

Meeting 6: Helping Children with Birth Family Connections

Agenda

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic</u>
(10 Minutes)	A. Introduction to Meeting 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Welcome and comfort issues♦ Bridge from Meetings 4 and 5♦ “Strengths/Needs Worksheet”♦ Meeting 6 agenda
(25 Minutes)	B. The Importance of Identity for Children in Foster Care <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Define self-concept and connections♦ Define identity and culture♦ Life Books
(15 Minutes)	C. The Power of Connections <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ “Five Connections” activity
(15 Minutes)	D. Federal Legislation and Its Impact on Children and Families <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ ICWA and MEPA/IEP
(10 Minutes)	BREAK

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic</u>
(30 Minutes)	E. Building a Positive Parental Alliance <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Positive Parental Alliance” sculpture
(20 Minutes)	F. Supporting Shared Parenting Through Visits <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Large Group Activity
(20 Minutes)	G. Supporting Shared Parenting Through Visits – Skill Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Managing Problems with Visits” role play
(20 Minutes)	H. Supporting Shared Parenting Between Visits <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Competition Activity
(15 Minutes)	I. Summary of Meeting 6 and Preview of Meeting 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Summary of Meeting 6◆ Preview of Meeting 7◆ Roadwork◆ Partnership in Parenting Experience

ROADWORK

- ◆ Complete the “Foster and Adoptive Parents’ Guide for Successful Visits or Contacts.”
- ◆ Write a letter to the parent of a child who may be placed in your home using Handout 10.
- ◆ Read Handouts 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Identity and Culture – Important Definitions

Identity	Identity is who you are based on characteristics such as race, ethnic background, religion, primary roles and responsibilities, and gender.
Self-concept	How we feel about our identity. It includes our sense of being loveable, capable, worthwhile, and responsible.
Connections	The important ties we have to people, values, beliefs, ideas, places, and things.
Culture	The way of life of a people.

Asking Questions to Understand Cultural Needs

Children enter foster care from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. Recognizing and supporting a child's cultural identity contributes to a child's well-being and helps the child feel loveable, capable, worthwhile, and responsible.

Questions to ask to help understand a child's cultural identity:

1. What family traditions are important to this child?
2. Who is considered part of this child's family?
3. Who are the special friends (often considered honorary “uncles, aunts, cousins”) of the family?
4. What languages are spoken in the family?
5. What foods remind the child of home and provide comfort for this child?
6. What is important about religion to this family?
7. What is the race and ethnicity of this child?
8. What are the child's clothing and hair style preferences?
9. How does the family spend time together?
10. What is the child's role in special holidays and family occasions?
11. What do the child's parents want me to know about this child?
12. _____.
13. _____.
14. _____.
15. _____.

Major Provisions of the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act

ICWA's principle is to "protect the best interests of Indian children." ICWA was also designed to "promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families by the establishment of minimum federal standards for the removal of Indian children from their families."

These principles are reflected in the ICWA provisions. In summary form, the major provisions of ICWA are to:

Provide for Exclusive Indian Tribal Jurisdiction over child welfare proceedings involving Indian children who reside or are domiciled on Indian reservations except where such jurisdiction is vested in the state by existing federal law, and to authorize the transfer of proceedings involving Indian children not domiciled or resident on reservations from state to tribal courts.

Establish a Right of Intervention in state court regarding foster care and termination of parental rights proceedings on the part of an Indian child's tribe or Indian custodian.

Require that Full Faith and Credit be accorded to tribal acts, records, and judicial proceedings applicable to Indian child custody proceedings by federal and state courts.

Require, in any involuntary proceedings in a state court when there is actual or constructive notice that an Indian child is involved, that **Notice be Provided** to the parent or Indian custodian and tribe, or that notice be provided to the Secretary of the Interior when the custodian or tribe is not known.

Provide for a Right to Court-Appointed Counsel for indigent parents in any child removal, placement, or termination of parental rights proceedings.

Establish Minimum Federal Evidentiary Standards and procedures for state court proceedings involving foster care placement of Indian children or the termination of parental rights.

Establish Federal Standards Governing Voluntary Foster Care Placements, relinquishments or terminations of parental rights and adoptive placements.

Establish Placement Preferences and Standards governing foster care, pre-adoptive, and adoptive placements of Indian children.

