



## **FAMILY ASSESSMENT AND PREPARATION**

- ◆ The Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment and Preparation Process
  - ◆ Kinship/Relative Adoption
  - ◆ Nonrelated Foster Parent Adoption
  - ◆ Newly Recruited Family Adoption
- ◆ Recording and Assessing Information in the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment





# **Module: Family Assessment and Preparation**

## **Trainer's Preparation**

### **Module Contents and Training Process**

This module includes information on:

- The Family Assessment and Preparation Process
- Specifics of family identification, preparation and assessment for different categories of adoptive families, such as kinship/relative; current foster parents; and newly recruited families.
- Recording and assessing information in the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment.

### **Preparing to Train**

Before beginning this module, trainers should:

- Gather and review all State-specific policies, procedures and protocols, including:
  - Adoption policies—specifically the priority for adoptive family selection.
  - Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment formats. (Use the name given this document in your State/agency wherever you see “Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment” in this curriculum.)
  - Use the terminology your State uses for this document wherever it is referenced in this module.
- Review additional resource materials located throughout this module.
- Review and become totally comfortable with the content and delivery methods required for the module. Review Team Activities and Large Group Discussions.
- Assess the experience of participants and structure Trainer's Points to meet their level of experience.
- Determine the amount of time to allocate to each segment. The entire module is designed to be trained in 12 hours. This time can be shortened or lengthened based on the depth of coverage for the activities.



## **Required materials/equipment and room setup for this module:**

- Participant's Handouts with State-specific policies.
- This module uses a DVD, therefore, a TV or projector and a VCR/DVD player is required.
- The basic materials needed for the training session are:
  - Trainer's Guide
  - Participant's Handouts
  - Pre-test 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
  - Paper clips
  - Paper or styrofoam cups
- An ideal participant size for this module is 20-25 participants. The ideal room set-up is round tables that accommodate 4-6 participants. Since Team Activities are common, this size and room set-up helps to set the informal, interactive tone for the training. Further, it reduces the amount of time required to get participants in teams.

## **General Training Tips:**

In addition, the following pointers are applicable to all trainings:

### **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 content 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 without reading it word for word.
- Trainers may find it helpful to underscore or highlight concepts and key points to emphasize, adding personal comments and anecdotes as appropriate.

### **Practice with the DVD equipment to be used**

- **Prior to each session, test the equipment.** Check the monitor/VCR 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 DVD 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 orientation 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 . . ."**



- 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

Welcome and Overview

The Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment

Kinship/Relative Adoption

The Difference between Nonrelated Foster Care and Kinship/Relative Foster Care

Nonrelated Foster Parent Adoption

Record and Assessing Information in the Family Profile/Home Study/History and Assessment

Newly Recruited Families

Wrap-up/Post Test/Adjourn







# Family Assessment and Preparation

## **Objectives:**

- *To build skill in the family identification, preparation and assessment process.*
- *To review concepts and tools in the family assessment and preparation process.*
- *To identify different issues related to family preparation and assessment in kinship/relative adoptions, nonrelated foster parent adoptions, and newly recruited family adoptions.*
- *To consider the strengths of adoptive families in order to empower them.*

## **Competencies: Participants will be able to:**

- *Write a family profile/home study/social history assessment using a family empowerment model.*
- *Complete an assessment of the family's suitability for a specific child/youth or a child/youth with certain characteristics.*
- *Identify the content necessary in preparing current caregivers (foster parent or relative) to make the transition from fostering to adopting.*
- *Develop a plan for recruiting families for children/youth who will not be adopted by relatives or foster parents.*

## Content Outline

- Welcome and Overview
- The Family Profile/Home Study/Social History Assessment
- Specifics of family identification, preparation and assessment for different categories of adoptive families, such as kinship/relative; current foster parents; and newly recruited families





## Welcome and Overview

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ Welcome to the Family Assessment and Preparation training. My name is . . . (*introduce self and give some background information*).
- ☐ Today's training focuses on Family Assessment and Preparation. We will review State-specific policies, procedures and protocols for adoptive family assessment and preparation with relatives, current foster parents, and newly recruited families in the context of issues and common concerns to the adoption of children/youth from the child welfare system.
- ☐ The objectives and competencies for this training are:

#### **Objectives**

- Build skill in the family identification, preparation and assessment process.
- Review concepts and tools in the family assessment and preparation process.
- Identify different issues related to family preparation and assessment in kinship/relative adoptions, nonrelated foster parent adoptions, and newly recruited family adoptions.
- Consider the strengths of adoptive families in order to empower them.

#### **Competencies**

- Write a family profile/home study/social history assessment using a family empowerment model.
  - Complete an assessment of the family's suitability for a specific child/youth or a child/youth with certain characteristics.
  - Identify the content necessary in preparing current caregivers (foster parent or relative) to make the transition from fostering to adopting.
  - Develop a plan for recruiting families for children/youth who will not be adopted by relatives or foster parents.
- ☐ 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.

Trainer's  
Points

## 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 Public Research and Evaluation Services (PRES), the national evaluator for the National Resource Center for Adoptions. PRES will compile and return the results to you and the designated State official.

Trainer's  
Points

## 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.)*

Trainer's  
Points



### **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 2 minutes to identify:
  - two things not apparent that you have in common besides your job or workplace.
  - an adoption success you had in the last year.
- ✓ Ask volunteers to share some commonalities and successes.
- ✓ Summarize responses.

## Intro DVD

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ Next, we are going to look at a video that provides an introduction of the fictitious case study we will be using for the duration of this training. The video provides information on the Harris children and how they entered the child welfare system. We will be learning more about these children as well as the important adults in their lives throughout this training.

### 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 you in thinking about a forever family for these children.

### Large Group Discussion

- ✓ Ask participants their reactions to the DVD.
- ✓ Ask participants what information they felt would be important when thinking about a forever family for these children 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 these children as well as hear from the important adults in their lives.

### Transition

- ◆ Now we will be discussing Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment.



## The Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment

### Trainer's Points



- ☐ Statistics for Federal Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 tell us that about 54% of child welfare adoptions are by foster parents; 32% are by relatives, and 14% are by newly recruited families. (AFCARS Preliminary FY 2009 Estimates, July 2010)
- ☐ Training all new families about both foster care and adoption issues and approving families for both supports adoption practice by ensuring continuity of relationships and expedites the legal adoption of the child/youth. Many agencies have used this approach for years with great success.
- ☐ The percentage of adoptions by newly recruited families has decreased from 16% in FY 1999 to 14% in FY 2009. (AFCARS #17, July 2010)
- ☐ On average, for each fiscal year 2002 through 2009, approximately 77,000 children/youth per year experienced termination of parental rights. Approximately 57,000 had finalized adoptions. (AFCARS, in FY 2009)
- ☐ At the end of FY 2009, there were 115,000 children/youth in child welfare with parental rights terminated and a plan of adoption. (AFCARS #17, July 2010)
- ☐ Irrespective of who adopts, the adoption caseworker is required to complete a Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment on the prospective adoptive family.
- ☐ In this segment, we will discuss the common elements of completing a home study/family profile for all prospective adoptive parents. In subsequent sections we will discuss unique elements and issues of assessment and preparation for adoption by relatives, foster parents and recruited families.
- ☐ In our State, we call the document, “*insert name used and use this name for the rest of the training.*” The documentation process requires gathering significant information from and about all members of the household and family, organizing that information into a structured format, and making an assessment of the family’s “suitability for adoption.”



- ☐ “Family Profile” is now the preferred term for the written family study and assessment. While the actual areas to be explored with the family have not changed significantly, the process for gathering and using the information has changed.
- ☐ Family preparation begins the moment when the documentation process begins. Too often, the educational aspect of family preparation is seen as separate from the documentation process. The end product of the family preparation and assessment process, the documentation, is a thoughtful and analytical summary of what has occurred during family preparation. It should be the result of a mutual assessment determined in collaboration with the family. It encapsulates the growth, insight, wisdom and self-awareness that the family obtains as a result of the family study process.
- ☐ The Family Preparation and Assessment Process should also empower families by ensuring that decision-making tasks belong to the family as well as offering them the experience of power within their relationship with the worker and the agency. This can be supported by educating families about the child welfare system and the power dynamics within it; offering information about oneself when it is in the interest of equalizing the power balance; and supporting the ability of families to reach out and secure help from neighbors, friends, and extended family. (Spaulding for Children, 1991)
- ☐ There are divergent opinions and guidelines regarding family profiles/home studies/social histories and assessments:
  - What should be included in the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment?
  - How long should the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment be?
  - Which documents should be attached?
  - What should be emphasized and omitted?
- ☐ Across States and agencies, the common elements of the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment include:
  - Identifying Information
  - Contact Information
  - Current Family Structure/Family Network Diagram
  - Family History and The Genogram
  - Parenting Style and Strengths
  - Social Supports – Resources/The Eco-Map
  - Home Environment/Community
  - Verification of family’s capacity for providing safety for the child/youth including documentation of checks of criminal history and child protective services registries.

- Parenting and Adoption:
  - Which characteristics does the family want in the child/youth?
  - If the family has parented the child/youth, what do you like most about the child/youth?
  - What do you like least about the child/youth?
- Child-specific Assessment
  - Which child characteristics of the child/youth can the family accept and nurture?
  - Which characteristics can't they accept in the child/youth?
- Verifications needed to petition for adoption
- General and Summary Assessment:
  - Understanding of adoption
  - Interest and motivation to adopt
  - Willingness to adopt and level of commitment to the child/youth
  - Understanding of the child/youth's future or anticipated needs
  - Placement recommendation and selection



Large Group  
Discussion



Handout  
Handout 1

## Large Group Discussion

- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 1, *State/Agency Family Profile/Home Study/Social History Assessment* (State-specific content).**
- ☐ Review the State's Family Profile/Home Study/Social History Assessment, giving particular attention to the contents of each section, the information collected, and how that information is used in assessing the family for adoption.
  - **Which aspects of the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History Assessment content and process facilitate your assessment and decision making?**
  - **Which aspects of the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History Assessment content and process hamper your assessment and decision making?**

## Trainer's Points

- ✓ Bring out the following comments if they are not discussed in the **Large Group Discussion.**





## **State/Agency Family Profile/Home Study/Social History Assessment and Placement Policies**

*(Provide State's own specific formats and  
policies for family assessments and adoption placement policies.)*



- Several content and process considerations should not be forgotten as the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment is completed. These include:
  - **Child safety is paramount:** This includes not only criminal and child abuse checks of all adults in the household and an examination of the physical house/apartment where the family lives, but also an evaluation of any other safety threats in the family's home, extended family and community. (Spaulding for Children, 1998, Groza et al, 2004, Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997)
  - **Strengths-based perspective.** This type of assessment recognizes the socio-cultural validity of individuals, families, and communities and focuses on building upon the strengths of these entities. Challenges or issues with the family should be addressed, but are viewed through the lenses of the families strengths. (Spaulding for Children, 1999, Saleeby 2002, Pennell and Anderson, 2005)
  - **Conflict resolution:** How does the family resolve conflict? Successful families have a tolerance for conflict that is supported by their confidence in their problem-solving and communication abilities. (Sturgeon et al, 2003)
  - **Nontraditional Families:** The dominate definition of family focused on the traditional "nuclear" family however the very definition of "family" varies from group to group. Today, foster and adoptive families vary in age, lifestyle, economic status, personal history and in other ways. (Spaulding for Children, 1991, 1999 & Groza et al, 2004)

The values of nontraditional families may challenge the values of child welfare workers. It is important the Family Profile/Assessment focus on the family's ability to provide appropriate care for the child/youth. The adoption worker may have to ask his/her supervisor for support in sorting out personal biases from professional evaluation. A good number of the children/youth in child welfare do not come from traditional families and may better adapt at being placed with a nontraditional family (Groza, Houlihan, & Wood, 2004).

- Ability to understand and to respond to the individual needs and challenges of children/youth from the child welfare system:** Adoptive parents should have the ability to individualize the child/youth's needs. The ability to assess each child/youth's unique developmental needs and problems and to modify parenting strategies accordingly is essential for an adoptive parent. The adoptive parent should form a parent/child relationship while understanding that each child/youth is an individual, and must consider each child/youth's viewpoint and perspective to allow for some autonomy for the child/youth (Rycus, & Hughes, 1998).
- Openness in adoption/continuing birth family connections.** Openness in adoption allows for some degree of contact between the child/youth and their birth families once the child/youth has been adopted by another family. This contact takes shape in many different forms, from letter writing to visitation. For older children/youth, many have long lasting attachments to birth family that make it difficult for them to consent to adoption if their relationships with biological family members were severed. Furthermore, continued contact with relatives may prove to be a resource to the adoptive family for continued information on the child/youth's medical history, as well as social and cultural histories. The adoptive family's ability to nurture these connections could be crucial to the successful adoption. (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2003 & Sturgeon et al, 2003)
- Identify Potential Family Connections Already Known to the Child/Youth:** Look for family connections to the child/youth that may already exist. Listen to the child/youth and contact significant adults who are identified by them. Those adults identified may not be able to be the permanent family, however, they may have potential and interest for forming and maintaining long-term caring relationships. (Sturgeon et al, 2003)
- Permanence is a relationship and not a place:** Remember that even if the child/youth is currently residing in a group care setting or treatment facility, do not let this current placement undermine the child/youth's need for a permanent family connection. There are families available, be they previous foster families or other resource families, who would be willing to "assist the young person in forming relationships outside the facility" and "practice family relationships and/or family living" to prepare them for a permanent family connection. (Sturgeon et al, 2003)

- **The Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment needs be honest:** Although a caseworker might be tempted to gloss over characteristics of a family that might be considered “negative,” this will help neither the family nor the child/youth in the long run. Instead, the caseworker should address the problem areas with the family. There are several reasons for this: to determine whether the family views these issues as a problem; to understand the family members’ perceptions and perspectives related to the problem identified; to provide opportunities for the family to learn new ways of thinking or behaving that will eliminate or mitigate the problem; to assess the degree to which the family members have grown or changed. (Rycus & Hughes, 1998)

- ☐ There is an article, *Elements to Be Included in an Assessment*, in the Reference section of this module. This article offers additional insights concerning what to look for and how to assess the information received.

