



Successfully Working with Birth Families

A Tough But Rewarding Relationship

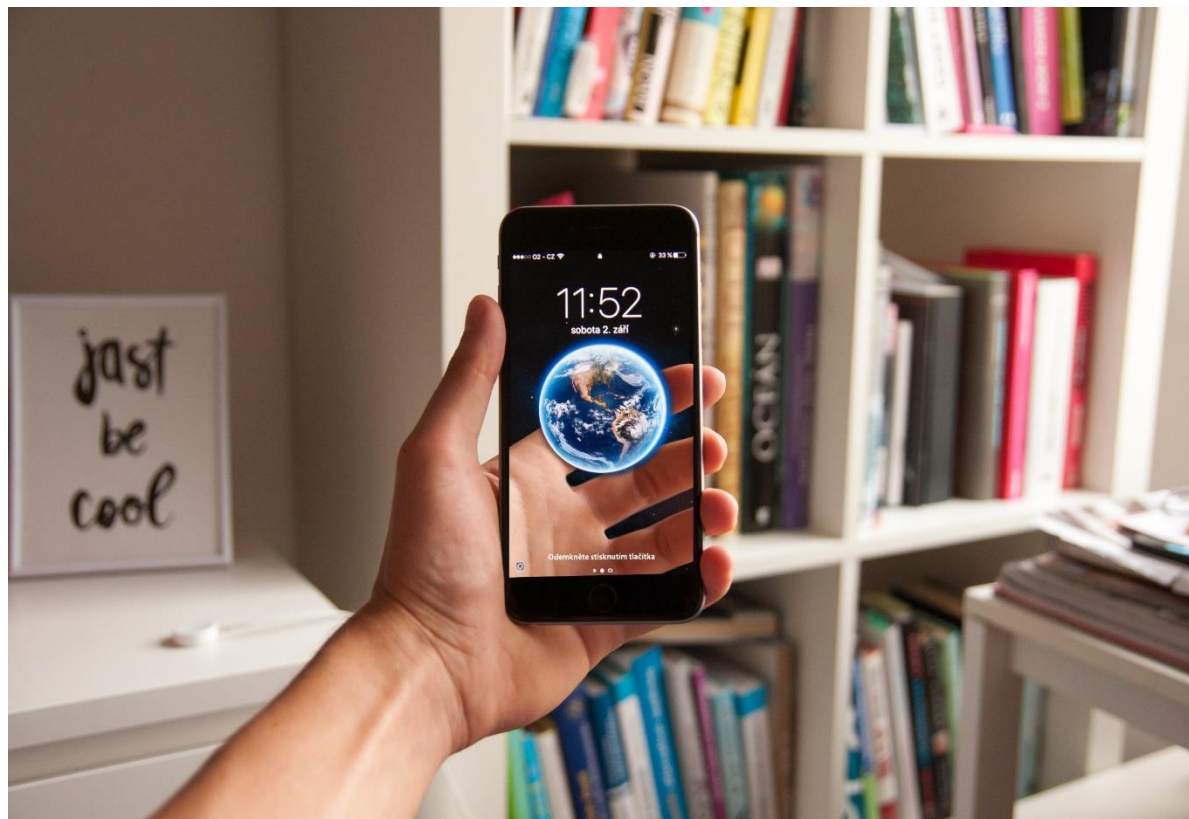
Why Is This Training Important?

- Foster children have families
- Best placement is with birth family when safe
- Majority of foster children return home
- Adopted children still have birth families
- Training developed with input from foster/adoptive parents, birth parents and professionals