Provide for a System of Record-Keeping on the part of states placing Indian children for adoption, and authorizing access to such records by Indian children when they reach the age of 18 years for the purpose of determining tribal affiliation and related rights.

Authorize the Secretary of the Interior to award grants for Indian Tribes and organizations for the purposes of establishing and operating Indian child and family service programs and preparing and implementing child welfare codes.

Authorize the Use of Interior Department Funds as nonfederal matching shares in connection with federal Health and Human Services-administered Social Security Act funds, and to provide that the licensing or approval of foster homes or institutions by an Indian tribe shall be deemed the equivalent to the licensing or approval by a state for purposes of qualifying for assistance under federally assisted programs.

Definitions

- Indian –** Any person who is a member of an Indian tribe, or who is an Alaska native and member of a regional corporation as defined in 1606 of title 43 (25 U.S.C. §1903(3)).
- Indian Child –** Any unmarried person who is under age 18 and is either: (a) a member of an Indian tribe or (b) eligible for membership in an Indian tribe and the biological child of a member of an Indian tribe (25 U.S.C. §1903(4)).

Custody Proceedings Covered by the Act

The Act applies to:

1. Involuntary Foster Care Placement (voluntary placement is covered separately).

In order to remove an American Indian child from the home, there needs to be “clear and convincing evidence” that the continued custody of the child by the parents or Indian custodian is likely to result in serious emotional or physical damage to the child (25 U.S.C. §1912(e)). The act applies not only to the initial foster care placement, but also to all subsequent placements unless the child is being returned either to the parents or the Indian custodian from which the child originally was taken (28 U.S.C. §1961(b)).

2. Termination of Parental Rights.

In order to terminate parental rights there must be a showing that the continued custody of the child by the parent or Indian custodian is likely to result in serious emotional or physical damage to the child. This finding must be supported by evidence beyond a reasonable doubt (25 U.S.C. §1912(f)).

3. Pre-adoptive and Adoptive Placements.

Pre-adoptive placement is the “temporary placement of an Indian child in a foster home or institution after the termination of parental rights, but prior to or in lieu of adoptive placement” (25 U.S.C. § 1903(iii)). The purpose of a pre-adoption proceeding is to insure that all placements are subject to the protections afforded by the act, and that the act’s adoptive placement preferences cannot be avoided by labeling an Indian child as not-adoptable (Bureau of Indian Affairs Report 1984 (67)). Adoptive placement is the permanent placement of an American Indian child, which includes any action resulting in a final decree of adoption (25 U.S.C. § 1903(iv)).

Criteria for Placements

The Indian Child Welfare Act describes the criteria that must be met when placing a child in foster care or pre-adoptive care initially and when reviewing the child’s placement. The child must be placed in a setting that will meet any special needs that child may have and will also be the least restrictive setting which most approximates a family. The foster or pre-adoptive home must be within a reasonable proximity to the child’s natural home. Preference shall be given, in the absence of good cause to the contrary, to a placement with (1) a member of the Indian child’s extended family, (2) a foster home licensed, approved, or specified by the Indian child’s tribe, (3) an Indian foster home licensed or approved by an authorized non-Indian licensing authority or (4) an institution for children approved by an Indian tribe or operated by an Indian organization which has a program suitable to meet the Indian child’s needs (25 U.S.C. § 1915(b)).

When placing an American Indian child in an adoptive placement, preference shall be given, in the absence of good cause to the contrary, to a placement with (1) a member of the child’s extended family, (2) other members of the Indian child’s tribe or (3) other Indian families (25 U.S.C. § 1915(a)). (OCFS Website)

Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA) and Amendment of 1996 (IEP)*

The Howard Metzenbaum Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA), 42 U.S.C.A. §5115a, prohibits denial or delay of placement for foster care or adoption by any agency that receives federal funds because of the child's or foster/adoptive parent's race, color, or national origin. The law was intended to:

- ♦ Decrease the time children wait to be adopted.
- ♦ Prevent discrimination in the placement of children on the basis of race, color, or national origin.
- ♦ Prevent discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin when selecting foster and adoptive placements.
- ♦ Facilitate the development of a diverse pool of foster and adoptive families.