## Team Activity

- ☐ Break into your teams.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant’s Handout 2, *Family Preparation and Assessment Techniques***. Take about 20 minutes to answer the following questions:
  - **Which family preparation and assessment activities and techniques have you used?**
  - **What impact have these techniques had on the prospective adoptive family’s sense of power and engagement in the process?**
  - **How have these techniques helped you to make a professional assessment of the family’s ability to adopt a specific child/youth and identify the resources and supports they would need to make the adoption successful for all members of the family?**



Handout 2

## Family Preparation and Assessment Techniques

*Trainer: Allow about 20 minutes to answer the following questions.  
Some possible answers are in italics:*

### Which family preparation and assessment activities and techniques you have used?

- *Questioning children/youth in front of parents to catch eye contact/body language*
- *Interview separately/home interview*
- *Training*
- *Genograms*
- *Eco-Maps*
- *Self-assessment questionnaire*
- *Parents pick a book, read it and report to groups*
- *Share personal experiences*
- *Let them read and critique the home study*
- *Have family do a Life Book*
- *Review family pictures with them*

### What impact have these techniques had on the prospective adoptive family's sense of power and engagement in the process?

- *Changes family members' attitudes and motivates them*
- *Validates ideas*
- *Gives new ideas/perspectives*
- *Feels comfort, at ease*
- *Not very empowering—Genograms/Eco-Maps/self-assessment/comment on home study*
- *Self-select out of adopting*
- *Appeal process*

### How have these techniques helped you to make a professional assessment of the family's ability to adopt a specific child/youth and identify the resources and supports they would need to make the adoption successful for all members of the family?

- *Find strengths and weaknesses of families*
- *Families understand what they are getting into*
- *Birth children raise concerns*
- *Know what family stands for*
- *Assess their academic skills*





## Large Group Discussion

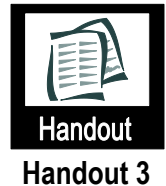
- ✓ Reconvene. Invite one team to give a full report. To eliminate repetition, encourage each remaining team to add points not covered by the first team.
- ✓ Record the responses on easel paper.
- ✓ Bring out the following points as the teams report:
  - Focus on the **empowering** qualities of specific techniques and tools, because any technique or tool also could be used in a **disempowering** way. (Spaulding for Children, 1991)
  - For example, a written family autobiography can empower families by allowing the parents to tell their life stories in their own way and in their own words. However, if a written autobiography is required of *all* families, it can become a barrier to those families who lack confidence in their ability to express themselves in writing. Some families might need to tell their stories orally. Adapt techniques to fit family strengths. (Spaulding for Children, 1991)
  - Likewise, mandatory family preparation training groups can be very supportive and educational. However, some people feel threatened by groups. Others might have conflicts with work schedules, distances from the training site, or childcare needs—that might prevent them from attending the sessions. (Spaulding for Children, 1991)
  - Remember that family preparation and assessment techniques are effective only if the techniques empower and engage families in the process. These techniques are intended to help families make decisions and explore issues. They cannot work if the family feels threatened or alienated by them. (Spaulding for Children, 1991)



## Completing the Assessment

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ Collecting information and discussing it with the family is not making an assessment. An assessment needs to answer the “So what?” question which helps to clarify how this information is useful and relevant in determining the ability of this family to care for the children/youth in their home.
- ☐ Assessment involves collecting and analyzing information about people with the aim of understanding their situation and determining recommendations for further professional intervention. (Crisp, 2003, p. 3)
- ☐ Assessment is reflective and critical analysis of the information collected.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 3, *Assessment Checklist***.
- ☐ This tool provides a quick checklist of questions to ask yourself as you complete the assessment of relatives, current foster parents, or newly recruited families.



## Assessment Checklist

Collecting information and discussing it with the family is not making an assessment. An assessment answers the “So what?” question. This helps to clarify how the information is useful and relevant in determining the ability of this family to care for the children/youth in their home.

Assessment is a continuous process. As you gather information, you are constantly asking and answering these questions:

- What do I know?
- How is this information useful for assessing this family for the specific child/youth or the specific type of child/youth the family is seeking to adopt?
- What more do I still need to know?
- Why do I need to know this?
- What do I recommend be done, based on the information that I have?

Each section of information gathered for the (*insert and use State-specific name for Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment*) should be assessed to ensure that you have collected sufficient information to document whether the family meets the basic, legal requirements for adoption in your State and can meet the needs of the specific child/youth or type of child/youth being considered for adoption.

In addition, after you have collected the requisite information, the following elements should be the focus of the assessment:

- What is their capacity to keep the child safe?
- How do they solve problems as a family and as individuals?
- What role does each member perform in the family? How might introducing new children/youth impact these roles?
- How does the family communicate both within and outside the family?
- How do family members express feelings of love, joy, sadness, fear, happiness, disappointment, loss and grief?
- How engaged is each family member to the whole family unit and to individual members of the family?
- Which behavioral controls are used between family members and outsiders?
- What are the family members’ understandings of adoption?
- What is their individual and collective interest in and motivation to adoption?
- What is their individual and collective level of commitment to the specific child/youth or type of child/youth?
- What is their individual and collective understanding of the child/youth’s future or anticipated needs, and willingness to commit to meeting those needs?
- Which interventions with the child/youth and the family are necessary to ensure that adoption by this family would be successful?
- Given what you know about this family, do you recommend that the family be approved to adopt the specific child/youth or type of child/youth they are seeking to adopt?

Epstein, N.B. Bishop, D.S., & Levin, S. (1978). The McMaster of Family Functioning. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 4(4), 19-31.





## Trainer's Points

- ☐ We have explained the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment includes certain content and processes. It is important to remember that the past and current relationship between the family and the child/youth impacts both the content and the process.

## Large Group Discussion

- **Based on your experience, what are the most difficult areas to assess with a relative being considered as an adoptive parent for a child/youth? With a foster parent? With a newly recruited family?**
- ☐ Let's return to the Harris children and their caregivers.
- ☐ As you watch the DVD, begin to insert information in the appropriate section of the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment for each prospective adoptive family:
  - Ernestine Harris, the paternal grandmother
  - Lorita Webster, the birth mother's best friend
  - Mr. and Mrs. Williams, current foster parents for Isaiah and Michael
- ☐ The DVD's should be considered "living case records" from which you are gathering information about the families and children.

## DVD Description

### "The System Intervenes" (25:12 min.)

- ☐ In the aftermath of the fire, the adults who are closest to the Harris children (Ernestine Harris and Lorita Webster) find themselves face to face with the child welfare system. By listening in on their private conversations, we learn of their commitment to the children and their deep-seated mistrust of the child welfare system. We sit in on an emotionally charged ISP (initial service plan) meeting in which the word "adoption" is met with shock and resistance, and the concept of "concurrent planning" is dismissed sarcastically. At the end of the DVD, we meet Mr. and Mrs. Williams—seasoned foster parents in their 50s—as they decide to take Isaiah and Michael into their care. Their confidence and optimism set the stage for a discussion about the need for anticipatory guidance when preparing resource parents

Trainer's  
Points





for older children/youth. This DVD also introduces the themes of child-centered, family assessment and preparation; concurrent planning; and the nondeficit, strengths-based approach.

Isaiah and Michael move into the Williams home and immediately begin to challenge their new foster parents with various behaviors. Meanwhile, the three Harris children continue to have supervised—and occasionally unsupervised—visits with their birth mother, Christine. These visits often result in stress, confusion and troubling behavior. During this period, the adults struggle with their own mixed feelings. On the one hand, they want to support Christine—on the other, they are increasingly concerned about making decisions that are in the children's best interest. The themes of power, powerlessness and empowerment, plus exploring expectations and changing roles are highlighted in this DVD.



**Handout**  
**Handout 4**

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ What are your reactions to the DVD?
- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 4, *Parenting Roles, Responsibilities and Issues: Nonrelated Foster Parenting and Kinship/Relative Foster Parenting***.
- ☐ Jot down notes to answer these questions:
  - **What are the differences in parenting roles and responsibilities, if any, between Mr. and Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Ernestine Harris, and Aunt Lorita?**
  - **What are the similarities?**
  - **How do these different roles and responsibilities affect the relationship between the caregiver and the Harris children?**
  - **What impact do these variations have on the adoption preparation and assessment process?**

## **Parenting Roles, Responsibilities and Issues: Nonrelated Foster Parenting and Kinship/Relative Foster Parenting**

*Jot down notes to respond to the following questions:*

What are the differences in parenting roles and responsibilities, if any, between Mr. and Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Ernestine Harris, and Aunt Lorita?

What are the similarities?

How do these different roles and responsibilities affect the relationship between the caregiver and the Harris children?

What impact do these variations have on the adoption preparation and assessment process?





## Team Activity

- ☐ Get with your team to discuss your findings.
- ☐ After about 20 minutes, each team will share its answers with the large group.
- ✓ Reconvene the group, and have teams present without duplicating answers already given.
- ☐ Some answers might be:
  - In nonrelated foster care we know that the family and the birth family typically do not know each other. Therefore, information about the child/youth is not always known or even obtainable.
  - In kinship placements, the birth family usually knows more about the family with whom the child/youth is being placed. In fact, kin families might have experienced multiple, traumatic/stressful events with the birth parent(s).
  - Foster parents are trained, prepared and might have a better understanding of other resources that may be available to them than do relatives/kin or newly recruited families.
  - Kin families might have a more difficult time maintaining boundaries around visitation and contact with the birth parent(s).
  - Kin families might have “experience” in dealing with and understanding what birth parents do well and what has been effective in the past and will provide much of the interventions.
  - Kin families generally struggle with more emotional issues related to the birth parent.
  - Foster and kin families might have very different motivations for performing the parenting role (sense of duty, obligation, guilt, love of specific child/youth and birth parent).
  - Kin families might be less system-wise and tend to perceive the child welfare agency as intrusive and non-supportive.
  - Kinship placements are less likely to disrupt.
  - Foster parents are more likely to pursue an adoption whereas relatives/kin often wait for the agency to present this option.



- ☐ **How might you use the information about parenting differences and similarities in assessing each prospective family?**





## Termination of Parental Rights

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ Termination of parental rights surfaces complex emotions and reactions from the children/youth, the birth parents, other relatives, foster parents and caseworkers.
- ☐ These emotions and reactions need to be assessed and addressed during the family assessment and preparation process.
- ☐ Let's look at a DVD showing the reactions of Ernestine Harris, Mrs. Williams, Lorita Webster and the Harris children to Ms. Foster telling them that Malcolm's and Christine's parental rights have been terminated.



### DVD Description

#### "TPR: What Does It Mean?" (6:34 min.)

- ☐ As the DVD opens, Stephanie Foster summons the courage to call Ernestine Harris with the inevitable, but heartbreaking, news that Malcolm's and Christine's parental rights are going to be terminated. The rest of the DVD is devoted to the sharing of this news and to the various reactions that it evokes from Ernestine Harris, Lorita Webster, Mr. and Mrs. Williams, the Harris boys, and Christine herself. This DVD highlights the topic of grief and loss and sets the stage for a discussion about decision making.
  - ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 5, *Reactions to TPR***.
  - ☐ As you watch the DVD, jot down notes about the reactions. After the DVD is completed, you will get into your teams and identify each person's reaction(s). Then state how you would address these reactions during the family assessment and preparation process.
- ✓ Show the DVD.



#### Handout 5



## Reactions to TPR

	Reaction	Use in Assessment and Preparation
<b>Harris Children</b>	<p><b>Isaiah:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fear</li> <li>• anger</li> <li>• grief</li> <li>• failure</li> <li>• loyal to birth mother</li> <li>• out of control</li> </ul> <p><b>Michael:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• quiet</li> </ul>	<p><b>Isaiah:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss with him appropriateness of response.</li> <li>• Consider impact on ability to form relationships with adults.</li> <li>• Hold objective discussion on attempts to avoid TPR after Isaiah settles down.</li> </ul> <p><b>Michael:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michael needs to be drawn out to learn what needs to be done for him.</li> </ul>
<b>Ernestine Harris</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sadness, loss, grief</li> <li>• not empowered along the way—everything happening to her</li> <li>• gut feeling—not surprised</li> <li>• defeat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the next step?</li> <li>• Didn't fully understand?</li> <li>• Lost fight! Tap into strengths shown in past fights.</li> <li>• Be clear and direct about options, issues and processes.</li> </ul>
<b>Lorita Webster</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support for Christine</li> <li>• “You’re the only person I trust.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss relationship with Christine and her children.</li> <li>• Feelings about Christine’s behaviors need to be explored.</li> <li>• Support loyalty to Christine and love for her children.</li> <li>• Support ambivalence.</li> </ul>
<b>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Williams</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sadness, resignation</li> <li>• concern for boys</li> <li>• feel as though they don’t know what to do</li> <li>• can’t rescue the children from pain</li> <li>• grief and loss</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show continued concern for Christine and Isaiah’s commitment to her.</li> <li>• Show support for Isaiah and Michael.</li> </ul>
<b>Christine Harris</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• devastated</li> <li>• fear</li> <li>• loss</li> <li>• let Isaiah, Michael and Elizabeth down</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage her in letting go while holding on.</li> <li>• Continued contact parameters for continued contact.</li> </ul>



## Trainer's Points

- ☐ What are your reactions to the DVD?



## Team Activity

- ☐ Get into your teams.
- ✓ Take 20 minutes for teams to discuss the reactions and how adoption workers would use this information.
- ✓ Reconvene and debrief.
- ✓ If no one raises Malcolm's reaction, it was not addressed in the DVD, talk about the importance of engaging incarcerated parents in planning and services.



## Individual Activity

- ✓ After the debriefing is complete, give participants 15 minutes to enter information on the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment.





# The Adoption Worker Takes Charge

## Trainer's Points

- ☐ In some agencies, the adoption and foster care workers are different persons. In other agencies, one caseworker handles both roles.
- ☐ Our next DVD introduces Kate Woodbridge as the adoption worker.

