important life tasks such as coming to grips with difficult emotions, learning about conflict and how to deal with it according to the family rules, and find a way of being in the world. Through interactions with siblings, we learn what situations are safe, which people are supportive and dependable.

For most of us, getting angry with our parents felt vastly different from getting angry with our siblings. We might have said things in anger to siblings that we wouldn't have dared to say to parents. We might have retaliated against siblings in ways that we would not have dreamed of retaliating with parents. We might have formed alliances with our siblings against our parents. In the case of more than two siblings, we might have allied with some siblings against others. These alliances could have been formed as a shield of protection from those completely outside the family, especially for siblings who have been removed from their birth family.

7. Research shows that these three predictable conditions contribute to the development of strong sibling connections:

   a. The first is high access between siblings.

      This refers to the amount of contact that exists between the siblings. Often, they have attended the same schools, shared the same friends and activities, shared same bedroom or even the same bed.

      Generally, there is an age difference of less than 10 years between siblings. As family members, they needed one another; and their parents needed them to need each other. Typically, the parents, for whatever reason, lacked the time to attend to each one individually and needed the siblings to rely on each other for support, companionship, attention, supervision, etc.

      In one case of a parent needing her children to need each other, a mother who was interviewed said that the birth of an infant was a wonderful addition to her family. She reasoned that her 4-year–old was a nonstop talker and now would have someone to talk to who would listen when mommy couldn't anymore.

      Essentially, the more that siblings have been together and the more that they have to rely on each other, the stronger the connection between them becomes.

   b. Acknowledging the connection to our siblings is important in relation to filling our need for a meaningful, personal identity. Sibling roles in shaping our identity include:

- Siblings are either attracted to or repelled by one another, which directly influences their identity formation. Sibling relationships are the first social relationships within which we compare ourselves with other and find elements of ourselves either acceptable or unacceptable.

- As some of the first experiences of socialization that we have our comparisons of gender, age, intelligence, physical appearance, abilities, health, and emotional strengths or weaknesses experienced through the sibling relationship serve to inform us about what is socially approved or disapproved.

- We come away from these sibling experiences with self-concepts of tall/short, beautiful/ugly, artist/scientist, genius/idiot, hero/clown and confident/confused. Our family helps to inform us as we develop our self-concept around such phrases as "good boy," "bad girl," "she's so smart, weak, stupid, strong, no good, etc."

c. Siblings begin to compare themselves with each other and to compete for parental attention based on the attributes that they perceive as desirable or undesirable.

All of these sibling experiences contribute to the development of a meaningful, personal identity. Often the exact issues that confronted us throughout life began with relationships in our family of origin.

Taken from the Sibling Group Placement PowerPoint, Spaulding for Children, 2004.

Transition

Transition

♦ Now that we have a better idea about how the sibling connection is formed and what it contributes to the lives of the group members, let's turn our attention to issues of sibling placements.

Placement of Siblings – State Policies and Procedures

Directions

✓ *Trainers need to be familiar and comfortable with the State's policies and procedures regarding the placement of siblings.*

Team Activity

☐ Break into two teams.

☐ Identify a recorder and a reporter.

☐ You will have 15 minutes to complete this exercise.

- **Group One: Identify the advantages of placing the Harris siblings together in one adoptive family.**

- **Group Two: Identify the disadvantages of placing the Harris children together in an adoptive family.**

✓ Reconvene the group.

✓ Write participants' responses on the easel paper.

Large Group Discussion

✓ Note to trainer: The following information summarizes the research on sibling placement. If points are not raised in the group reports, mention them:

- **Group 1: What are the advantages of placing the siblings together?**

  - *Placement together minimizes the trauma of separation and loss of birth parents.*

  - *Attachment and a sense of connection members of the birth family.*

  - *Children/youth coming from abusive or neglectful homes might have a stronger connection with siblings than with their birth parents.*

- *Siblings provide emotional support to each other and boost one another's self-esteem.*

- *A child/youth from the child welfare system might benefit from being part of a family rather than being singled out.*

- *Some experts believe that removing an abusive sibling does not necessarily stop the behavior but only changes the identity of the victim. All siblings might benefit from therapy together and from staying together.*

- *Siblings prefer to stay together.*

- *The presence of caring siblings protects against further loss during trauma.*

☐ Remember what we discussed about the sibling relationship and its characteristics, which are:

- It provides a sense of connection and constancy.

- It provides a sense of personal identity and maintains shared memories.

- It provides a sense of the familiar and a sense of support among family members.

☐ All of the qualities are important reasons for placing siblings together.

☐ All of these advantages relate back to the high-access, sibling relationship.

☐ The kind of relationships that are enhancing and supportive of the group.

☐ Placing siblings together capitalizes on the dynamics of a relationship that already exists for the benefit of the children/youth and their adoptive family.