In August of 1996 Congress amended MEPA in order to strengthen its nondiscriminatory provisions and to provide stiff penalties for violation of the act. The anti-discrimination provisions of MEPA now state that any public or private agency or entity that receives federal assistance cannot:

- ♦ *Deny to any person the opportunity to become an adoptive or foster parent on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the foster or adoptive parent or the race, color, or national origin of the child involved in the foster or adoptive placement; and*
- ♦ *Delay or deny the placement of a child into foster care or for adoption on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent or the race, color, or national origin of the child involved in the foster care or adoptive placement.*

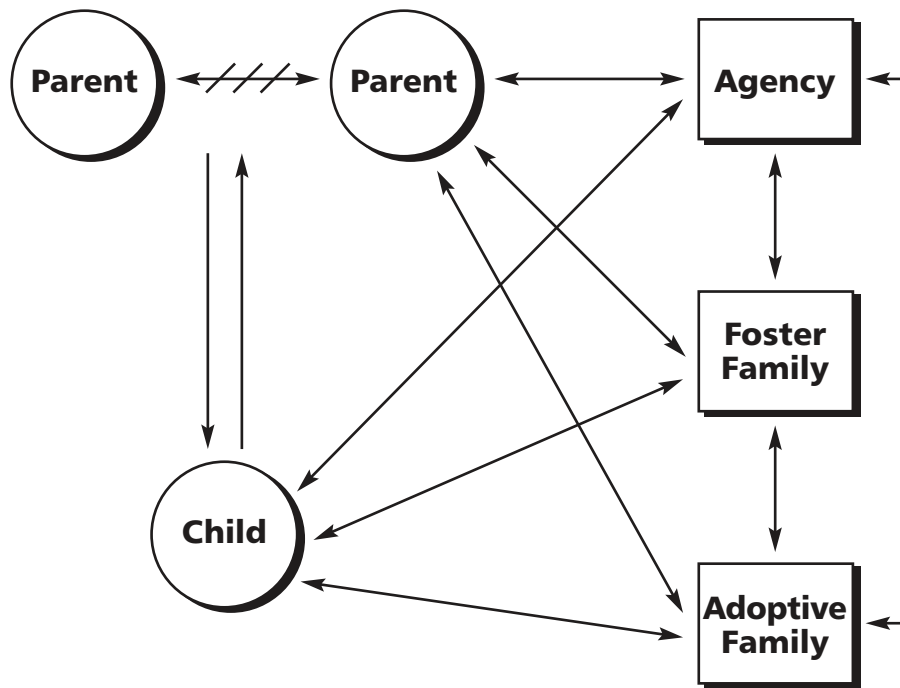
IEP was enacted to encourage trans-racial placements of children when appropriate same-race placements are not available. The act specifically permits the consideration of a child's cultural, ethnic, or racial background and the ability of a potential foster parent to meet the child's related needs as one of many factors to consider in determining the best interests of a child. The Department of Health and Human Services published Policy Guidance in the Federal Register on April 25, 1995, to be used as guidelines for compliance by agencies. An updated Policy Guidance related to the amendment was made available in June 1997.

* Developed by National Association of Foster Care Reviewers and published in Heather Craig-Oldsen, Foundation Training for New Foster Care Reviewers, Atlanta, GA (1998) through funding from Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau.

Non-compliance with this act is a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C.A. §2000d et seq. Any person who believes that she or he has been a victim of a violation of the act has a right to bring an action for relief in the appropriate U.S. District Court. Any entity found in violation of the law will lose considerable federal matching funds. MEPA does not affect the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, 25 U.S.C. 1901 et seq. (42 U.S.C.A. §5115a(f))

MEPA/IEP - Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA), part of Improving America's schools Act of 1995, Public Law 103-382, #551-554, 108 Stat. 4056-4057 and Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption (IEP), part of the Small Business Job Protection Act, Public Law 104-188, 110 Stat. 1755 #1808

The Alliance Model of Child Welfare Practice



The Alliance Model is an idea developed for staff and parents in child welfare to promote partnerships in parenting. This model of practice is even more important today with the passage of legislation such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act, Public Law 105-89, also known as ASFA. ASFA was designed to focus child welfare agencies on the issues of safety, well-being, and more timely permanence for children. With abbreviated time frames, it is important that parents of children in foster care begin working together quickly, whenever possible.

This diagram is called “The Alliance Model.” An alliance in a family refers to two members sharing a common goal or interest that is not detrimental to any other members of the family. The lines and arrows in the diagram represent alliances.