## DVD Description

### “Can’t We All Just Get Along?” (6:50 min.)

- ☐ After the TPR decision, adoption worker Kate Woodbridge meets with all interested parties to discuss a permanency plan for the Harris children. The DVD explores the innermost thoughts, fears, tensions, and hopes of the three prospective families—Ernestine Harris, Lorita Webster, and Mr. and Mrs. Williams—as the assessment and preparation process begins. The DVD introduces the topics of kinship care and cross-cultural communication.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant’s Handout 6, *Discussing a Permanency Plan***. Jot down your answers to the following questions as you watch the DVD:
  - What were some of the concerns of the families and how did the caseworker address those concerns?
  - How did racial and cultural differences impact the meeting?
  - How have your own cultural views surfaced or been challenged in your work as a child welfare practitioner?
  - What would you have done differently?
  - What other ways that you have found successful in handling the first contact?
  - What are your next steps?

## Large Group Discussion

- ✓ Reconvene.
- ☐ What are your reactions to the DVD?
- ✓ Debrief the DVD using the questions above.

Trainer's  
Points

DVD  
Description

Handout  
Handout 6

Large Group  
Discussion



## Discussing a Permanency Plan

*Jot down your answers to the following questions as you watch the DVD, Can't "We All Just Get Along?":*

What were some of the concerns of the families and how did the caseworker address those concerns?

- *"Have mother and father."*
- *All care about children.*

How did racial and cultural differences impact the meeting?

How have your own cultural views surfaced or been challenged in your work as a child welfare practitioner?

What would you have done differently?

- *Present options and provide written information for each to review.*
- *Meet with each individual first and then as a group.*
- *Don't include children in the first meeting.*

What other ways that you have found successful in handling the first?

What are your next steps?



## Trainer's Points



- ☐ Depending on how your agency assigns worker responsibilities, the family and worker might be at different stages in the relationship process as the family preparation and assessment process is initiated. This will impact the speed of completing the process.
- ☐ It is important to note that this process takes place within the cultural context of the participants—the worker, agency, family, and community. The child welfare practitioner should not only be aware of their own culture, but be able to understand within their own mind the way in which culture affects their view of others and be able to anticipate or identify cultural differences that may present themselves during the process. (Spaulding for Children, 1991, Cross, 1996, Crosson-Tower, 2007)
- ☐ Families may vary culturally in terms of what behavior they see as problematic, and in **what behavior they expect from children/youth.** (Spaulding for Children, 1991, Crosson-Tower, 2007)
- ☐ Families and their racial and ethnic communities differ in **their traditional practices and views of adoption.** (Spaulding for Children, 1991)
- ☐ For example, African-Americans have a very strong tradition of informal adoption, or “taking children in.” Puerto Rican families tend to have flexible boundaries between the family and the surrounding community so that “child lending” is an accepted practice. (Spaulding for Children, 1991)
- ☐ Other groups have much clearer boundaries between family members and outsiders and may place a stronger emphasis on blood lines or blood ties. These groups may not have a strong tradition of adoption.
- ☐ Families also differ in their **norms around communication and their expectation for how communication in specific situations will occur.** (Spaulding for Children, 1991, Crosson-Tower, 2007)
- ☐ In entering the adoption process, the worker’s expertise and control of resources and information gives him or her more power or status than the family. When the family and adoption practitioners differ with respect to race, sex, ethnicity and class, the effects of these power dynamics might be compounded. Workers need to remain mindful of these dynamics at all times irrespective of whether the prospective family is relatives, foster parents or newly recruited families.

- ☐ **Remember the question: What do this family and I need to do to help the family become better able to meet the child/youth's wants and needs or to determine whether they are the best available family to meet the needs of this child/youth?**
- ☐ The preparation and assessment process rests on the information gathered to complete the (*Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment*) as well as a comprehensive review and assessment of available historical records of the family and the child/youth.
- ☐ Through the preparation and assessment process, the worker will provide the family with information and experiences to expand their understanding of the adoption process and the needs and wants of the specific child/youth or type of child/youth they are seeking to adopt.
- ☐ Families should receive written information about the qualifications that they must meet in order to adopt; the reasons that families may be determined ineligible to adopt; and the adoption process, including the time frames for each step in the process.
- ☐ Adoption caseworkers might choose to attend the same training sessions as prospective adoptive parents, beginning with orientation. This helps to ensure that the information given to parents is consistent. Joint training sessions also provide opportunities for families and workers to get to know one another.
- ☐ Training can be enhanced by caseworkers and veteran adoptive parents serving as co-trainers through the entire preparation process. Another excellent strategy is to provide veteran adoptive families as "buddies" or "mentors" for new applicants so that prospective adoptive families have an opportunity for close, one-on-one relationships with experienced families. New applicants seem to accept and to trust information when it comes from fellow parents.
- ☐ It is common for individual family members to have different expectations and hopes. Therefore, it is important to prepare and to assess each family member individually as well as the family as a whole.
- ☐ The preparation and assessment process, while relying on the same general guidelines, should be specific to each family and child/youth or the type of child/youth the family is interested in adopting. Take into account the current and past relationships between the child/youth and the prospective adoptive family; past interventions with the child/youth and birth family; and anticipated issues based on comprehensive assessments of the child/youth, the individual family members, and the family system.

## Transition



- ◆ The purposes of this segment were to identify components of the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History Assessment; to show how it is the core, organizing process for thorough family preparation and assessment for adoption; and to identify some variations depending on the family's relationship, if any, with the child/youth prior to the adoption.
  - **Are there any questions regarding the content of the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment and the general orientation guidelines for completing one?**
- ◆ The Harris children have three families who have expressed interest in adopting them: their paternal grandmother; their Aunt Lorita, who is actually a friend of the family; and Isaiah's and Michael's foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Williams.
- ◆ In the next segments, we will look at how to apply the preparation and assessment process with current caregivers, including nonrelated foster parents, relatives, and "fictive kin," as well as with newly recruited families.





## Kinship/Relative Adoption

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ Let's look at kinship/relative adoptions first because this type of adoption generally is considered the best alternative for a child/youth who cannot be returned to the birth parents. Placements within the family are more likely to preserve the child/youth's family-of-origin relationships and connections.
- ☐ The concept of "kin," as used in child welfare, has multiple meanings.
- ☐ At times, kin is used to represent people with whom the child/youth has a legal relationship by "blood" or "legal adoption." At other times, it is used to represent people with whom the child/youth has a "psychological" relationship but no legal relationship (kin by choice).
- ☐ *The Child Welfare League of America defines kinship care as:*
  - *The full-time nurturing and protection of children/youth who must be separated from their parents by relatives, members of their tribe, clan, or godparents, stepparents, or other adults who have a kinship bond with the children/youth.*
- ☐ The federal government defines "relative" in its Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program as persons related by blood, adoption, or marriage.
- ☐ Each State provides a legal definition of "kin" or "relative" from the perspective of placement in foster care.
- ☐ In our State, we define "kin" or "relative" as *(insert definition for each term)*.
- ☐ As we discuss, kinship or relative adoption, it is important that we distinguish the legal relationships from the psychological relationships. This is because the legal adoption process used varies when the adoptive parents have a legal relationship with the child/youth than when they do not. Also, the preparation activities might vary.
- ☐ First, let's look at significant legislation, court decisions and administrative rules that have clarified and elevated the place of relative/kinship care in child welfare practice.



## Trainer's Points

- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 7, *Legislation and Court Decisions That Elevated the Place of Relative/Kinship Care.***
- ☐ Review the document.
- ✓ Emphasize the Child and Family Services Reviews, Adoption and Safe Families Act, and Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act provisions that encourage and support relative placements, including placements with paternal relatives.

Trainer's  
Points



Handout  
Handout 7



## Legislation and Court Decisions That Elevated The Place of Relative/Kinship Care

### **Federal Level**

**1978 - The Indian Child Welfare Act, Public Law 95-608:** Strengthens the role played by tribal governments in determining the custody of Indian children; specifies that preference is given first to placements within the child/youth's family/tribe, second to other Indian families. Efforts to preserve Indian culture and to keep Indian children/youth connected to tribes.

**1979 - Miller v. Youakim – 440 U.S. 125:** Ruled that relatives are entitled to foster care benefits if eligibility criteria met.

**1980 - The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, Public Law 96-272:** Mandated placement of children/youth as close to their communities of origin as possible, in the most family-like setting consistent with the child/youth's best interest and needs; required reasonable efforts to prevent unnecessary placements and to reunify children/youth with their birth parents and/or families; established adoption as an alternative, permanent plan for children/youth who could not be returned to birth parents; required that decisions about permanency be made within 18 months of a child/youth entering care.

**1988 - L.J. vs. Massing a Consent Decree:** Maryland court required the State to assure that children/youth in custody of the State and in kinship care have access to specialized services that were previously available only to children/youth in foster care.

**1996 - The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, Public Law 104-193:** Requires that States must consider giving preference to adult relatives over nonrelatives when determining placement for a child/youth.

**1997 - The Adoption and Safe Families Act, Public Law 105-89:** requires that relatives meet the same foster care eligibility requirements as nonrelatives; exceptions to time frames for filing TPR petitions may be granted at the option of the State if the child/youth is cared for by a "fit and willing" relative who can provide a "planned, alternative, permanent, living arrangement."

**2000 - Child and Family Services Reviews:** Places greater emphasis on locating and assessing paternal relatives as placement options.

### **State Level**

*(Trainer: Insert and discuss relevant State-specific legislation and cases.)*



## Trainer's Points

- ☐ It has been reported that often kinship caregivers are reluctant to adopt the children/youth in their care because of the confusion that it might cause for the child/youth, the conflict that might arise with the child/youth's biological parent(s), and a feeling that existing blood ties make legal bonds unnecessary. (Berrick, Barth & Needell, 1994; Chipman, Wells, Johnson, 2002; Thornton, 1991)
- ☐ Among of the biggest challenges for child welfare workers are the relative/kin who have had the child/youth placed with them for years but who choose not to proceed with an adoption once termination of parental rights has occurred. Do you seek another family; or do you sanction planned, permanent foster care with the current care giving relative?
- ☐ Although our focus here is on kinship adoption, it is important that we review the different, nonadoption options available to relatives/kin. We need to understand their impact on effecting relative/kin adoption and to use that knowledge to determine whether an option other than adoption would be in the best interests of the and child/youth.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 8, *Nonadoption Options for Relatives/Kin.***
- ☐ As you work with relative/kin to effect a legal adoption for a child/youth, it is important to remember that one of these nonadoption options might serve the needs and wants of the child/youth while ensuring permanency for the child/youth.

Trainer's  
Points



## Nonadoption Options for Relatives/Kin

*Trainers: Make State specific.*

Relative/kinship care includes **formal or child welfare system placements, informal placements and legal guardianship placements.**

**In formal or child welfare system kinship/relative care,** the child/youth is placed with the relative under the supervision of a child welfare agency after the court has determined that the child/youth has been abused or neglected. The relative who cares for the child/youth in formal care can be a licensed foster parent and can receive the same compensation and support services as a nonrelated foster parent or may not be licensed and be compensated under a State funding system or TANF. In most states, formal kinship/relative care is subject to the same requirements as nonrelated foster care. *Children/youth in the child welfare system who are placed with relatives are in foster care.*

**In informal kinship care,** the child/youth is placed in the home of a relative by the birth parent without any court involvement. In this case, the relative takes responsibility for primary care of the child/youth outside of the supervision of the child welfare system. A further distinction has been made between two types of informal care—*private* and *voluntary*.

- Private kinship care occurs when an arrangement is made between parties without the involvement of the child welfare system at all.
- Voluntary kinship placements exist where there is initial involvement with a child welfare agency, but then the child/youth is placed in the care of a relative without ongoing involvement of the child welfare system. (Geen, 2003)
- According to the National Survey of American Families (NSAF), the number of voluntary kinship care placements is approximately one and a half times greater than the number of formalized kinship placements. (Ehrle & Geen, 2002; Geen & Clark, 2001)
- In addition, children/youth who have come to the attention of the child welfare system and have been placed in the home of a relative (whether in kinship foster care or in voluntary kinship care) make up only 28% of all children/youth living with a relative. The remaining 72% are in private kinship care. (Ehrle, Geen, & Clark, 2001)
- This reveals that most children/youth who reside in the home of a relative have not come to the attention of child welfare agencies.
- They are also not eligible for the same monetary compensation received by formal kinship caregivers who are licensed or certified foster parents.

*(continued on next page)*



**In legal guardianship kinship/relative placements**, the relative or fictive kin is appointed by the court to take on specific legal rights, responsibilities, and decision-making powers of a parent (enrollment in school, medical decision making) in regards to a minor child/youth (Find Law, 2005). This appointment can be made either with or without the consent of the birth parent. This type of care arrangement is becoming an increasingly popular option for kinship families (Testa, 2001). Guardianship, unlike adoption, does not sever the legal relationships between the parent and the child/youth. (Find Law, 2005)

Furthermore, new federal and State policies seem to make obtaining legal guardianship a more viable option for kinship caregivers. (Testa, 2001)

Among the factors promoting this option are monetary compensation/subsidized guardianship for caregivers obtaining guardianship under specific circumstances that are different in each State, legal services available to assist related and nonrelated persons in completing the necessary paperwork, and agency support systems that allow kin to receive training from others who have guardianship.

There are two variations of legal guardianship available in some States. They are:

- **Co-guardianship** allows a parent who cannot be an active parent to retain custody of her/his children, if a relative is able to help. In these cases, the court appoints a relative as co-guardian with the legal authority to parent the child/youth. The court may appoint more than one relative, giving children/youth the support of a network.
- **Standby Guardianship** is a legal arrangement that permits a parent to arrange for a person to serve as the guardian of his/her child/youth upon the parent's incapacity or death. Standby guardianship is effective for terminally ill parents and their children/youth.