☐ Siblings receive support from one another in situations that they face together. They might use each other as transitional objects during placement.

☐ This sense of constancy and comfort can be particularly important for younger children. Placing siblings together communicates the importance of their family relationship.

- **Group 2**: What are the disadvantages of placing the siblings together?

- *Safety is threatened if siblings are placed together.*
  Sometimes one of the siblings is a threat to the safety of the others. Despite best efforts to remedy the situation, a child/youth's behavior might not improve to the point that the others are safe all of the siblings are placed together.

- *One or more children/youth have special needs.*
  Often sibling groups have come into the child welfare system from troubled backgrounds. Their combined problems might seem too severe and numerous for one set of adoptive parents. By placing the siblings separately, the caseworker helps each child/youth to receive the undivided attention of his or her parents. This helps each child/youth to develop to full potential.

- *The caseworker cannot find homes willing to take them all.*
  Families willing to adopt sibling groups of three or more children/youth are difficult to find. So are families willing to adopt sibling groups containing older children/youth and adolescents. Some experts say that it is better to place those children/youth for whom families are available rather than to wait and maybe not be able to place any of the siblings.

- *A destructive relationship exists.*
  Some siblings are separated because of their inability to get along with each other. Sibling rivalry has been a concern among families since Cain slew Abel. Few brothers and sisters are driven to such extremes; yet sibling rivalry and jealousy remain major causes of separation in foster care and adoption.

- *The children/youth request separation.*
  Children/youth generally request separation from siblings only when they fear a sibling because of past harm, view the other sibling as potentially disrupting their placement, or have no significant relationship with their sibling. Some siblings with different fathers or mothers are placed with maternal or paternal relatives who do not acknowledge the children/youth born to other mothers or fathers as part of their family. Often, these children/youth want to be adopted by those relatives.

- *The sibling connection is weak or nonexistent.*
  In some cases, siblings do not know each other because they never have lived together or have been separated, without ongoing contact, for several years.

Trainer's Points

☐ Interventions can decrease disadvantages of placing siblings together. These include therapeutic interventions; the provision of a safe, nurturing environment; and efforts by the adoptive parents to engage each child/youth individually and uniquely. All of the interventions address the issues that may present themselves are when siblings are placed together. These are just some of the issues that must be considered in placing sibling groups together.

Large Group Discussion

Large Group Discussion

Handout

Handout 32

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 32,** *Jimmy and Judy—Together or Separate*?

☐ Take 10 minutes to read the case example, and jot down your answers to the questions at the end.

- **Would you separate these siblings from foster parents who wish to adopt each of them separately and instead place Jimmy and Judy together with a third family? Explain.**

- **What does your agency policy require you to do?**

- **What would be gained and lost if the caseworker's plan proceeded?**

- **If you decided to place Jimmy and Judy separately, what could you do to develop and to maintain a sibling relationships between them?**

- **Which information would you use to determine whether these siblings should be placed together or separately?**

- **What additional information, not already provided, do you need before making a decision about these siblings' placement?**

Jimmy and Judy—Together or Separate?

At 3 months of age, Jimmy was placed with a foster parent who has raised him lovingly for three years. Jimmy is very attached to his foster mother, and she wants to adopt him. Meanwhile, Jimmy's birth mother gave birth to a girl, named Judy, when Jimmy was 1 year old. She has a different father. The baby girl was placed in another foster home. She is very attached to her foster parents. Those parents want to adopt her. Jimmy and Judy are now ages 3 and 2 respectively. They have seen each other a few times at birth parent visits, but they don't know each other. Parental rights were terminated. The caseworker decides it is best to place Jimmy and Judy together with a third family.

The caseworker's reasons for this decision are:

1. Neither of the current foster families want to adopt both children.

2. The siblings are young and have no problems. They can be adopted easily by one family.

3. The caseworker has a very desirable family waiting to adopt children this age.

4. Siblings should be placed together.

Would you separate these siblings from foster parents who wish to adopt each of them separately and instead place Jimmy and Judy together with a third family? Explain.

What does your agency policy require you to do?

What would be gained and lost if the caseworker's plan proceeded?

If you decided to place Jimmy and Judy separately, what could you do to develop and to maintain a sibling relationship between them?

Which information would you use to determine whether these siblings should be placed together or separately?

What additional information not already provided do you need before making a decision?

Adapted from Sibling placement: Research to practice, Children's Bureau. *Children's Bureau Express*, *5*(2), 2004.

Trainer's Points

☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 33,** *Promising Practices in Sibling Placement.*

Handout

Handout 33

Promising Practices in Sibling Placement

Research suggests that the following techniques are useful when placing sibling groups:

- Assign one worker to all of the siblings. This allows for constancy and consistency in the decision-making process.