The line between the two parents shows that they are united, or have formed an alliance, to care for the child and meet his or her needs so that the child can concentrate on growing up and completing important developmental tasks. The slash marks represent a damaged or broken parental alliance. When the positive alliance of parents is damaged or broken, children respond in a variety of ways. Some children who perceive that their parents are not united in seeking the collective good of the family often try to “fix” the family. They begin parenting the parents, as well as younger siblings. When they do this, they often rise above the normal parental boundary line. Other children respond by creating a decoy for all the battling. They may begin acting in ways that capture the parents' attention. Parents may begin aiming their tensions at the child rather than at each other. In the child's mind, at least the parents are united again. Other children respond to the parents' broken alliance by withdrawing, which likewise can serve to unite the parents around the child's good.

* Adapted from Thomas D. Morton, “*Partnerships in Parenting*,” CWI.

Whatever the response, the energy of the child is directed toward preserving the family, rather than toward the “job” of childhood, which entails growing into a healthy and strong adult. Consequently, at best, the family is at risk of deteriorating in function. At worst, the family is at risk of disintegrating altogether, leaving the child at risk of being without the love and nurturance needed for him or her to grow and develop.

In this circumstance the child must develop two separate alliances in a two-parent home – one with one parent and one with the other parent – in order to survive. No longer can he or she rely on the parental alliance. Children faced with this conflict often shield their loyalty to one parent from the other. Alternatively, they may feign dislike for one parent as a way of preserving loyalty to the other. In either case, the child is emotionally at risk and must divert energy toward social survival in the conflicted world of the adults.

Historically, child welfare agencies have primarily emphasized their mission of child protection; therefore, the primary helping alliance has been with the child. The purpose of this alliance is to ensure that the child's needs of nurturance and safety are met. Since the main threat to child safety is generally parental behavior, the alliance seeks to shield the child from risk created by the parents. While the intended benefits of safety are real, both the child and the parents may tend to experience the intervention as reducing emotional and physical safety, rather than increasing it.

With the mission of protecting the child, the agency's natural tendency is to align with the child. The agency seeks to restore the flow of nurturance and limit excessive parental control. Since this intervention is mostly involuntary on the part of the parent, the agency must first establish blame and damage, or risk of damage, before it can legally intervene. These two circumstances generally cause the parents to see the agency as a threat to their attachment to their child.

Agencies often use attachment to extract change in parental behavior. The offered social contract with the parent is, “If you meet the terms of the case plan, you can keep your child in your family.” The threatened loss of the child is used by the agency to socially control the parental behavior that is placing the child at risk.

Although services are offered to the parent and are intended to support the parent, the parent may not experience that support as nurturance. To the extent that the parents have been engaged around their needs, especially the needs and goals for the development and safety of their children, the offers may be experienced as nurture. To the extent that the parents are engaged primarily around the agency's needs to ensure child safety, the parents may experience the offer in much the same way as the truant youth who is ordered to attend school, presumably for his own benefit. If the youth were experiencing success at school, the order would probably not be necessary. The order in and of itself, however, will not alter the experience of attending school.

The child also may sense the intervention as a threat to his or her emotional security. To the extent that the agency's alliance with the child creates conflicting loyalty between the parental attachment and the child's relationship to the agency, the child will experience the situation in a similar way as when conflict began between his or her parents.

A problem of a control-centered intervention is that it tends to place the parents in a childlike position. In terms of family systems, this places the parent below the parental boundary and confuses the parent-child relationship. Although control of parental behavior may be necessary to protect a child, ultimately the success of the intervention will require attention to parental needs as well. Since 99 percent of interventions begin with the preservation of the family or the return of the child to the family as a goal, nurturing the child through the parent is an essential condition for the future.

When safety cannot be ensured within the family, a foster family is frequently chosen for a child. Through the preparation and selection process, foster parents are initially aligned with the agency. Since the primary role of foster parents is to meet the child's needs for nurturance and safety, the foster family quickly works to form a positive alliance with the child, although today they also form alliances with birth parents.

More than the agency's alliance with the child, the attachment of the foster family to the child is likely to be perceived by the birth parents as a serious threat to their attachment with the child. The child is presented with a new dilemma. Attaching to the foster family may be an essential condition to getting his or her needs met. However, this attachment may jeopardize his or her attachment to the birth family. Maintaining the birth family attachment may also similarly reduce the motivation of the foster parents to form an attachment with the child, which is an essential component in their motivation to nurture and protect the child. The child may give up on the parental attachment, fail to attach to the foster family or seek to maintain a dual, and somewhat secret system of parallel alliances.