In our State, guardianship options are:

- 
- 





## Handout 1

# The Difference between Nonrelated Foster Care and Kinship/Relative Foster Care

## Trainer's Points

- ☐ A child/youth is in “foster care” whenever he or she is placed with a related or nonrelated person by court action, based on a finding of abuse or neglect by the birth parent or other person legally responsible for the child/youth’s welfare, and the State child welfare agency or court continues supervision of the placement.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant’s Handout 1, *State Policies* #.**
- ☐ The State policies on relative placement are at pages \_\_\_\_\_.
- ☐ Review the policies.



## Large Group Discussion



- ☐ **In which ways are kin/relative foster care placements handled differently from nonrelated foster care placements in your State?**
- ☐ Ask if there are differences in the following areas if they are not raised by the participants:

### **Time to prepare for the arrival of the children**

- The child/youth generally is placed immediately with the relative when removal is necessary for reasons such as a crisis. In contrast, nonrelated foster families receive training, preparation, and licensure or certification for specific types of children/youth; and they must have their homes structured to receive children/youth prior to any placement.
- The relative has not had time to arrange the home and the daily routine to accommodate additional children/youth. Prior to the placement, the relative may or may not have had a relationship with the child/youth, have known the child/youth's needs, and or have been willing and able to handle certain behaviors or conditions.
- Consider how many of us would be prepared financially to take on the responsibility of several additional mouths to feed, not to more clothes to buy, medical expenses to cover, and other increased living expenses.
- Imagine that you returned home from work today to find that three children/youth had been dropped off there unexpectedly and that they would be living with you indefinitely.
  - What would be your reaction?
  - Do you have finances immediately available to begin caring for them?
  - Are you ready to take on another job in order to care for them, if necessary?
  - What arrangements for child care do you have in place?
  - How will the children/youth get to school in the morning?
  - Who will care for them while you are at work, if you work?
  - How ready are you, really, to have them live with you?





## Training and external support

- Kinship families generally do not receive immediate financial support because they are not licensed or certified. In contrast, nonrelated foster families are eligible for foster care funding upon placement of a child/youth in their home. In addition, kinship families may never be certified or licensed so that they can receive foster care funding. Many kinship families are left to apply for financial support, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program, which is significantly lower than foster care funding.
- Child welfare worker attitudes about family members' duty to care for their "relations" might impact not only financial supports but also services offered, including training and support services to address a child/youth's specific concerns.

## Relationship to the child welfare system

- A real distinction between foster care and kinship care families is that the kinship care families, usually foster, only their relations, not children/youth in general. They may lack the "system" experience that foster families have. Unlike other foster care families, they may lack the knowledge needed to navigate the system and process effectively. Often, it is this lack of knowledge and information about the process that poses the greatest challenge for kinship families.

## Motivation for fostering

- Kinship families are usually motivated to care for their kin-children/youth out of a desire to support the relative during the crisis and to keep the children/youth with their family whereas nonrelated families are usually motivated to foster care out of a sense that they want to fill a need in the community. With kinship families, workers must assess whether kin have a realistic sense of the length of the placement.
- **What differences in placement procedures are there, if any, between potential placement with a maternal or a paternal relative?**
- **How do these variations change what you need to do during the adoption preparation and assessment process?**



## Common Issues for Kin/Relative Families Pursuing Adoption

### DVD Description

#### “Kinship Care” (28:00 min.)

- ☐ In this documentary-style presentation, kinship caregivers speak candidly about the challenges and rewards of raising a relative’s child. Kinship parents share their personal stories while national experts in the field offer their perspectives on such issues as making the transition, changing roles and relationships, loss and grief, the importance of support and self-care, dealing with outside pressure, and interacting with the child welfare system.

### Large Group Discussion

- ☐ Turn to **Participant’s Handout 9, *Kinship Perspectives and Issues***. As you watch the DVD, jot down the different perspectives on the following:
  - **Involvement with the child welfare system**
  - **Relationships with birth parents and other family members**
  - **Reasons for choosing guardianship versus adoption**
  - **Your concerns and issues regarding kinship care**
- ✓ Show the DVD.
- ✓ Reconvene participants.
- ✓ Ask participants their reactions to the DVD.
- ✓ Debrief DVD.



Handout 9



## Kinship Perspectives and Issues

*As you watch the DVD, jot down the different perspectives on the following:*

Involvement with the child welfare system.

Relationships with birth parents and other family members.

Reasons for choosing guardianship versus adoption.

Your concerns and issues regarding kinship care.





## Issues Raised in Relative/Kinship Adoptive Placements

*Note: The following Training Points are taken from Crumbley, J. and Little, R.L. (1997). Relatives raising children, an overview of kinship care, Washington, D.C.: CWLA Press.*

### Trainer's Points

- ✓ Raise these issues if not raised in the team reports.

#### ☐ Relationships with birth parents and other family relationships change after adoption.

- Kin/relatives must decide the type and level of contact that the child/youth may have with the birth family. The agency no longer is involved and cannot be used to justify the kin/relative's decision to limit contact.
- Some kin/relative caregivers struggle with feelings that they are interfering with the parental rights of a beloved family member. For instance, some kin/relatives wonder what will happen if a parent with a substance abuse problem recovers at a later date. In addition, kin/relative adoptive parents need to address their own relationship with the birth parent in light of the legal termination of parental rights.
- Kin/relatives need to examine their feelings about their "success or failure" in raising their own children/youth. For example, how will their feelings affect raising their related child/youth?
- Kin/relatives need to balance their commitment to the child/youth with their preceding commitment to the birth parent, who might be the caregiver's own son or daughter, sister, brother, cousin, or even their parent.
- The legal and emotional relationships between children/youth in kinship families and their birth parents change. The birth parents no longer are the primary parental figures. With this change, the child/youth sometimes takes out anger toward the adoptive parent. At other times, the child/youth blames the adoptive parent for the fact that he or she has been separated *from the birth parent*.

#### ☐ The ability to meet the needs of each child/youth.

- Kin/relative caregivers are taking on responsibility for children/youth with some of the same emotional, behavioral, and developmental challenges as other children/youth in the child welfare system.



- In addition to the basic nurturing of the children/youth, kin/relative caregivers need to respond to his/her unique needs. Birth children/youth in the family might feel slighted because of the time and energy given to the adopted child/youth.

☐ **Children/youth ought to live with people they know and trust where it is safe and in their best interests to do so.**

- In most kinship placements, children/youth live with people they know and trust and with whom they have an established relationship. However, as families disperse geographically and as more emphasis is placed on locating paternal relatives, it is increasingly common for children/youth to be placed with relatives that they never met before.

☐ **Siblings should be placed together whenever possible so long as the placement can meet the individuals needs of each of the siblings. Relative placements reduce the incidence of separation of siblings and the related trauma.**

- Children/youth in the child welfare system with nonrelated caregivers are separated from their siblings more often than those in related foster care with kin/relatives. This represents another source of loss and trauma for the children/youth. (Urban Institute, 2005)
- As placements with paternal relatives increase, there is a potential for increase in sibling separations because the siblings have different fathers.

☐ **The child/youth ought to know his/her family identity, culture and ethnicity.**

- Identity formation requires that the child/youth have knowledge of where he/she comes from.

☐ **Families might feel that children/youth should be cared for within the family, that they should not have to enter the child welfare system.**

- Kin/relatives entering the adoption process may not be aware of a number of resources available to them. In working with kinship families, it is important to encourage them to recognize and to develop existing resources internally to their family system as well as external supports that the kin/relative can use to expand on their familial resources to increase opportunities for the child/youth.

☐ **Children/youth are stigmatized by the labels “foster child” and “adopted child/youth.” Living with a relative is less stigmatizing.**

- Although these children/youth are in fact “in foster care” or “adopted,” often they do not perceive themselves as “foster children” or “adopted children” because they are still with blood relatives. Many of their friends also live with family members other than their parents.
- The label “foster child” or “adopted child” forces a child/youth to discuss issues that brought him/her into care that generally are embarrassing and uncomfortable for him/her.
- Kinship placement might reduce the unfortunate stigma that is experienced because of such labels.

☐ **Caregivers’ guilt**

- Many of the challenges that exist for kinship caregivers are associated with the realities of having the child/youth in their home.
- These challenges might take the form of the caregiver’s guilt when the child/youth responds to him or her more positively than to the birth parent.
- Children/youth might be much more obedient to the caregiver, while complaining about the birth parent(s).
- The caregiver might also feel guilty about not having his/her own child/youth become the person envisioned by the caregiver.
- They caregiver now is faced with explaining the situation to friends and community members and might be entering an extended period of dealing with a crisis.

☐ **Transference of caregivers’ feelings**

- Transference occurs when the caregivers might begin to feel the same way about the child/youth as they do about the birth parent.
- Sometimes it is expressed as anger toward the child/youth when the birth parent(s) inconvenienced the caregiver by leaving the child/youth with the caregiver.

☐ **Role and boundary confusion**

- Sometimes the child/youth might be caught in the middle of a conflict of loyalty between the caregiver who disciplines them and the birth parent(s) who says the child/youth does not have to obey because the caregiver is not the real parent.

☐ **Family legacies and life cycles may continue**

- Family legacies and life cycles are negative behaviors and patterns such as alcoholism and substance abuse, violence, incarceration, etc.
- The caregiver might be concerned that the child/youth will do the same thing as the birth parent(s) did, continuing the cycle.

☐ **Alternative permanency plans**

- Many caregivers are grandparents, often older adults.
- It is not unusual for grandparent caregivers to suffer many health concerns that can challenge their continued ability to serve as effective parents.
- Even an unexpected hospitalization might call for alternative permanency plans, based on the caregiver's health needs.
- The kinship caregiver needs to determine what will happen if he or she becomes unable, for whatever reason, to care for the child/youth.

☐ **Divided loyalty**

- When a birth parent must surrender their parental role, the child/youth is faced with the challenge of redefining his/her relationship with that birth parent. This can be tough for a child/youth.
- From a child/youth's perspective, who is the real parent(s) to them now? How should the child/youth relate to the birth parent now? How does the child/youth resolve the issues of loyalty to the parent(s) who gave birth to him or her, and the kin parent who actively parents him or her?
- How does he get his needs met without causing conflict? How does he/she keep everyone happy?

☐ **Establishing a parent-to-child/youth relationship**

- The child/youth might wonder, “Do I call my grandmother, ‘mom’; or do I keep calling my mom, ‘mom?’”

☐ **Lack of resources**

- Kin/relative families might lack support from extended family members, significant others, friends, and the community.
  - Resources that were in place for the kin/relative family and that previously met their needs may no longer be sufficient with the additional family members.
- ☐ These differences in how relative and nonrelative foster care placements are processed and supported have significant impact when considering a child welfare adoption with a kin/relative.
- ☐ Furthermore, many children/youth are placed first in nonrelated foster care and later moved to a kin/relative placement either for foster care or adoption. This would be the case for Isaiah and Michael, should they be adopted by their paternal grandmother.
- ☐ Let’s watch a DVD to help us sort out some of the unique issues in the preparation and assessment of Ernestine Harris for adoption.

**DVD Description**

**“I Just Want to Be a Grandmother” (15:50 min.)**

- ☐ This DVD focuses on Ernestine Harris as she goes through the family assessment and preparation process with adoption worker Kate Woodbridge. In addition to seeing the application of various tools and techniques, the DVD provides an opportunity to listen in on Mrs. Harris’ conversations with God while she struggles to make the right decision for her grandchildren. This DVD explores concepts of cultural competence, cross-cultural communication, and kinship care, with an undercurrent of *loss* as a central theme in this—and all—adoption decisions.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant’s Handout 10, *Preparing and Assessing Relative Caregivers for Adoption***.

Trainer's  
Points



Handout

Handout 10





☐ Jot down notes to answer these questions as you watch the video:

- What are Mrs. Harris' concerns related to the children's birth mother and father?
- What are Mrs. Harris' concerns about her *ability* to provide care for each of the children?
- What are Mrs. Harris' concerns about her *desire* to provide care for the children?
- What are the techniques that Kate Woodbridge uses to gather information and to engage Mrs. Harris in self-assessment?
- What does Kate Woodbridge know about Mrs. Harris at this point?
- What additional information does Kate Woodbridge need in order to make a comprehensive assessment of Mrs. Harris as a prospective adoptive parent for Isaiah, Michael and Elizabeth?

✓ Show the video.

✓ Ask participants for their reactions to the video.



## Preparing and Assessing Relative Caregivers for Adoption

*Jot down notes to respond to the following questions:*

What are Mrs. Harris' concerns related to the children's birth mother and father?

- *Doesn't want to take over their roles even though she acknowledges that the children will be grown and gone before Malcolm gets out of jail.*
- *Hopes Christine will get better*

What are Mrs. Harris' concerns about her *ability* to provide care for each of the children?

- *Her age and health*
- *What would happen to them if something happened to her*
- *Lack of support from her birth children*
- *Not enough room to take all of them*
- *Has to take care of son Billy*

What are Mrs. Harris' concerns about her *desire* to provide care for the children?

- *Desire to keep family together*
- *Reluctant . . . can she do it?*
- *Freedom*

What are the techniques that Kate Woodbridge uses to gather information and to engage Mrs. Harris in self-assessment?

- *Eco-Map*
- *Genogram*
- *Sparked Mrs. Harris by looking together through family pictures with Elizabeth*

*(continued on next page)*

What does Kate Woodbridge know about Mrs. Harris at this point?

What additional information does Kate Woodbridge need in order to make a comprehensive assessment of Mrs. Harris as a prospective adoptive parent for Isaiah, Michael and Elizabeth?





## Team Activity

- ☐ Break into your teams:
  - Discuss your perceptions with your team.
  - Based solely on the information that you have from the DVD, what you know about the Harris children, and what your agency policy is with respect to relative and nonrelative adoptions, do you agree on an assessment of Mrs. Harris as the appropriate adoptive parent for Elizabeth? For Michael? For Isaiah? Make sure to justify your assessment by basing it on the information presented in the DVD as well as in previous DVDs and written materials.
  - Identify information that needs further exploration for you to make a better assessment.
  - Identify other techniques that you might have used in this situation.

## Large Group Discussion

- ✓ Reconvene the group, and have each team present its assessments and justifications.
- ✓ Engage all of the teams in critiquing each other's assessments.