The caseworker then needs to:

- **Consider each case on its own merits.** Although there may be similarities between cases, each one really has its own personality and energy. Approach each one with the freshest set of eyes that you can. For example, when you smell many different perfumes, between them you take a whiff of coffee beans to clear your nasal passages. Or, if you are at a cheese-tasting party, you have a taste of vanilla yogurt or raspberry sorbet, between cheeses, to clear your taste palate. Find some way to cleanse your mental palate from the last case that you worked on so that you are more sensitive to the uniqueness of the current one.

- **Assess the strength of the sibling connection.** Remember that one of the indicators of a strong connection between siblings has to do with high-access qualities, such as the siblings' ages and the length of time that the siblings have been together or apart. The more time they have spent together in a consistent manner, the greater the connection. The older the siblings are, the closer their attachment and the more traumatic their separation will be.

- **Assess the amount of contact between the siblings.** As we've discussed, more contact can mean a stronger connection. Quality of contact between the siblings also is a factor. Has the contact been meaningful? Have the siblings had time to spend interacting with one another? If so, how was that time spent?

- **Consider whether one of the siblings has assumed a parental role.** If so, has it had a positive or negative effect on the sibling group? For example, the "parentified sibling" either can work to undermine the effectiveness of the foster parents or can help the whole sibling group to make the transition into the adoptive placement.

  One example of this is a girl who had been taking care of her siblings before the group of siblings was moved into a foster care placement. The foster mother acknowledged the girl's knowledge and care for the siblings. The foster mother used that knowledge to her advantage by having the girl assist with the care of the other siblings and by asking her advice regarding their preferences concerning eating habits, bedtime rituals, etc. But the foster mother also provided the girl with a parenting experience that the girl had not had previously.

- **Consider the nature and degree of sibling rivalry, if any is apparent.** Is it extreme to the extent that it is disruptive to the whole sibling group, or is it in a more normal range?

- **Ask the children/youth.** Give the children/youth a chance to say for themselves whether they want to be placed with their siblings. This can be a really important contribution to the decision-making process and ultimately can make or break a successful placement.

- **Assess the degree of loyalty that exists between the siblings.** The greater the degree of loyalty, the greater the risk of disruptive behavior if the siblings were to be separated. When assessing the level of sibling loyalty, look for:

  - Signs of actively trying to be together. There may be a display of negative reactions toward being separated that would help with this assessment.
  - Displays of cooperation, sympathy and mutual helpfulness.
  - Sharing of a special language, such as inside jokes.
  - Defending one another from perceived, outside threats.
  - Attending to conflicts openly, and rapidly resolving them.

Use Life Books to provide insight to the relationships among siblings and to identify other adults important to the them who might act as potential placements.

Target recruitment to specific people who know the siblings and are known to the siblings.

Present the siblings together in photo listings and recruitment campaigns if they are not to be adopted by the current caregivers. Letting potential adoptive families know what to expect will enable them to self-select in or out of accepting a sibling placement.

Have older child/youth participate in the adoption planning for themselves and their younger siblings. What advantage might there be to this? It keeps them engaged as a family and reinforces the sibling connection.

Provide joint preparation sessions for adoption placement, as well as individual sessions, for all of the siblings whether they are being placed together or separately.

If the siblings are placed with separate families, place them so that they are in the same neighborhoods and schools, unless the assessment and preparation process provides information showing that this would be detrimental to the siblings or to one of them.

If siblings are placed with separate families, engage all adoptive parents in working together to maintain the sibling relationships.

Assess *resource or adoptive* parents for large groups of siblings with regard to administrative skills, coping skills, access to community resources, strength of support systems, experience with living in a large family, and support for the value of sibling ties.

Transition

♦ Are there any questions or comments on anything we have discussed in this segment?

♦ Next, we will be discussing Recording and Assessing Information in the Child Study and Assessment.

Recording and Assessing Information in the Child Study and Assessment

Large Group Discussion

☐ After each DVD vignette, you were given time to record information you gained about Isaiah, Michael, and Elizabeth in the appropriate place in the Child Study/Assessment. Let's look at those now.

☐ Write your names on these documents and forward them to me. Then take a 15 minute break.

✓ Trainer selects two examples for each child. Either write them on easel paper and post or copy them onto a transparency and project onto a screen.

✓ Reconvene group and return the documents.

✓ Summarize the elements of good recording:

- Brief, but complete.
- Accurate-factually correct.
- Uses clear, concise language free of unnecessary social work jargon.
- Does not reflect worker's biases.
- Assessments and conclusions follow logically from facts recorded.

☐ Our task now is to constructively criticize these recordings. This means we acknowledge the strengths and offer suggestions for improvement.

Transition
Wrap-up and Post Test

♦ Are there any questions or comments on anything we have discussed in child assessment and preparation?

♦ This concludes the training. Please complete your post-tests and return them to me before you leave.