Any of these are costly choices for the child. The best of all possible worlds is that the child can openly seek and maintain all connections necessary to meet his or her needs. The possibility for this depends on the teamwork of the agency and foster parents and the strength of their partnership with the child's birth parents.

When a child cannot be parented by his or her birth parents or adopted by a foster family, then another family is found to provide the life-long attachment for the child. When this happens, the adoptive family works to form a positive alliance with the child. Since a stronger attachment is often necessary for a lifetime commitment or attachment to be formed, the adoptive parents may view detaching the child from connections with the agency, foster parents and birth family as a necessary act in ensuring the full attention of the child to the attachment with the adoptive family. Unfortunately, the loss of these connections at the psychological level leaves holes in the child's identity and undermines the child's concept of self.

At worst, the child may feel conflict between loyalties to the birth family, foster family, and adoptive family. When the parents compete for the child's loyalty, the child is again left with the dilemma of having to manage all the adult alliances, which diverts energy from growth to psychological security.

When a child in a foster or adoptive home perceives that the adults are not aligned around his or her well-being, the child will feel threatened. Maintaining a relationship with the birth family is important to the child because identity and self-concept begin with that alliance. The alliance with the agency is important because the agency represents the power to move children at will, or so it seems to the child. The foster or adoptive family alliance is important because daily nurturing and care is ensured there. So, when a child perceives that adults are not aligned among themselves, the child responds in ways similar to his or her response to parental conflict. The difference is that now there are more alliances to manage or “fix”, and even less energy remains for the child to grow and enjoy his or her childhood. That is why we say the adults in a child's life must work together as team members and as partners.

Teamwork - *Teamwork* involves two or more people working together according to a coordinated plan, in a relationship where team members assume different roles and responsibilities, all designed to reach the same goal. Team members can be relied upon to assume their specific jobs or responsibilities.

Within the Alliance Model, child welfare staff and foster parents work as a team. As with any effective team, players have different roles, responsibilities and tasks, but each team member has the same goal, in this case, to preserve, or rebuild, the family around the long-term welfare of the child. This requires that the team members form a partnership or positive alliance with the birth parents, always seeking to keep parents focused on the welfare of the child.

Partnership - A *partnership* is a relationship where two or more parties each contribute something of value in order to receive benefits. The nature of the contribution and the distribution of benefits are defined by the social contract between the parties.

Social Contract - A *social contract* is an agreement entered into by the mutual consent of parties desiring to exchange something of value. When there is coercion, a contract is not valid. When there is no exchange, there is no contract. When there are no contributions, there is no partnership.

Since we define teamwork and partnership a bit differently in the Alliance Model, we usually use the term “team” to describe the staff, foster parents and other professionals working together. Hopefully the birth parents can become team members. However, at the beginning of the relationship, the best we can hope for is to negotiate good working agreements in partnership. Building partnerships builds trust and agreement between people over time.

Within the Alliance Model, the agency's goal is to establish an alliance with parents to protect their children rather than just an alliance with children to protect them from their parents. Overwhelmingly, agency efforts are directed toward the goal of maintaining the birth family as the primary parenting resource for children. Given this fact, agency efforts are judged by the extent to which they strengthen parenting capacities and family attachments. Foster parents can help or hinder these efforts. Therefore, foster families need to know the framework or model the agency uses in its child welfare practice. If a person is primarily interested in becoming a foster parent in order to protect and save children from harmful parents, his or her needs may not be met through the foster care program. The agency recruitment and public education efforts must reflect the philosophy of the agency's model of practice.

Foster parents play vital roles, supplementing and supporting birth families rather than substituting for them. They, too, need explicitly defined social contracts with birth families. Foster parents must be prepared to care for a child independently while psychologically sharing the child with others. Foster parents make a vital contribution to the partnership when they accept a child's relationships.

The job of public or private child welfare agencies is to preserve, or help rebuild, families at risk of deterioration. The single most powerful relationship upon which to build is the connection between the child and his or her parents.

The Role of Foster Parents in Building Alliances with Parents of Children in Foster Care*

Recognize and support parent strengths

The best place in most cases to begin working with a parent of a child in foster care is to begin looking for the parent's strengths. The parents obviously have needs or their child would not have been placed in care. But we are beginning our work with them counterproductively if we focus our attention too tightly on those needs. When we see only a parent's needs, we are defining the parent in our minds in a negative way. When we have defined the parent in our minds in a negative way, it is difficult for us to be or even seem genuinely engaged in working with him or her. By contrast, when we recognize a parent's strengths, we feel better about working with him or her, and we will have a positive place to begin talking and working with that person.