## Individual Activity

- ☐ Let's take about 15 minutes to add information gained from this DVD to Mrs. Harris' Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment.





## Assessment Issues for Kinship Placements

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ Given all the information gathered, the next step is to assess what needs to be done with the kin/relative to prepare him/her adequately to address these issues. This step also includes making plans to minimize any negative impact on the adjustment of the child/youth and the kin/relative to their changing roles and relationships resulting from the adoption.
- ☐ Understanding and discussing the motivation for adoption with the kin/relative will help to identify the areas of support that the adoptive family will need either before or after the adoption.
- ☐ As you explore and understand a relative's motivation to adopt a child/youth, you need to explore and to assess completely the following areas with the relative:
  - **Utilization of services after the adoption.** Will the relative caregiver access, try or appropriately utilize services available for the child/youth or adoptive family?
  - **Post adoption birth parent involvement.** How will the relative caregiver determine whether to restrict or to allow the birth parents (mother and father) involvement with the child/youth? Is the relative able to avoid triangulating the child/youth (encourage or discourage the child/youth's involvement with the birth parents)?
  - **Quality of relationship with birth parents.** What is the quality of the caregiver relationship with the birth parents and how does this experience influence the caregiver's relationship with the child/youth? What is the potential for the caregiver and the birth parents to resolve past or present issues and to renegotiate parental roles?
  - **Continuing prior relationships after the adoption.** How will the caregiver determine whether to allow or to disallow the child/youth from continuing relationships and contacts with people from his/her past.



## Clinical Issues in the Kin/Relative Adoption

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ From a legal perspective, the child/youth's relationships with members of his/her family of origin change after adoption. The child/youth might become a sibling to someone who has been an aunt, an uncle, a cousin, or a parent. Someone who has been a brother, a sister, a grandmother, a grandfather, an aunt, an uncle, or a cousin to the child/youth might become his or her adoptive parent. Too little research has been done to determine whether the family actually functions in changed roles.
- ☐ In the preparation and assessment process, it is critical to focus discussions with the adoptive family, as well as the child/youth, on how they choose to handle these changes. The caseworker needs to refrain from structuring the preparation and assessment based on what he/she thinks the relationships or roles should be.
- ☐ Remember, the family knows itself better than the caseworker ever will and knows what will work for the family after the caseworker is out of the picture.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 11, *Common Issues in Preparing and Assessing Kin for Adoption***. This handout provides questions that you might ask to get relatives thinking about the issues and their positions or orientations concerning these issues. Then you can address their concerns or approaches with them.
- ☐ Review the document.

Trainer's  
Points



## Common Issues Preparing and Assessing Kin by Choice for Adoption

### ***Ambivalence/Lack of Commitment to Adoption***

As you know, parental rights have been terminated. This means that we no longer will work with the child/youth's birth parents to return the child/youth to them, but we have begun looking for others to become parents to the child/youth by adoption.

Possible questions to ask the relative:

- How do you feel about the termination?
- Do you believe that it was a good decision for the child/youth?
- Do you feel that it was a good decision for the birth parent(s)?
- How will this affect your caring for the child/youth?
- How do you feel about adopting the child/youth?

### ***Role/Boundary Redefinition***

Changes in the caregiver's roles and boundaries occur not only with respect to the child/youth, but also to the child/youth's birth parent(s). Relationships with the birth parent(s) are redefined as the kinship caregiver undergoes a transformation from supporter to primary caregiver, from advisor to decision maker, and from friend to peer to authority figure.

Possible questions to ask the relative:

- How will you redefine roles, authority and relationships?
- What relationship do you envision the birth parents having with the child/youth after adoption?
- Are you comfortable telling the birth parents that they cannot have contact with the child/youth?
- What would make you limit or prohibit such contact?
- Can you live with the feelings of disloyalty, betrayal, etc. the birth parents and the child/youth might try to impose on you?
- If the birth parents show up for visits either high or intoxicated, what will you do? How will you handle this with the child/youth?

*(continued on next page)*



- What will you do when a birth parent claims that you took his/her son or daughter away from him/her?
- What assistance might you need in making the post adoption contact with the birth parent least harmful to the child/youth and to the entire family?

### ***Loss and Grief in Changing Relationships***

The relative mourns for himself/herself as well as for the birth parent who has lost rights to the child/youth. The situation causes both of them to change their life plans. It makes the relative question whether he/she could have done more to help the birth parent to keep the child/youth.

Possible questions to ask the relative:

- How do you feel about taking on the role of parent for the child/youth?
- If you had control over the situation, what would you do?

### ***Anger and Resentment***

The kin/relative might be angry with the birth parents for failing to do the things necessary to get the child/youth returned to them. The relative might resent having to carry the birth parents' responsibility for the child/youth. It is important to acknowledge these feelings, to normalize them, to validate them, and to ensure that they are directed away from the child/youth.

Possible questions to ask the relative:

- How do you feel about taking on this responsibility for the child/youth?
- Many relatives who adopt become angry with the birth parents. How will you handle the anger and resentment that you might feel now or in the future about taking on this responsibility?

### ***Fantasies about Parents – Child/Youth Reunification***

Many kinship caregivers express the hope of seeing the birth parents and the child/youth reunited and continue to hope for this even after termination of parental rights. Such fantasies might become problematic if the caregiver is unable to accept the reality of the birth parents' needs and limitations or is unable to protect the child/youth from the birth parents due to fantasies and denial about the birth parents' limitations and capabilities.

*(continued on next page)*



It is understandable that you wish that your family member who is the birth parent could continue to parent his/her child/youth; but that cannot happen now that parental rights have been terminated. It is up to you to protect and to parent the child/youth.

Possible questions to ask the relative:

- How are you going to deal with your desire to have your loved one resume parenting while protecting the child/youth?
- What is your plan for the child/youth?
- What do you view as the differences between your remaining the child/youth's foster care parent versus becoming the child/youth's adoptive parent?
- What do you think are the differences from the child/youth's point of view?

### ***Overcompensation***

Many kinship caregivers feel extreme empathy and sympathy for the child/youth and birth parents, given their history (domestic violence, neglect/abuse). They might feel that the system failed to help their loved ones. Consequently, the caregivers might try to "make up" for the child/youth's past losses or traumas, but in so doing, might overcompensate. The caregiver's task is to provide the child/youth with balance.

Possible questions to ask the relative:

- What does the child/youth need from you?
- What did the child/youth miss or not receive from the birth parents?
- How do you intend to give the child/youth what was missed?

### ***Competition with Birth Parents***

Many caregivers sometimes feel forced into competition with birth parents in order to disprove the birth parents' accusations that the caregiver is "unfit" or "no better able to raise a child/youth." Others feel a need to prove to the courts or agencies that they are more qualified than the birth parents to raise the child/youth. Some want to prove to the child/youth that they are able to provide better care for him or her than the birth parent(s).

Possible question to ask the relative:

- What do you think accounts for your ability to parent this child/youth when the birth parents could not?

*(continued on next page)*

## ***Intrusion into the Family***

Kin/relative caregivers have a tendency to question the need for intrusion into their family business necessitated by family profiles/home studies/social histories and assessments and legal requirements for adoption. Many view these as unnecessary intrusions into family privacy. You should validate these feelings while explaining the need for the information.

Explain in this way: “This information is needed to show that the child/youth is safe with you; that you are the best person to care for the child/youth permanently; and that you should receive ongoing financial support for the child/youth. Clearly this involves asking for personal information; but this information is available only to you, the courts, and my superiors and team members who help me to complete a thorough and accurate assessment.”

Possible questions to ask the relative:

- Can we continue to talk about these things?

## ***Morbidity and Mortality***

As more and more grandparents and, in some cases great-grandparents are adopting, the issue of planning for the child/youth’s care in the event of illness or death becomes more crucial. This is a subject to be explored in any adoption, and it is especially important in kin/relative adoptions to ensure that a “stranger placement” is not required at a later time when the youth is older.

Possible questions to ask the relative:

- Who will take care of the child/youth if you should become seriously ill or die?
- How will this person or these persons be involved in the child/youth’s life now or after the adoption?

Adapted from Joseph Crumbley’s presentation Maintaining Family Ties, Lansing, MI, 2004.





## Large Group Discussion

- ☐ Now that you have all the information, you ask yourself: Is this relative/kin the most appropriate adoptive parent for this child/youth?
- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 12, *Decision: Should I Continue to Consider this Relative for Adoptive Placement?***
- ☐ You need to answer these questions
  - Are there barriers precluding adoptive placement with this relative?
  - What can be done to eliminate or to mitigate these barriers?
  - Are there any concerns that cannot be overcome?
  - Which other options might be pursued to maintain the continuity of the relative placement and/or relationship?
  - What does agency policy or procedure require me to do?





## **Decision: Should I Continue to Consider this Relative for Adoptive Placement?**

*Please answer the following questions:*

Are there barriers precluding adoptive placement with this relative?

What can be done to eliminate or to mitigate these barriers?

Are there any concerns that cannot be overcome?

Which other options might be pursued to maintain the continuity of the relative placement and/or relationship?

What does agency policy or procedure require me to do?

## Adoption Issues with Kin Who are not Legal/Blood Relatives

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ Let's look now at a DVD that will help us identify some of the unique issues that need to be addressed when the prospective adoptive parent is "kin by choice," not a legal relative.

### DVD Description

#### "What about Me?" (5:53 min.)

- ☐ This DVD focuses on Lorita Webster as she goes through the family preparation and assessment process with adoption worker Kate Woodbridge. Listening in on Lorita's conversations with co-workers at the beauty shop, we learn about her childhood in foster care and her commitment to the Harris children. These insights allow viewers to explore ways in which Lorita's life experiences might help her to play a healing role in the children's lives. The DVD also highlights the significance of *fictive kin*. It facilitates a discussion about nonrelatives as potential placement resources for children/youth.

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 13, *Lorita DVD: Preparing and Assessing Kin by Choice for Adoption***.
- ☐ Jot down notes to answer these questions:
  - **How does Lorita's experience as a foster child impact her motivation to adopt the Harris children?**
  - **How does Lorita's experience as a foster child impact her relationship with Kate Woodbridge and Lorita's attitude toward the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment process?**
  - **Why is Lorita considering adopting the Harris children?**
  - **What are Lorita's concerns about her *ability* to provide care for each of the children?**
  - **What are Lorita's concerns about her *desire* to provide care for the children?**



Handout 13



## Lorita DVD: Preparing and Assessing Kin by Choice for Adoption

*Jot down notes to answer these questions:*

How does Lorita's experience as a foster child impact her motivation to adopt the Harris children?

- *She knows how they feel.*
- *She wants to protect them.*

How does Lorita's experience as a foster child impact her relationship with Kate Woodbridge and Lorita's attitude toward the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment process?

- *Not open in sharing information*

Why is Lorita considering adopting the Harris children?

- *Loyalty to Christine*
- *Love of the children*

What are Lorita's concerns about her *ability* to provide care for each of the children?

- *Might be overwhelming*
- *Size of her home and living space*

What are Lorita's concerns about her *desire* to provide care for the children?

- *Feels that she **should**, not that she wants to*





## Team Activity

☐ When the DVD is completed:

- Ask participants their reactions to the DVD.
- Discuss your answers to the questions on Handout 13 with your team, and make an assessment of Lorita Webster as a prospective adoptive parent for Elizabeth, Michael and Isaiah. Assess Lorita based solely on the information that you have from the DVD, what you know about the Harris children, and what your agency policy is with respect to adoption by nonlegal kin. Make sure to justify your assessment.
- Identify information that needs further exploration for you to make a better assessment.
- Identify other techniques that you might use to gather information to assess Lorita.
- Explain how your assessment process would be similar to and different from the assessment of Ernestine Harris, the children's grandmother.



## Large Group Discussion

- ✓ After about 30 minutes, reconvene the group; and have each team presents its assessments and justifications.
- ✓ Engage all of the teams in critiquing each other's assessments.



## Trainer's Points

- ✓ The following issues should be addressed by the participants when they report. If they are not, mention them:
  - "Kin" is not just a blood relationship.
  - When there is a need for placement away from the birth parents either temporarily or permanently, current, child welfare policy and practice encourages and supports having other members of the birth family and "family friends" with whom the child/youth has strong relationships provide the care.



- Including the child/youth in identifying prospective adoptive parents widens the pool of prospective placement options. Discussions with these persons of their potential interest in adopting of the child/youth should take place to preserve the child/youth's psychological bond with them even if they do not choose to adopt.

Trainer's  
Points

## Individual Activity

- ☐ Refer back to Handout 11, *Common Issues in Preparing and Assessing Kin for Adoption*, and answer the questions for Lorita Webster.
- ☐ Take about 15 minutes to record the information that you have about Lorita Webster in the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment format.
- ☐ Keep this summary. We will discuss it toward the end of this module.



## Transition

- ◆ Are there any questions or comments about kin/relative adoptions?
- ◆ Next, we will discuss issues unique to nonrelated foster parent adoptions.





Handout  
Handout 1

## Nonrelated Foster Parent Adoption

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ As a reminder, foster parents can be related or nonrelated.
- ☐ The purpose of this segment is to explore factors unique to non-related foster parent adoption and impact of these issues on the preparation and assessment process. We will use the shorthand term, “foster parent,” to refer to these nonrelated caregivers throughout this segment.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 1, *State Policies and Procedures on Foster Parent Adoption. Policies for nonrelated foster parent adoption are on pages* \_\_\_\_\_.**
- ✓ Review the policies and procedures.

## Individual Activity

- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 14, *Foster Parent Adoption: Differences and Similarities***.
- ☐ Then answer this question:
  - **How is nonrelated foster parent adoption different from and similar to adoption by relatives/kin or newly recruited families?**
- ☐ Take about 5 minutes to jot down your thoughts, based on your own experience in placing children/youth from the child welfare system.



## Foster Parent Adoption: Differences and Similarities

How is nonrelated foster parent adoption different from and similar to adoption by kin/relatives or newly recruited families?