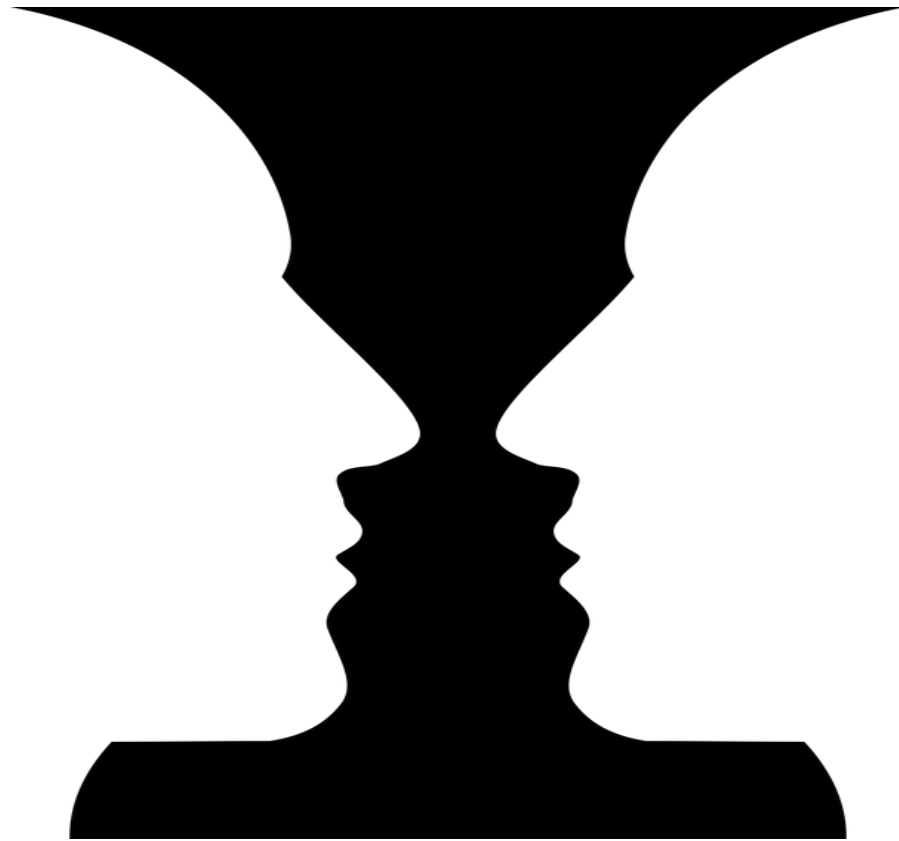
What We Will Be Learning Today

- Perception and its impact
- Building and nurturing attachments
- Types of permanence in foster care
- Role of communication
- Building and maintaining relationships with birth parents
- Role of being a mentor parent

Power Of Perception



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Perception

- “We were just starting out having a family, everything was going ok. It was all good. We were getting ready for the baby, you know all that stuff getting ready for a baby. The pregnancy was great, labor fantastic, like a few hours and she was here. Maria seemed healthy. She went to bed one night, and she never woke up, she just did not wake up and she was six weeks old. That threw us into chaos. We were both social drinkers, could take it or leave it, we were not addicted or drug addicts anything that bad. After she was gone we both started drinking heavily, and then started using and abusing drugs.” (Rosa BP)

Definition Of Perception

- Ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses
- State of being or process of becoming aware of something through the senses.
- Way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something; a mental impression
- Intuitive understanding and insight
- The neurophysiological processes, including memory, by which an organism becomes aware of and interprets external stimuli

Impact Of Perception

- Influences Choices
- Positive Power
- Negative Power

Perception

- What is the child/youth's perception of:
 - Themselves?
 - Their birth parents?
 - Their foster parents?
- What is the foster parents' perception of:
 - Themselves?
 - The child/youth?
 - The biological parents?
- What is the biological parents' perception of:
 - Themselves?
 - The child/youth?
 - The foster parents?

Trauma

“We have to understand that many of these parents are often dealing with their own past trauma. That simple fact had a profound impact on how I viewed them as parents.” (Kim Counselor)

Trauma

“I never had someone parent me. I never had someone who protected me. I wanted to be a good parent, but when life got hard I started doing what my parents did. I was so thankful that foster parents I worked with understood my past and showed me how to be a better person and parent.” (Trish BP)

Birth Parents' Trauma History

- Compromise ability to make judgments about safety
- Challenging for parents to form and maintain trusting relationships
- Challenges in relationships with foster parents and professionals
- Impair capacity to regulate their emotions
- Poor self-esteem and maladaptive coping strategies
- Result in trauma reminders
- Impair decision-making ability
- More vulnerable to other life stressors

Goals Of Fostering

- Assisting in the reunification of the child with the birth family
- Helping to minimize additional traumas from removal/instability
- Healing

Trauma Informed Work With Birth Parents

- Understand anger, fear, or avoidance may be a reaction to past traumatic experiences
- Assess a parent's history for past traumatic experiences
- Remember that traumatized parents are not “bad”
- Build on desires to be effective in keeping their children safe and reducing their children's challenging behaviors
- Help parents understand the impact of past trauma on current functioning and parenting