Use strengths to engage parents

Once you have recognized a parent's strengths, you can use the following questions to create ways to use those strengths to build a partnership with the parents:

- ◆ How can I use that strength to begin engaging parents to work with me in partnership?
- ◆ What is something I as a team member might want from this parent who has this strength?
- ◆ What is something I as a team member might offer to this parent based on this strength?
- ◆ What is something this parent might want from me as a team member based on this strength?

Maintain Confidentiality

There are rules and restrictions about confidentiality and what information agency staff can share, even with fellow team members such as foster parents. However, parents themselves may share information with foster parents. All personal information must be held in confidence, with the understanding that foster parents must share information with the agency staff. Parents need to know that agency staff and foster parents share information.

Even when policy supports agency staff sharing certain information with foster parents, some agencies may interpret policy conservatively. In this case the agency's procedures restrict sharing information; thus, the agency perceives a barrier to sharing such information, though there is in reality no legal or policy barrier. It will be healthy if agencies revisit their procedures around the sharing of information to ensure that they are not being counterproductively

* Adapted from material developed by Thomas D. Morton, Child Welfare Institute.

restrictive. Foster parents should have complete access to information that is relevant. The obvious question arises from what is or is not “relevant.” For example, a mother may have had an affair during her marriage when her child was living with her. The child does not know about the affair, but the husband knows about the affair and his anger may cause the marriage to fall apart. Should the caseworker tell the foster parents about this? In many cases, the foster parents would have no need for the worker to share this information. However, if the parents fight about this issue every time the child comes home, the child could be sufficiently affected that the worker would need to tell the foster parents so they would be able to perform their role and responsibilities. The foster parents would be responsible for holding the family's information in confidence.

Manage Personal Emotions

It is a natural human response to feel strong emotions when learning of a child's suffering. While the “Alliance Model of Child Welfare Practice” readily recognizes the validity of such emotions, it also takes a practical approach toward attempting to help parents change so they will no longer behave in a way that makes foster parents and workers feel anger, disgust or some other negative emotion. Foster parents may ask themselves, “How can I be respectful to someone who did those things?” The answer is that a positive, constructive working relationship is the most effective route to help the parent never again do “those things.”

Foster parents may be judging the parent by the worst thing that parent ever did in his or her life. All of us probably have a worst thing that we did in our lives, and we do not want to be judged by that forever. How would any of us feel if we were judged by the worst thing we ever did? A foster parent could be an important part of the process of helping that parent change. Even in the case of adoption, adoptive parents will need to talk with children about what happened in their past and to be able to do it in a way that is not condemning of the parents.

Also foster parents may be surprised upon getting to know the parent that they are better able to empathize with the parent. For example, we may care for a boy who was sexually abused by his father. Initially we may think the father must be a monster and wonder how anyone could possibly expect us to treat him with respect. But what if we learn the father as a boy was also sexually abused by his own father? Suddenly we have a glimpse past the “monster” we had previously seen the father to be, and we instead are able to see a human being in pain and confusion. We see that although this father indeed committed a monstrous act, he is not a monster; rather, he went through experiences as a boy that confused him about what is acceptable in how fathers relate to sons. When we realize this, we can begin supporting this person to help him find a way to parent that will take the pain away not only from his son, but also from himself.

A place for foster parents to start working with a caseworker in such a situation is for them simply to think together about the best starting place in working with such a parent in a constructive way with a goal of reunification. The foster parent will eventually need to be in the parent's presence, if only at a planning meeting, so the foster parent will need to think of what would contribute to his or her comfort so that the foster parent and the parent will be able to contribute to the child's plan.

There are ways for foster parents to show respect for parents without having direct contact with the parents. A foster parent must realize that as long as the child is in his or her house, the foster parent has a relationship to the parent through the child, because the child will be bringing memories of the parent into the foster parent's house. The way the foster parent talks to the child around these memories and the issues related to these memories is a crucial starting point.