Some possible answers include:

- *Foster parent adoption is easier.*
- *Foster parents have a sense of entitlement.*
- *Foster parents know the child/youth's history.*
- *Foster parents might resent the child welfare worker.*
- *Foster parents have shared the child/youth's pain.*
- *Foster parents are more likely to know the birth family members.*
- *Foster parents know more about the child/youth than the child welfare worker does.*
- *Foster parents who adopt are often older than other adoptive parents.*
- *Foster parents often have less income than other adoptive parents.*
- *Foster parents have some knowledge of the child welfare system and its processes.*
- *Foster families might feel more external pressure to adopt.*
- *Foster parents are often more ambivalent than other adoptive families.*
- *Foster parents not in a huge rush to adopt.*
- *Foster families think that they will automatically will be approved to adopt any child who they have fostered.*
- *Relatives and foster parents more willing to maintain family connections.*
- *Different relationships.*
- *Family interactions less complex.*
- *Attachment to children and established relationships.*
- *Knowledge of child's history.*
- *Know birth parents.*
- *Motivation is what's best for child.*
- *Relative and foster parents less fearful of birth families.*
- *Commitment levels higher for relatives and foster parents.*





## Large Group Discussion

- ✓ Reconvene; then ask each participant to share one of his/her answers using a round robin technique to involve all participants.
- ✓ Write the answers on easel paper.
- ✓ Make sure to *constructively critique* each response.



## Trainer's Points

- ☐ Prior to 1975, agencies discouraged foster parents from adopting the children/youth in their care. Foster parents who openly asked about adoption during foster care orientation meetings were not always welcomed. (The Adoption History Project, Department of History, University of Oregon, 2005)
- ☐ Agencies discouraged adoption by foster parents for the following reasons:
  - Concern that families who wanted to adopt would use the foster care system as a “back door” to adoption.
  - Concern that foster families whose motivation was adoption might sabotage the agency’s work at family reunification.
  - Fear of losing foster families when they no longer had space or desire to take more foster children/youth after adopting.
  - Concerns about the potential negative effect on other foster children/youth in the home who were not being.
  - Fears about the impact of openness between the foster family and the birth family.
  - The foster parents assumption that older children/youth were not adoptable.
- ☐ Since 1980, with the passage of the Federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (P.L. 96-272), the practice of foster parent adoption has been encouraged for the following reasons:
  - Research showing that children/youth have better outcomes if they have a stable, caring adult in their lives.



- Research showing that foster parents who adopt older children and youth support continuing relationships with the child/youth's birth family.
  - Research showing that foster parent adoptions have fewer disruptions than those with newly recruited adoptive parents.
  - Public policies at the federal level and in most states now support foster parent as the adoptive family of choice for children/youth who have been in a foster home for a period of time and have formed a psychological bond with the foster parents.
  - Research supporting continuity of care and relationships to promote the child/youth's stability, permanence and well-being.
  - Agencies' acknowledgement that they could not recruit successfully a sufficient number of new families for all the children/youth waiting to be adopted from the child welfare system.
  - Nationally, more than 100,000 children/youth are waiting to be adopted at any given time. Fortunately, the vast majority of these children/youth are in stable placements with kin/relatives or foster parents who are providing care.
- ☐ The decision by a foster family to adopt a child/youth in their care will be based on the unique factors associated with, among other things, the child/youth, the foster family, the birth family, and circumstances surrounding the relationships between and among these individuals.
- ☐ Where adoption workers question the appropriateness of a specific foster family to adopt a specific child/youth who has been in their care, the comprehensive assessment process needs to:
- identify and provide objective documentation of the concerns,
  - specify steps to be taken before the adoption is processed to eliminate the concerns.
  - provide sufficient documentation to support a decision to seek another adoptive family

- ☐ With proper preparation of children/youth and families, foster parent adoption can be the solution to providing adoption for children/youth in the child welfare system who cannot be adopted by their kin/relatives.
- ☐ Coupled with effective engagement of foster families as resource families to birth parents while the agency pursues family reunification, these adoptions might support ongoing connections between the child/youth and the birth family more effectively because the foster family and birth family have developed a relationship centered on the child/youth's safety, permanency and well-being..

## Transition

- ◆ Are there any questions or comments about nonrelative adoptions?
- ◆ Next, we will discuss issues unique to examining implications of changes in foster parent adoption.





## Examining Implications of Changes in Foster Parent Adoption

### Team Activity

- ☐ The purpose of this activity is to examine the growing emphasis on foster parent adoption in adoption practice and the impact that this has on the foster family, the birth family, the child welfare system, the child/youth, the foster care, and the adoption worker. This activity and discussion are intended to highlight the shift in the roles of the adoption and foster care workers, plus the need for collaboration, shared decision making, and complete and full disclosure of information with and about foster families.
- ☐ Break into your teams.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 15, *Implications in Foster Parent Adoption***. Take about 15 minutes to answer the questions.

### Large Group Discussion

- ✓ Reconvene the group and ask participants to respond to the following questions:
  - What are the implications with regard to the movement toward adoption by *nonrelative foster parents*?
  - What are the implications for the *birth family*?
  - What are the implications for the *child welfare system*?
  - What are the implications for the *child/youth*?
  - What are the implication for the *foster care or adoption worker*?
- ✓ Engage participants in constructive critique of each others' answers. Particularly highlight answers that appear biased or without evidence—based support.

## Implications in Foster Parent Adoption

*Possible answers from participants are in italics.*

What are the implications with regard to the movement toward adoption by *nonrelative foster parents*?

- *Foster families might face more pressure to adopt children/youth in their care.*
- *Foster families might have different motives.*
- *Foster families usually have fewer fantasies and fears about the child/youth's birth family.*
- *Foster families have a greater knowledge of a child/youth's experiences prior to placement and during placement because they already have parented the child/youth.*
- *Foster families may know which behaviors the child/youth might exhibit in the future, based on their training as foster parents.*
- *Foster families may have a better understanding of their role and relationship with the agency, and, perhaps, with their child welfare worker.*

What are the implications for the *birth family*?

- *Possible sabotage.*
- *They can see what the foster family has offered and can offer to the child/youth.*
- *They might be able to give the child/youth permission to be adopted.*
- *They might know where the child/youth is.*
- *The opportunity to maintain an ongoing relationship with the birth family and the child/youth is based on the foster family's experience with the birth family while fostering.*
- *Openness in the adoption process—opportunity for the birth family to influence the child/youth's life.*

What are the implications for the *child welfare system*?

- *Deplete resources for foster care.*
- *Foster placements made at intake often have long-term implications.*
- *Foster families need to be prepared to face the adoption question.*
- *Post adoption services must be available in the long term.*
- *Reach permanency faster.*
- *Less disruptions.*

What are the implications for the *child/youth*?

- *Child/youth experiences fewer moves.*
- *Familiar foster parents and family.*
- *Child/youth might maintain links with birth family.*
- *Child/youth might experiences further rejection if not adopted by his/her foster family.*

*(continued on next page)*



- *The foster family is better able to help the child/youth remember important people from the past and to help maintain important connections with whom they are in the child/youth's best interest .*
- *The foster family might not be the family best suited to meet the child/youth's needs, but agency policy gives them preference in adoption because the child/youth has lived with them for a certain time.*

What are the implications for the *foster care or adoption worker*?

- *Stronger, collaborative relationships between foster care and adoption workers if there are different workers.*
- *Agencies benefit from this practice because it enables them to move children/youth into permanency more quickly.*
- *Foster parent who become adoptive parents needs specific training in areas, such as child/youth preparation, foster parents engagement, etc.*
- *Loss of foster families plus the need to recruit and to train new foster parents continually .*



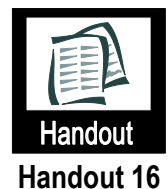
# Strategies for Building Working Relationships in Foster Parent Adoption

## Trainer's Points

- ☐ The purpose of this activity is to allow you to engage in a structured and honest dialogue about the challenges involved in working together with other child welfare workers, foster parents, and birth parents to ensure a successful adoption for a child/youth and to share strategies for successful collaboration.

## Team Activity

- ☐ Break into your teams.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 16, *Building Partnerships: The Foster Care Worker, Adoption Worker, Foster Family, and Birth Family***.
- ☐ You will have about 20 minutes to reflect and to write down your individual responses to the following questions and then to discuss your answers with your team:
  - Which strategies could you use to build partnerships with foster care workers or treatment workers?
  - Which strategies could you use to build partnerships between Kate Woodbridge and Mr. and Mrs. Williams?
  - Which strategies could you use to build partnerships between and among the birth family (Christine Harris), the foster family (Williams family), and the adoption worker (Kate Woodbridge)?



## Building Partnerships: The Foster Care Worker, Adoption Worker, Foster Family, and Birth Family

*Possible participant answers are in italics.*

Which strategies could you use to build partnerships with foster care workers or treatment workers?

- *Informal worker-to-worker contacts.*
- *Adoption worker attending hearing on termination of parental rights .*
- *Regular case staffing with adoption and foster care workers.*
- *Recognize permanency planning needs of child/youth at the point of intake.*
- *Enhance collaborative environment.*
- *Co-train foster care workers and adoption workers to increase understanding of each other's jobs.*
- *Complete Life Book together. Go on home visits together.*

Which strategies could you use to build partnerships between Kate Woodbridge and the Mr. and Mrs. Williams?

- *Start discussion focusing on child/youth's needs.*
- *Acknowledge and accept the foster family as part of team.*
- *Foster care worker introduces adoption worker to foster family.*
- *Foster family is a part of joint training sessions co-facilitated by foster care and adoption workers.*
- *Foster care worker and adoption worker meet together with foster family to explain the adoption process.*
- *Recognize the foster family's experience with the child/youth and, thus, their knowledge of the child/youth's abilities, strengths and challenges.*

Which strategies could you use to build partnerships between and among the birth family (Christine Harris), the foster family (Williams family), and the adoption worker (Kate Woodbridge)?

- *Get birth family to participate in the Life Book process.*
- *Determine past and current relationships of birth family members and foster parents.*
- *Support ongoing visits/phone and/or contacts between birth family and foster family, if appropriate.*
- *Encourage birth family to give permission for child/youth to be adopted by foster family.*
- *Encourage foster parent and birth family agreements on post adoption contacts.*
- *Set up case staffing to include foster parents and birth family on the adoption planning team.*
- *Opportunities for communication—purposeful, structured.*





## Large Group Discussion

- ✓ Reconvene participants into the large group. Invite each team to give one response to each question and then move on.
- ✓ In summarizing, ask participants to comment on the power dynamics in each of these relationships. Stress that the ultimate goal of these relationships is to invest power in the families to meet the needs of the families and the child/youth. In power struggles that are not resolved, it is often the child/youth who loses.
- ✓ Again engage participants in constructive critique of the answers.





## Characteristics of Foster Families with Successful and Unsuccessful Adoptions

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ Child welfare experts have identified characteristics of foster families who adopt children/youth in their care.
- ☐ The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption describes the following characteristics of successful foster families who adopt:
  - These families like to give and to help.
  - They are satisfied with their lives.
  - They are resourceful.
  - They are tolerant of loss, anxiety and ambiguity.
  - They have a sense of humor.
  - They involved the child/youth in activities in their community.
- ☐ The common denominators are:
  - belief that permanent families make a difference and that no child/youth is a “throwaway.”
  - willingness to ask for help.
  - willingness to learn new parenting tools (sometimes by trial and error) even when the family has lots of experiencing with parenting or other child/youth.
  - willingness to hang in there when the going gets tough!
  - ability to talk openly about sexual abuse and other scary things (scary not only to children/youth but also to adults).
  - ability to define family roles and to provide safe boundaries for all family members.
  - ability to be realistic and flexible about themselves and their child/youth.
  - ability to laugh and to maintain a sense of humor.
  - sufficient self-esteem to care enough about themselves and their child/youth to develop good support among family, friends, professionals, and community resources.

- ☐ Researchers who studied foster/adoptive families in the 1980s found that the families who successfully adopted children/youth in their care had the following characteristics: (Meezan & Shireman, 1985)
- They expected that children/youth would be placed in the long-term and had the children/youth in their home for longer periods of time than foster parents who did not choose to adopt.
  - They enjoyed the children/youth and were able to be involved with them actively .
  - The foster parents had some acceptance of the birth families' attitudes and were able to talk about the birth families with their adopted children/youth. However, these foster families also perceived the children/youth to be similar to themselves in some way.

The children/youth who were adopted by their foster families had resolved their ties to their birth families successfully and were younger than children/youth not adopted by their foster families. (Meezan & Shireman, 1985 as cited in Child Welfare Information Gateway, March 2005)

- ☐ This same study also found the following:

- **Visits with birth families were beneficial to the adoption process.** Visits (if appropriate) with the birth families did not inhibit the adoption process. In fact, just the opposite was true. The families who adopted their foster children/youth were more likely to have met their child/youth's birth parents in the year that they were considering adopting the child/youth. The benefits of birth parents visiting the child/youth include the fact that, through these visits, the child/youth gains a more realistic view of the birth parents and a sense of his or her own identity. (Fahlberg, 1991). Of course, the family circumstances for each child/youth are unique, and visits with birth family members might not be included for some children/youth.

**A positive interaction cycle was established between the foster parents and the child/youth.** Foster parents had the sense that things were "getting better" as the placement progressed. This positive cycle in which everyone's needs were met was found to a greater extent in these foster families that chose to adopt than in those that chose not to adopt. It was noticeably absent at the point of adoption disruption in the adoptions that failed. Families may remain responsive to their



children/youth only if they think their efforts are justified and their children/youth are responsive. (Meezan & Shireman, 1985 as cited in Child Welfare Information Gateway, March 2005)

- Child welfare experts have identified characteristics of resource families who did not adopt successfully. Those characteristics are:
  - unresolved losses in the past and present, resulting in a need to revisit past relationships and an inability to meet the child/youth's needs.
  - possessiveness of the child/youth and unwillingness to acknowledge and to work with important people from the child/youth's past.
  - desperation for a child/youth, resulting in unrealistic expectations of foster care and adoption.
  - high stress and anxiety levels.
  - aggressiveness.
  - power and control issues.