Trauma Informed Work With Birth Parents

- Pay attention to ways trauma can play out during case conferences, home visits, visits to children in foster care, court hearings, and so forth
- Refer parents to trauma-informed services whenever possible
- Become knowledgeable about evidence-supported trauma interventions
- Advocate for the development and use of trauma-informed services in the community

Building And Nurturing Attachments

“I never had a parent. I spent most of my childhood in foster care, and my teen years in group homes. I was never around babies, or younger kids. Then I had a baby, I had a hard time feeding her and changing her diaper, I thought she cried because she was mad at me, I never knew she needed something from me. I did not know I should comfort her and all that stuff. I did not know how to be a mother.” (Lynn BP)

Building And Nurturing Attachments

“We (foster parent) always told the parent that they are the parent and we are there to support their family and their relationship with their child. We want to build a strong relationship with child and parent, and show them how to build a strong attachment.” (Brett FP)

Building And Nurturing Attachments

“The best part of fostering is getting to attach to these wonderful kids, but we also need to build attachment with their parents. When we build the foundation of attachment between parent and child we give them something that will last a lifetime. Then when they go home you know that attachment will be something that that family can build on.”
(Laverne FP)

Building And Nurturing Attachments

- The development of a bond between a parent and a child
- New attachments build off of other attachments
- Cutting past attachments hurts everyone
- Creating and maintaining connections

Four Levels Of Permanence in Foster Care

- Objective Permanence
 - Child is settled in placement long-term
- Subjective Permanence
 - Perceptions of permanence and belonging by child and caregiver
- Enacted Permanence
 - Where a modus vivendi has been reached between child, foster parents and parents
- Uncontested Permanence
 - Where all behave as if:
 - child is 'part of the family'
 - foster family is a 'family for life'

Communication

“When we hold, love, and tend the physical, emotional, and mental wounds it is very hard not to “demonize” the parent. We absolutely shouldn’t, but it often happens when you watch 24/7 what these kids go through,” (Tara FP)