Team members might feel safety risks in working closely with some parents. Team members should not feel that to implement the alliance model of practice they must be prepared to jeopardize their safety. Workers and foster parents should follow a standard practice of never being alone with anyone with whom they feel unsafe. Team members may be concerned that some parents in some situations might become angry, out of control or might show up at their house, perhaps intoxicated. When foster parents participate in developing a plan with the workers, they can plan for these possibilities. An obvious action in such situations is to call the police. However, plans should also be developed to avoid such crisis measures and to avoid foster parents feeling vulnerable. Such plans would involve progressions which ensure safety at each step, starting with in-office contacts, progressing to exchange of visits, then progressing to a neutral setting. If a parent is violent and out of control, the plan would include only in-office visits until this pattern of behavior alters. In such cases, if the foster parents want the location of their home kept secret, the caseworker should support them in this. A particularly volatile case might never progress beyond in-office visits.

A key dimension of the alliance model centers around how decisions are made in teams. Working in teams, workers will be more positioned to hear foster parents' input, rather than workers being positioned so they are more likely to have to rely on "pulling rank" over foster parents in making decisions. Sometimes foster parents as team members may be wrong, of course, so that a caseworker may need to make the final decision. By the same token, caseworkers can be wrong, and, if a foster parent feels strongly about his or her view, the foster parent could request that someone else – perhaps the caseworker's supervisor – be brought in so that the foster parent's concerns could be included on the record. In such a case, it would be best for foster parents to be able to cite examples of *behavior*, rather than their own *feelings*. For example, a foster parent may be concerned about the child's safety when the parents use alcohol or other drugs; this foster parent would be behaviorally oriented in describing a mother by saying, "The mother has had alcohol on her breath the last three times I saw her, and she acted intoxicated. No one has done a drug screen to determine if she is using drugs or alcohol."

Share Power and Control

When parents are brought into decision-making, they will be more invested in contributing to a process which they helped to plan. In the partnership/teamwork approach, more information is available. First, caseworkers and foster parents gain more firsthand information from interacting with parents. This added information aids in decision-making. Second, when parents are included in partnership, they gain more first-hand information about the caseworker and foster parents, which could build trust.

When caseworkers rely too heavily on their personal power to move a case forward, they may not always be aware of how ineffective their power is in real terms. Power often only lasts as long as the person with the power is there to enforce it. When a caseworker or a foster parent is in the room with parents, he or she might be very powerful; however, when the parents are away from the caseworker or foster parent and have the child, they can be very powerful. The alliance model seeks a greater degree of shared influence to influence people's actions and behaviors beyond what happens in a room during a meeting, or in a foster home during a visit. A parent's personal investment in a process often does not come out of response to power; rather, parents' personal investments derive from their wanting the same goals and their being willing to achieve those goals.

Model Effective Parenting Skills, Mentor and/or Teach Parents

When there is direct contact between foster parents and parents, the foster parents often serve as mentors or teachers. Minimally, they model effective parenting for the parents whose children are in foster care. Sometimes the process is formalized; sometimes it is informal. Good teachers do four things. First, teachers or mentors share practical information. For example, foster parents may be in a position to teach a parent about grieving behaviors, in order to normalize angry and depressed behaviors in children. Second, teachers or mentors provide examples or applications for the information. For example, a foster parent trying to teach a parent ways to handle grieving behavior may explain specific ways a child has reacted to loss and specific ways the foster parent effectively dealt with the child's behavior. Third, teachers or mentors give the learner an opportunity to practice. In the case of a foster parent teaching a parent about dealing with grieving behaviors, perhaps the foster parent can facilitate a discussion between the parent and child. Fourth, teachers or mentors provide feedback. Without feedback the learner doesn't know what was done well, or poorly. So, foster parents need to tell parents specifically what they did that was effective, as well as offer suggestions.

Scenarios — Managing Problems with Visits

Scenario 1: I Don't Want You to Go!

Child:	Jenny
Age:	6
Reason for Placement:	Physical Abuse
Permanency Plan:	The plan is for Jenny to be reunited with her mother.
Foster Parent:	John and Melanie Clark
Caseworker:	Terry Smith
Time in Care:	Three months
Role Players:	Terry (Caseworker) Melanie (Foster Mother) Jenny (Child in Foster Care) Janet (Jenny's Mother)

Background: Jenny had multiple bruises and burns when she came into foster care. Her mother's boyfriend is accused of the abuse. Her mother is overwhelmed and frustrated and says she cannot handle Jenny by herself. She says she loves Jenny. Jenny's mother was living with her boyfriend who threatened and sometimes hit her too. Jenny disobeys deliberately; doesn't want to be touched; is afraid of stairs, bathtubs and strangers, and she screams whenever she sees someone with a cigarette. Jenny is attending school at grade level and is good at taking care of herself.