(The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, 2005 as cited in Child Welfare Information Gateway, March 2005)

- A study of foster families in the early 1980s found that the foster families in the adoptions that failed were:
  - rigid and did not allow for changes easily.
  - had difficulty sharing parenting with the agency or the birth families.
  - were poorly prepared for adoption and did not have open communication or an open relationship with their social worker.
  - felt coerced by their adoption worker into agreeing to adopt the child/youth.
  - experienced more adoption worker turnovers than the families who were successful in their adoptions.

(Meezan & Shireman, 1985b as cited in Child Welfare Information Gateway, March 2005)

- ❑ While there has been no comprehensive study of characteristics of families in general that lead to successful or unsuccessful adoptions since the late 1980s, the research on older child or adolescent adoptions, post adoption services, and adoption disruption and dissolutions basically reconfirmed the findings of the 1980s.
- ❑ Adoption disruptions occur after the child is placed for adoption, but before the adoption has been legally finalized whereas dissolutions occur after the adoptions have been legally finalized. Most of the research involves disruptions and not dissolutions. Most of the research focuses on single agencies, single states, single factors in disruption, for example, disruption rates, small samples or singular variable analysis, for example, child characteristics, services provided, family characteristics, not multivariate analysis which all researchers and practitioners acknowledge is necessary to fully explain why disruptions occur. Therefore, this body of research, while informative, is limited in generalizability to identifying conclusively the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful adoptive parents.
  - Festinger's study on reasons for disruption found that the top three reasons for disruptions in New York were:
    - family expectations and coping skills, desires, and problems
    - motivation of family
    - children's expectations.

Specifically, families felt they could not cope with the child's behavior or they had too many children who had conflictual relationships while caseworkers reported that the families had unrealistic expectations of the children or were unwilling to accept and address typical testing behaviors. Some families adopted for companionship. Children did not feel comfortable in the homes, did not feel that they were being treated the same as other children, rules were too rigid, and their lifestyle was not accepted. (Festinger, 1986)

- Berry found that family characteristics associated with adoption disruption included:
  - younger parents
  - higher educational attainment
  - few social supports
  - no prior foster care or adoption experience. (Berry, 1997)

- A review of the literature and survey of 15 states by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute found that disruptions occur because:
  - families have unrealistic expectations based on incomplete information provided during the adoption study and placement process
  - limited access to post adoption services. (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2004)
- Festinger analyzed the studies from the 1970s through 2001 and summarized the findings relevant to characteristics of adoptive families who disrupt. The studies to date show that age, race, education, marital status, presence of biological children in the home, and income are not predictive indicators of adoption outcome. In some studies, some of these factors were relevant and in others they were not. For example, studies by Barth and Brooks found adoptions by more educated parents, especially mothers, were more likely to disrupt whereas Partridge, Hornby, and McDonald did not find education to be predictive. Consistently, fewer disruptions were reported amongst families where the parents-child had a foster parent-foster child relationship before the adoption. In general, the studies found that the reasons for disruptions depended on whether the study reported the adoptive parents' or the caseworkers' views on the reasons. Families typically reported that they were not given information or were misinformed about the child's problems or behaviors or not prepared to deal with them and the child did not wish to be adopted. Caseworkers reported that parents were unable or unwilling to deal with the child's known behaviors or problems or had unrealistic expectations of the child. (Festinger 2005)
- Barth, Gibbs, and Siebenaler conducted a literature review of postadoption services. They found that family characteristics that are risk factors for disruption include no prior adoptive or foster care experience, younger adoptive parents, and parents with higher educational attainment. (Barth, Gibbs, Siebenaler, 2001)
- ☐ Flynn, Welch, and Paget conducted a study of adolescent adoptions and found the following factors correlated with success:

- Commitment of parents and adoptees. The youth described this as working with the parents while the parents described this as “hanging in there” when things get difficult.
- Realistic expectations of youth and parents.
- Compatibility of youth and parents, such as liking the same things, wanting the same things.
- Personality, for example, positive attitude, flexibility, and good communication skills were the key traits identified.
- Support from families, friends, community, and agency. Both youth and parents identified the need to have someone outside the family to talk with on an ongoing basis.
- Professional assistance when needed. Timely asking for help and timely receipt of help was critical during crisis periods.

(Flynn, Welch, & Paget, 2004)

- ☐ We should use this knowledge to modify our preparation and assessment practices.
- ☐ Engaging the foster family is a critical step in the adoption process. It must not be overlooked simply because the placement has occurred already and a relationship with the system and child/youth is established.
- ☐ Foster families need to know what will happen during the adoption process, how long it will take, and who will be involved.
- ☐ Certain questions need to be asked of the agency and the foster parents. These includes:
  - What are the implications for the child/youth, family and agency if the foster family expresses a desire to adopt?
  - Whose decision is it really?
  - Is there a chance that the family will be turned down and will lose the child/youth?
  - If they adopt, will the family be considered a viable foster family resource for other children/youth?

- Will the foster family lose significant benefits by adopting?
  - What are the implications for the child/youth, the foster family, and the agency if the family discusses adoption but decides against it? Will the child/youth be removed from the foster family?
  - Will the foster family still be considered a viable, foster family resource for other children/youth if they choose not to adopt the child/youth whom they have now?
- ☐ Power issues might emerge between the foster parents and you as an adoption worker. These power issues might create a barrier to the openness that is so essential to an effective process.
- ☐ Let's look at a DVD to help us identify some issues in foster parent adoption.



### DVD Description “Pillow Talk” (19:30 min.)

- ☐ This DVD focuses on Mr. and Mrs. Williams as they go through the family assessment and preparation process. While presenting various tools and techniques, the DVD also features frank discussions between the Williamses and adoption worker Kate Woodbridge about the implications of adopting older children who have previous attachments. In addition to showing Kate's work with the family, the DVD offers a rare glimpse “behind the scenes.” We are privy to Mr. and Mrs. Williams' during their private conversations. Issues of power and powerlessness, entitlement and claiming, and loss emerge throughout this DVD.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 17, *Preparing and Assessing Foster Parents for Adoption***.
- ☐ Jot down notes to answer the following questions:
- **Why are Mr. and Mrs. Williams' considering adopting the Harris children?**
  - **What are Mrs. Williams' concerns about her ability to provide care for each of the children?**
  - **What are Mr. Williams' concerns about his ability to provide care for each of the children?**





- **What do other members of the Williams family recommend that they consider? How do these recommendations influence what you do with Mr. and Mrs. Williams and your final assessment of them as prospective adoptive parents for the Harris children?**

- ✓ Show video.
- ✓ Ask participants for their reactions to the DVD.

Trainer's  
Points



## Preparing and Assessing Foster Parents for Adoption

*Jot down notes to answer the following questions:*

Why are Mr. and Mrs. Williams' considering adopting the Harris children?

- *Should do*
- *Give them stability*
- *Love them (children)—Michael and Isaiah*
- *Could provide safety*

What are Mrs. Williams' concerns about her ability to provide care for each of the children?

- *Doesn't have expectations that Isaiah will love her back.*
- *Could not be the same mom to them as she is to her birth children—lack of initial bond, recognizing differences.*

What are Mr. Williams' concerns about his ability to provide care for each of the children?

- *Power struggle with Isaiah.*
- *Wanting Isaiah to take role of "son" instead of "head of house."*
- *Isaiah's lack of respect for Mrs. Williams.*

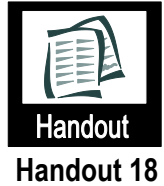
What do other members of the Williams family recommend that they consider? How do these recommendations influence what you do with Mr. and Mrs. Williams and your final assessment of them as prospective adoptive parents for the Harris children?

- *Want to meet with Michael and Isaiah, who have issues; want to find out what's bothering them.*
- *Worry about her own children.*
- *No relationship with other family members yet, despite their frequent visits with Michael and Isaiah.*
- *"Unsavory" backgrounds.*



## Team Activity

- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 18, *Assessing Mr. and Mrs. Williams.***
- ☐ You will have 30 minutes to do the following and to discuss your answers with your team:
  - **Based solely on the information that you have from the DVD, what you know about the Harris children, and what your agency policy is with respect to adoption by foster parents, do you agree on an assessment of Mr. and Mrs. Williams as the appropriate adoptive parents for Elizabeth, Michael and Isaiah? Make sure to justify your assessment by basing it on the information presented.**
  - **Identify information that needs further exploration for you to make a better assessment.**
  - **Identify other techniques that you might use to gather information to assess Mr. and Mrs. Williams.**
  - **Describe how this assessment is similar to and different from the assessment of Ernestine Harris, the children's grandmother; and Lorita Webster, the children's "aunt."**



## Assessing Mr. and Mrs. Williams

*You have 30 minutes to do the following and to discuss your answers with your team:*

Based solely on the information that you have from the DVD, what you know about the Harris children, and what your agency policy is with respect to adoption by foster parents, do you agree on an assessment of Mr. and Mrs. Williams as the appropriate adoptive parents for Elizabeth, Michael and Isaiah? Make sure to justify your assessment by basing it on the information presented.

Identify information that needs further exploration for you to make a better assessment.

Identify other techniques that you might use to gather information to assess Mr. and Mrs. Williams.

Describe how this assessment is similar to and different from the assessment of Ernestine Harris, the children's grandmother; and Lorita Webster, the children's "aunt."



## Large Group Discussion

- ✓ Reconvene the group, and have each team present its assessments and justifications.
- ✓ Engage all of the teams in critiquing each other's assessments.
- ✓ The following issues should be addressed by the participants when they report to the group. If they are not, mention them:
  - age
  - reactions of birth children and their spouses
  - different motivations of Mr. and Mrs. Williams
  - interest in one sibling, but not the other
  - competition with family members by blood
  - attitude that "they will never be like *our* children"

## Individual Activity

- ☐ Take about 20 to 25 minutes to record the information that you have about Mr. and Mrs. Williams in the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment format.
- ☐ Keep this summary. We will discuss it in the final segment of this module.





## Exploring Attitudes about Adoption

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ We often have concerns about particular families who seek to adopt children from the child welfare system.
- ☐ These concerns, although they might never be addressed directly, can interfere with the adoption process.
- ☐ The next exercise allows us to examine our attitudes and to identify, for ourselves the source of these attitudes.



### Individual Activity

- ☐ This activity encourages you to examine concerns that you might have about certain prospective adoptive parents—including older couples, single parents, families who wish to adopt cross-culturally or cross-racially, families who are dependent on the agency, and those who are related to the child/youth whom they wish to adopt. In this segment, we will explore our own attitudes about families with these characteristics, attempt to clarify our individual values and biases, and consciously examine the role these values have in adoption.
- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 19, *My Thoughts about Adoption***.
- ☐ Read each issue, and write down your thoughts about it.
- ☐ You will have 10 minutes to complete this handout individually. Then I will ask you to volunteer to share your responses with the group.



### Handout 19



## My Thoughts about Adoption

*(Possible participant answers are in italics.)*

### **Older People** (At what age do I consider parents too “old” to adopt?)

My thoughts about elderly couples adopting are:

- *Consider individually with regard to activity level, etc.*
- *There should be a cut-off age.*
- *Some women wait until their 40s to conceive and are doing a good job at parenting.*
- *Who will take care of the child/youth if the adoptive parent becomes ill or dies?*
- *Some older people are quite active.*
- *Evaluate the age difference between parent and child/youth.*

### **Single Parents**

My thoughts about single parents adopting are:

- *Does he or she have a practical support system?*
- *Single male: Why would a 21-year-old adopt?*
- *May be emotionally needy.*
- *Issues regarding their parenting skills.*
- *Need to be in good shape financially.*
- *Child/youth might need a two-parent family.*

### **Cross-cultural Adoption**

My thoughts about cross-cultural adoption are:

- *Need to know what the family and the child/youth are up against.*
- *Unfair to the child/youth.*
- *Family needs to learn more about the child/youth's culture in order to ensure the family's exposure to and acceptance of that culture.*
- *Depends on the child/youth and the region of the country.*

### **Keeping Siblings Together**

My thoughts about keeping siblings together are:

- *Siblings always should be placed together.*
- *Keeps the children/youth connected to their birth families.*
- *Siblings should be split if one home cannot be found to keep them all together.*
- *Sometimes, foster parents say that they will take siblings in order to keep the one they have.*

*(continued on next page)*



**Foster Families Who Are Dependent on the Agency; that is, expect the caseworker to solve all problems**

My thoughts about foster families who are dependent on the agency are:

- *My experience with a particular family clouds my perspective.*
- *If they are nurturing, why not?*
- *Sometimes, having a child/youth remain in the birth family is better than placement in an agency-dependent family.*





## Large Group Discussion



- ✓ After 10 minutes, reconvene the group. Then ask participants to share their comments and to identify what they see as the basis for their attitudes.
- ✓ Record the comments on easel paper so that they remain visible throughout the discussion.
- ✓ Briefly review the themes that have emerged under each category.
- ✓ Make sure to comment on Federal Laws prohibiting age discrimination; marital status discrimination; gender discrimination; and race, culture or national origin discrimination.
- ✓ Discuss how the answers are consistent with State policies and procedures or not.
- ✓ Ask participants the following questions:
  - **Do we hold adoptive families to standards that are different from those that we expect of families created by birth?**
  - **Do our standards reflect what is known about families who are best suited to parent children/youth from the child welfare system?**





## Encouraging Foster Parent Adoptions

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ If your agency's foster parents are not adopting children/youth in substantial numbers and you want to increase these adoptions, you might want to take a look at your placement policies and practices.
- ☐ It is not unusual for foster parents to inform the agency that they will not adopt a child/youth, but are committed to fostering him or her until adulthood. Many factors can account for this decision. You need to be vigilant in identifying the specific factors influencing this family's position and not make any assumptions or judgments about their commitment to or interest in the child/youth. In being specific with the family, you might provide education or information that they can use to change their position.
- ☐ Foster parents should not be pressured to adopt a particular child/youth. They should be given information and options that empower them to make an informed decision.
- ☐ **Which other ways have you used to encourage and to support foster parent adoptions?**



### Transition

- ◆ Are there any questions or comments about anything that we have discussed about foster parent adoptions?
- ◆ In the next segment, we are going to discuss issues specific to newly recruited families.