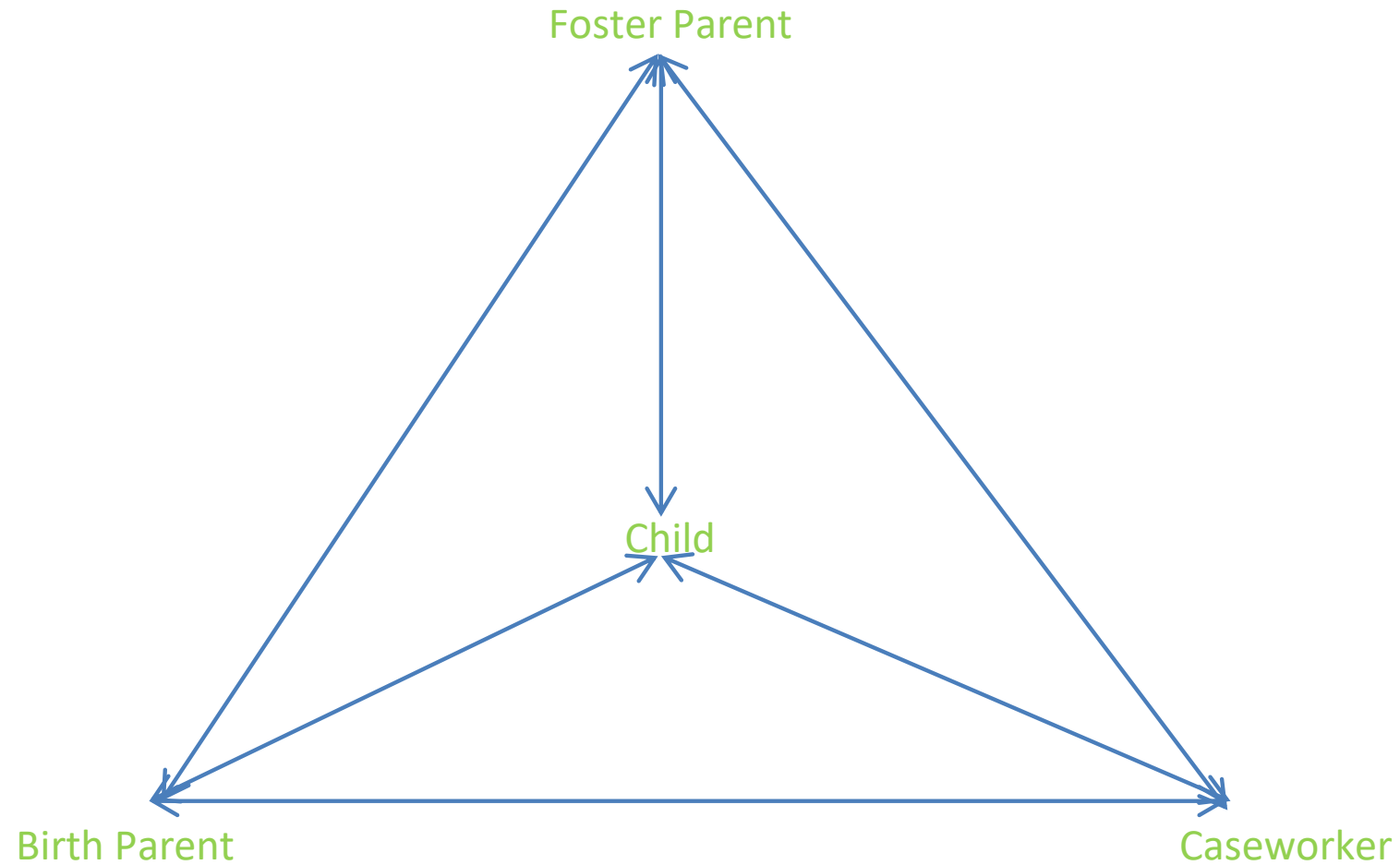
Communication

“One of the reasons that birth parents and foster parents get off on the wrong foot many times is that the rules are not clear - or the expectations. It would help if foster parents and birth parents were given an opportunity to sit down and talk to each other about what their expectations are - what the rules are, and discuss any questions that each may have,” (Sherry BP)

Keys To Effective Communication

- Be aware of informal communication
- Respect is a vital key for successful communication
- Using supports in dealing with powerful emotions

Fostering Triangles



Importance Of Relationships

“It is key to keep the focus on their child. We (as foster parents) are there to keep their kids safe and help them be able to bring their kids home in a safe home. We both have the same goal to make their family safe.” (Brett FP)

Importance Of Relationships

“It is important to help parents find successes early on and praise them for what they are doing right. Help them feel like they can do things right. Catch them being good.” (Mary FP)

Relationship Builders

- Include birth parents
- Ask for input
- Answer questions
- Support visitation
- Be prepared for anger
- Share information about your family and background
- Assure birth parents

Relationship Builders

- Find creative ways to increase contact between visits
- Help prepare the foster child for visits with his/her birth parents. Talk positively about them and get there with a positive attitude.
- Take photos during visits - have copies made for the parents and the child
- Brainstorm with the birth parents on ideas for visits - if problems develop ask the birth parents to help solve.

Mentoring

“Most times as foster parents when kids leave our home we never hear from the parents and times they perceive us as "necessary evil" We try to get into a position to mentor them and encourage them as they are being reunited When we can develop that relationship we can help mentor them We let them know we want to make their family better, not tear it apart” (Tara FP)

Mentoring

“It meant so much to me when my son’s foster parents helped me. Not only did they help me be a better mom. They helped me clean my house and gave me ideas on how to cook for a family. They helped me be a better parent.” (Tina BP)

Mentoring

“We need to help birth parents change their view of the system. From that of a system against them, to see it as a support system to help them find ways to best use the system to their advantage to get their families back together” (Bonnie FP)

Mentor Parent

- As a mentor parent some of the following may be skills birth parents may need:
- Ways to successfully keep a child on a schedule/routine - setting priorities
- Ways to working with mental health/school on meeting needs of the child
- Help learning appropriate ways to ask for help in times of need and/or crisis

Mentor Parent

- Help in learning how they can find and utilize community supports
- Help to brain storm ideas to make visitation a successful relationship building time
- Help to learn appropriate ways to build new positive connections with children as well as support systems; i.e., extended family, community supports

Mentor Parent

- Model positive parenting skills; i.e., praising children in front of parents, praising parents for their positive behaviors and actions
- Help to understand key developmental tasks and how they can work with their children in achieving those developmental tasks
- Help to understand discipline techniques that have been successful with their children

Benefits Of Strong Relationships

- Relationships between birth parent, foster parent, and children will be less stressful for everyone
- Increased support for child and family - building support systems
- Better chances of successful reunification and quicker reunification

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