Situation: Jenny has been having weekly supervised visits in the agency visiting area. Mother's boyfriend has been out of her home for the past two weeks. Either John or Melanie Clark has been part of the visits since they know that Jenny needs support from trusted adults. This is the second visit since Jenny became aware that Mother's boyfriend has moved out. This visit is in the foster home, at the foster parents' request, because they want Jenny and her mom to be more comfortable. The visit has gone well, and it is time for Janet to leave with Terry Smith, the caseworker.

Terry:	Jenny, this has been a good time today and the time has gone so fast. It's time for your Mom to go home.
Melanie:	That's right, Jenny. It's time for Terry to take your Mom home.
Jenny:	No! It's not fair! I don't want you to leave! (grabbing her mother)
Janet:	Honey, I'm sorry, but I have to go now.
Jenny:	No! No! No! (stomping her foot and bursting into tears)
Adults:	(Respond to Jenny.)

Scenario 2: I Don't Want to See Her!

Youth:	Karen
Age:	14
Reason for Placement:	Neglect and Medical Neglect
Permanency Plan:	Karen will be reunited with her mother if her mother completes treatment and can take care of her. If that is not possible, Karen's foster parents are considering adopting her, but have not made a final decision yet.
Time in Foster care:	Three months
Foster Parents:	Pat and Ken Conrad
Role Players:	Karen (Youth in Foster Care) Pat (Foster Mother)

Background: Karen has been in foster care several times during her life due to neglect and medical neglect. Her mother has recurrent problems with drugs and alcohol. Karen has been in this foster home for three months; this is the second time she has lived here. Karen has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. She also has a heart murmur. Karen is about three years behind her grade level in school and has been diagnosed with dyslexia, a reading disorder. Karen has two friends from her foster parents' church, who are two years younger than she is. Karen has a big smile when she is happy and she loves to dress up. Most of the time Karen is very quiet and wants to stay in her room by herself. She looks forward to Sundays when her mother eats dinner with the foster family.

Situation: Last Sunday Karen's mom, Joan, did not show up for Sunday dinner. Pat and Ken Conrad followed up with the agency and with Joan. Joan had a relapse and was high on drugs all that weekend. Joan is back in her recovery program this week. Karen has entered the kitchen where Pat Conrad is popping some popcorn for the family.

Karen: Aunt Pat, you are always telling me that I need to talk to you about my feelings.

Pat: Sure, Karen, talking about feelings is a good way of dealing with them.

Karen: Well, I'm very, very unhappy with Mom. In fact, I'm downright pissed off. And I know you don't like that language, but that's exactly how I feel! I don't want to see her tomorrow! I don't want to be here when she comes....IF she comes! (rolling her eyes)

Pat: (Respond to Karen.)

Foster and Adoptive Parents' Guide for Successful Visits or Contacts

1. How might I prepare the child for a visit or contact?

2. How might I prepare my family for the child's visit or contact?

3. How might I help the child after a visit or contact?

4. Regarding visits and contacts, what information do I need from the caseworker and how might I show teamwork with the caseworker?

5. How, through the visits or contacts, might I work in partnership with birth parents, extended family or previous foster families?

6. What are ways I might handle my feelings concerning visits or contacts?

7. What might I do to promote birth parent/child connections between visits or contacts?

8. If birth parents don't come to a scheduled visit, how might I help the child?

Letter To Birth Parents

Please write a letter on a separate sheet of paper to the parents of a child who may be placed in your home. Please tell the birth parents some things about you and your family that would assure them of your ability to foster or adopt their child.

As you write your letter, think about these questions:

- ◆ How would I feel if my child were living with people I do not know?
- ◆ What would I want to know about a family caring for my child?
- ◆ What could another parent tell me that would make me feel secure that I am still my child's parent?

This letter will become a part of your Family Profile and may be shown to birth parents.

Meeting 6 Supplemental Handout 1: **Five Connections Activity**

Instruction: Cut along dotted lines

Meeting 6 Supplemental Handout 2: **Ideas for Shared Parenting Between Visits**

Instruction: Create as many ideas as you can for sharing parenting with the children's parents between visits.

Example: Letters

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____