## Newly Recruited Families

### Trainer's Points



- ☐ Recruited adoptive families are the smallest percentage of families adopting children/youth from the child welfare system. Nationally, approximately 12-15% of all children adopted from the child welfare system are adopted by recruited families. (AFCARS, September 2006) ***Note to trainers: You should update this data before each training. Go to the Children's Bureau website for the latest data.***
- ☐ Recruited individuals or families generally have either already been approved to adopt children/youth with certain characteristics or are recruited specifically for a particular child/youth. In this curriculum, this pool of prospective adoptive families is included in the term, "newly recruited families."
- ☐ If the plan of adoption by a relative or nonrelated foster parent cannot be completed, you must determine if it is in the child/youth's best interests to continue with an adoption plan. While adoption is the preferred policy option for children/youth whose parental rights have been terminated, the safety and well-being of the child/youth are paramount. If the child/youth expresses a preference to remain with the relative or nonrelative caregiver as a foster child instead of being adopted by a newly recruited family who is unknown to the child/youth, the caseworker should carefully and completely assess the impact of considering a recruited family adoption on the child/youth's safety and emotional well-being. The older the child is, the more important her commitment to adoption is to the success of the adoption, especially if they are at the age where they must legally give their consent. However, continued assessment should be made as the child/youth's original conflicting feelings regarding adoption with an unknown newly recruited family may change over time. If it is decided to proceed with a recruited adoptive family, there are many ways to proceed.
- ☐ First, the child/youth to be adopted can help to identify people with whom they have developed a connection over the years that might consider adopting them. The child/youth needs to understand that anyone they identify must be screened according to the agency's guidelines. Also, they may identify people who for various reasons cannot adopt them; but who will choose to remain connected to them. However, the caseworker must commit to attempting to locate and screen each identified person and to report back to the child/youth.



- ❑ AdoptUsKids has several resources available to assist you with different recruitment strategies such as media campaigns, Public Service Announcements (PSAs), photo listings, print and broadcast media presentations of specific children/youth, relative/prior connections searches, and community outreach and faith-based initiatives. They are listed in the References and Other Resources section of your Handouts. In this module, we focus on the assessment and preparation process after a family has been identified.
- ❑ In general, there are four basic approaches to recruiting adoptive parents: general recruitment, targeted recruitment, child-specific recruitment and child-centered recruitment.
- ❑ General recruitment focuses on raising public awareness of adoption and the need for adoptive parents for children/youth in the public child welfare system. Targeted recruitment focuses on presenting profiles of the general characteristics of the waiting children/youth to the general public or to targeted groups or segments of the public known to foster or adopt children/youth. Child-specific recruitment focuses on presenting information on identified children. Child-centered recruitment focuses on aggressively searching for “lost” relatives and others identified by the child/youth with whom the child/youth has had a connection. ( McKenzie & McKenzie, 2006)
- ❑ The tasks required for recruitment vary depending on the approach used. Most often, the caseworker will focus on targeted, child specific and child centered recruitment strategies.
- ❑ Targeted recruitment tasks include developing a comprehensive summary of the characteristics of waiting children, identifying outlets to distribute this information to individuals and groups that might adopt children with these characteristics, engaging in various outreach efforts with those individuals and groups, providing ongoing feedback, and completing the study and approval process.
- ❑ Child-specific recruitment tasks include discussing with the child/youth the need to recruit parents, the recruitment process and explaining that it could take time to find an appropriate adoptive family, developing an honest profile of the child/youth including what she wants and does not want in an adoptive parent, sharing that profile with the child/youth, engaging the child/youth in identifying outreach efforts that will not embarrass her, engaging aggressively in outreach to individuals and communities that might adopt, providing ongoing feedback to the child/youth, the individuals and communities, and completing the study and approval process.

- ☐ A common task irrespective of how the prospective adoptive family is identified is completion of The Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment. It has the same elements as those completed for a relative or foster parent interested in adoption.
- ☐ However, the caseworker's assessment and preparation approach with a newly recruited family if they have not had a connection with the child/youth or have not had previous involvement with the child welfare system can take more time. Completing the preparation and assessment process with these families requires a much more thorough education about the child welfare system, its impact on children/youth in general, the adoption process, discussion of their motivation to adopt, the characteristics they would like in a child/youth and the characteristics they would not like, and the impact of adoption on the family.
- ☐ Needless to say, more time is required for pre-placement activities structured to provide opportunities for both the child/youth and the potential adoptive family to get to know one another and follow-up contacts with the child/youth and the adults to discuss the visits, their concerns, process clarifications, gather additional information for assessment and moving them and the caseworker to a decision as to whether or not the adoption should proceed.
- ☐ The next Team Activity assumes that we have identified prospective adoptive parents who responded to a targeted recruitment initiative for two waiting children/youth. A summary of the prospective adoptive parents' characteristics and the children/youth's characteristics is used to begin the specific child/youth and specific family placement selection process.



## Handout 20

### Team Activity

- ☐ Turn to **Participant's Handout 20, *Summary Profile: Brenda and Steve Early and Summary Profile: Jacob and Sara Smart***
- ☐ You will have 30 minutes to complete this Team Activity.

## Summary Profile: Brenda and Steve Early

Brenda and Steven Early have been approved for adoption of children ages 6 through 10 with minimal behavioral problems and developmental disabilities. The Earlys have been married five years. They have wanted children; but are unable to conceive. They would like to adopt three or four children over the next three years. They are 30 and 32 years of age respectively. Both are employed professionally—he is an attorney and she is a college professor in social work. They have talked about Brenda taking a sabbatical for one year if they were to adopt. They have no immediate family in the area. Brenda's parents are deceased. She has one brother who is an officer in the U.S. Army stationed in Germany. He is not married. He visits once a year. Steven's father lives with Steven's older sister in California. His mother is deceased. Steven visits his father twice a year. The father does not travel. Steven's sister is divorced with one 16-year-old son. They have several good friends who would provide care for any adopted children when necessary and when Brenda returns to work. Brenda's work schedule is flexible. She would schedule her classes at times so that she could be with the children before and after normal school hours. Steven works long hours—frequently he does not get home until 9 or 10 p.m. He states that he would try to reduce his hours at least during the first six months of the adoptive placement.

The Earlys have a four bedroom home in an upper middle class neighborhood. He is Jewish but does not regularly participate in services. She is Catholic and participates in services every Sunday. They would raise the children in the Catholic faith.

## Summary Profile: Jacob and Sara Smart

Jacob and Sara Smart are siblings who are 8 and 7 years of age respectively. They have been placed in the same foster home since they were released from the hospital after birth. The foster mother is 63 years old. She does not want to adopt them because she thinks she is too old and her health is failing—she has insulin dependent diabetes. She wants to make sure the children are adopted before she is unable to care for them. She is unmarried and has no adult children whom she might rely on to take care of Jacob and Sara. She has talked with some of her friends about the possibility of adopting them, but none have stated that they would.

The children's mother died three years ago. According to the foster mother, their mother's adopted sister continued to visit the children for about a year after the mother's death. Then she moved out of state. She had talked about possibly having the children placed with her before she moved. The aunt sends the children birthday cards and Christmas presents. The foster mother says that no other relatives have visited or contacted the children since she has had them. The children's mother and aunt were placed in foster care and adopted by the same family when they were 12 and 11 years old.

The children have two different fathers. Jacob's father was never identified. Sara's father acknowledged paternity and voluntarily released his parental rights six months after she was born. He stated that he could not see himself bringing a bi-racial child into his family. He is White; the mother was bi-racial—Black/White. His family was contacted before Sara was placed in foster care. They stated they wanted nothing to do with the child because she was bi-racial.

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Jacob is in the second grade. He receives As and Bs. He especially likes and does well in math and science. He has no behavior problems. He has tested above normal on cognitive tests. He has no known health problems. He is in the top percentile in physical development. Sara is in the first grade. She likes reading, music, and science. She has tested below average on cognitive tests. She is legally blind, has chronic anemia and frequent colds. Both children are well behaved in the home, community, and school. They have attended the Methodist church two blocks from their home since placement.

They call the foster mother, “grandma.” She has talked with them about being adopted by someone else because she is “sick.” She has told them that she will always be their “grandma.” The children want to be adopted; but they would like the new family to live close by so they can continue to go to the same school and church and visit her “every day.” Jacob would like a dad who will play basketball, football, baseball and soccer with him; help him build things; and take him fishing. He would like a mom who can cook as well as grandma. He wants his sister adopted by the same people. Sara wants a mom who will take care of her forever and help her to do things. She isn’t sure about a dad. She wants to be with Jacob.

**Using Jacob’s and Sara’s Profile, identify the issues you would focus on with the Earlys as you and they determine if Jacob and Sara should be introduced to them for adoption. Discuss possible responses from them and how you would address those responses and how you would assess them in relation to the Earlys’ suitability to adopt Jacob and Sara.**

### **Earlys and Smarts: Child-Family Visitations**

Now let’s assume that we concluded that the Earlys, Jacob and Sara should meet. Jacob and Sara have been visiting weekly from Friday after school until Sunday for about three months. Based on your assessment, the visits have been going well, but Jacob has said that he is concerned that the Earlys live so far from his current foster mother (about 30 minutes by car), and that Mr. Early is frequently working and does not get home until after he goes to bed when they are visiting. He really wanted a father to “play with me.” Sara also is concerned that the Early’s home is so far from their current foster home; she would have to change schools and friends. Also, some of the kids in the Early’s neighborhood and at church don’t want to play with her because she is blind and Black. The Earlys have expressed some concerns about Sara’s school performance; but said they would get her additional tutoring and provide more opportunities for learning outside the school environment. Jacob seems overly protective of his sister, and they would like to see him “act more like a child.”

Mr. Early admits that he has been working during the weekend visits and has not had the time to spend with the children that he had hoped. He doesn’t see his work schedule changing significantly in the near future. However, he hopes to be able to work at home more than he has in the past so he can “break for dinner with the children.” He had expected to have most of Sunday with the children, but Mrs. Early insists on taking them to church on Sunday mornings and spending an hour with the church’s children’s group after services. Mrs. Early is fervently Catholic and thinks that the children should begin to learn about the Catholic faith with other children their ages. Further, they expect to enroll them in the school operated by the church. Participation in the children’s group now gives them an opportunity to become acquainted with some of the children before they begin school. Mrs. Early has been the primary caregiver for the children during the visits. She

*(continued on next page)*





picks them up on Fridays and has dinner with them and the current foster mother before going home. She puts the children to bed on Friday's usually before he gets home. Mr. Early assists with putting them to bed on Saturday nights. He has gone with them to a water park on two or three Saturdays. He and Mrs. Early take the children to the foster home on Sundays about 4 p.m. because the foster mother invited them to have dinner at the foster home early in the visitations, and they have continued to enjoy dinner with her and the children. They have a very good relationship with the foster mom and want her to remain involved in the children's lives because they know how much the children love her and she loves them. They view her as "grandma" to the children. This will be very important to them and the children because both of their mothers are deceased. Mrs. Early says that she has been very helpful in letting her know how to teach Sara to be more independent in the Early's home. They are committed to making sure the children visit her on a weekly basis after the adoption.

### **Should This Adoption Proceed?**

You would like to move to the next step—confirmation that the adoption should proceed or should not proceed because the children will be getting out of school in the next month and that would be a good time to transition them to the home if it is decided that the Earlys should adopt.

- **What issues would be the focus of your discussions with the Earlys? With Jacob? With Sara? With the current foster mother?**
  
- **What responses to these issues would lead you to decide that the adoption should proceed?**
  
- **What responses to these issues would lead you to decide that the adoption should not proceed?**
  
- **What additional preparation activities would you encourage if the decision is to proceed with the adoption.**
  
- **How much longer should visits continue? What purpose(s) would be served by continuing visits?**





## Large Group Discussion

- ✓ Reconvene and Debrief
  - **Using Jacob's and Sara's Profile, identify the issues you would focus on with the Earlys as you and they determine if Jacob and Sara should be introduced to them for adoption. Discuss possible responses from them and how you would address those responses and how you would assess them in relation to the Earlys' suitability to adopt Jacob and Sara.**
  - **What issues would be the focus of your discussions with the Earlys? With Jacob? With Sara? With the current foster mother?**
  - **What responses to these issues would lead you to decide that the adoption should proceed?**
  - **What responses to these issues would lead you to decide that the adoption should not proceed?**
  - **What additional preparation activities would you encourage if the decision is to proceed with the adoption.**
  - **How much longer should visits continue? What purpose(s) would be served by continuing visits?**
- ✓ Pay attention to the responses to be sure that the participants have identified and addressed the children's concerns sufficiently as well as the Mr. Early's commitment to the adoption and a specific plan for continued involvement with "grandma."
- This case example raises many issues common to any adoption. However, when the child must physically move with people he has not had a relationship with, there is the need to take time to develop the relationship. Agencies have different policies on the frequency and duration of pre-adopt visits. The most important factors are to ensure that the children/youth and the family have had sufficient time to get to know each other beyond the information on paper and to identify concerns with one another and resolved them.

## Transition

- ◆ Are there any questions about anything we have discussed thus far?
- ◆ In the next segment, we are going to talk about recording and assessing information in the family preparation and assessment process.





## Recording and Assessing Information in the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and Assessment

### Trainer's Points

- ☐ After each DVD vignette, you were given time to record the information you gained about Ernestine Harris, Lorita Webster and Mr. and Mrs. Williams in the appropriate place of the Family Profile/Home Study/Social History and 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 "Parenting Style and Strengths" for each prospective adoptive parent. Either write them on easel paper and post *or* copy them onto a transparency.
- ✓ Reconvene group and return the documents.
- ✓ Summarize 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/conclusions follow logically from facts recorded.



### Large Group Discussion

- ☐ 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 about family assessment and preparation?
- ◆ This concludes the Family Assessment and Preparation module.

