

Meeting 7: Gains And Losses: Helping Children Leave Foster Care

Agenda

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic</u>
(15 Minutes)	A. Introduction to Meeting 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Welcome back◆ Mutual selection issues◆ Bridge from Meeting 6◆ Meeting 7 agenda
(40 Minutes)	B. Going Home: The Role of Foster Parents <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ A partnership effort
(50 Minutes)	C. Helping Children and Youth Transition from Foster Care <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Strategies for successful transitions
(10 Minutes)	BREAK
(10 Minutes)	D. The Stages of a Disruption or Dissolution <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ The six stages
(20 Minutes)	E. The Causes of Disruptions and Dissolutions <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Assessing your family

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic</u>
(25 Minutes)	F. Preventing Disruptions or Dissolutions by Giving Children Permission <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ The steps of integration
(10 Minutes)	G. Meeting 7 Summary and Preview of Meeting 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Summary of Meeting 7◆ Preview of Meeting 8◆ Next step in the mutual selection process◆ A Partnership in Parenting Experience

ROADWORK

- ◆ Complete your Strengths/Needs Worksheet.
- ◆ Read Handouts 12 through 17 and discuss them with friends and/or family members.
- ◆ Complete Handout 18, "Concurrent Planning Readiness Assessment Worksheet."

Merrilee's Case*

Merrilee lived with her birth mother until Merrilee was 16 months old. During Merrilee's first year, her mother had been reported for neglect. It was not too serious, and Merrilee remained in the home. When Merrilee was 14 months old, her mother gave birth to a baby boy and after that, began to neglect her more seriously. Merrilee was placed in foster care while her baby brother remained with her mother. Later he, too, was placed in foster care although in a different home.

When Merrilee came into foster care, the agency staff felt that it would be too confusing for her to see her birth mother. The worker recommended an "adjustment period" for both mother and child with no visits. After this initial adjustment period, both Merrilee and her birth mother seemed to have "adjusted" so well to the separation that both the mother and worker were reluctant to initiate contact between the two. The mother relinquished her rights after six months, having never seen Merrilee again.

Merrilee was a bright and precocious child who became a valued member of the foster family. The foster family wanted to adopt Merrilee; however, the agency was reluctant to allow this. They opposed foster parent adoption in general. In addition, they were concerned about confidentiality because the foster parents knew who the birth mother was; however, the foster parents had had an application in for some time to adopt an infant. Soon after Merrilee's placement with the foster family, an infant boy became available for adoption through a private agency. This boy was placed for adoption with the foster parents, and another adoptive family was sought for Merrilee.

An adoptive family who lived 350 miles away was selected. The initial visit was arranged so that the adoptive family would come and pick up Merrilee at the social services building and take her for an all-day outing. They planned to return her to the social services building so that her worker could take her to her foster home for her last night there. The following day the foster mother was to bring her into the agency; the adoptive family would then take her to their home. There was no plan for the foster and adoptive parents to meet.

This first visit, an all-day outing, went very well, as first visits frequently do. The adoptive family asked Merrilee if she would like to spend the night with them and she said yes. They called the caseworker who agreed with the change in plan. The following morning, the adoptive parents brought Merrilee back to the agency to say her final good-bye to her foster mother. Her foster father, who was at work and who knew that he would be upset by the separation, said his "good-byes" to Merrilee over the phone. The worker took her from the room with her adoptive parents to a room down the hall. Her foster mother was waiting there to give Merrilee her belongings and to say good-bye. Merrilee then returned to the room where her adoptive parents were waiting.

* From, "Helping Children When They Must Move" by Vera Fahlberg, M.D., in **PROJECT CRAFT: Training in the Adoption of Children with Special Needs**. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan School of Social Work, 1980, p. VI-16-18.

The adoptive parents changed Merrilee's name so that she could feel as if she were having a "fresh start" in her new family. Merrilee had long, naturally curly hair. Her foster mother had frequently brushed Merrilee's hair. She did this as a way of being physically close and nurturing with Merrilee. She also used this as a way to raise Merrilee's self-esteem by commenting what beautiful hair she had and how pretty she was. The adoptive mother didn't know this history and suggested that Merrilee have her hair cut, "like your older sister's hair." Merrilee agreed.

I met Merrilee when she was four-and-a-half years old. At that time, she was constantly fighting control battles with her mother. For example, she was not to leave the yard without permission. Merrilee didn't sneak out of the yard; instead, she would sit perched on the fence until she was sure her mother was looking out of the kitchen window. Then, she would go over the fence. If she were asked to do something such as pick up her toys, it never quite got done.

In some respects she seemed overly competent, never asking for help. Merrilee had trouble sitting in a comfortable fashion on her parents' laps. She couldn't cuddle. She was prone to many fears, but the most prominent one was her fear of strangers. Whenever the family had company, Merrilee would become alternately hyperactive and clingy, demanding a lot of attention.

Identifying Underlying Messages

Things that Happened to Merrilee	Possible Unintentional Message to Merrilee
1. Foster care placement soon after birth of brother.	
2. No contact with mother soon after placement or ever again.	
3. No contact with brother ever.	
4. Placement of a baby boy with foster parents soon before Merrilee's adoptive placement.	
5. Merrilee learned to trust and love foster parents and then had to move.	
6. The moving plan of one pre-placement visit.	

Things that Happened to Merrilee	Possible Unintentional Message to Merrilee
7. No return to foster home after initial visit.	
8. Lack of direct contact with foster father for good-byes.	
9. Lack of contact between foster and adoptive parents.	
10. Change of name at age two-and-a-half.	
11. Cutting of hair.	
12. Lack of contact of any type (no pictures, letters or direct contact) with foster parents after move.	

The Role of Foster Parents in Transitioning Children and Youth from Foster Care

Foster parents contribute to successful transitions of children and youth from foster care.

Moving from a foster home is often emotionally difficult for the child or youth. They need emotional support. When children and youth leave foster homes it can also be very difficult for the foster parents, their families and their friends. However, since the goal of foster care is reunification, it is the healthy foster family who must be willing to take the responsibility to help children manage their emotions during a move, as well as manage their own challenges.

When a child is returning home, or moving to an adoptive home, the foster parents:

- ◆ Talk with the child or youth about the specific plans.
- ◆ Involve the child and the child's parents or prospective adoptive parents in planning how the move will occur.
- ◆ Prepare the child or youth for all the steps of the move.
- ◆ Explain the details of any court appearances during the transition time.
- ◆ Communicate with the caseworker and parents about how the child or youth is handling the upcoming move.
- ◆ Communicate with the child's parents or prospective adoptive parents about how the child or youth is handling the upcoming move.
- ◆ Plan a way to honor the child or celebrate the time the child was with the foster family.
- ◆ Update the child's Life Book to include information and pictures involved with the move.
- ◆ Be prepared for grieving behaviors in the child or youth, as well as in the foster family.
- ◆ Honor and celebrate going home.

Planning a Move: Helping Children Transition from Foster Care – Worksheet

Planning a Move: Family Reunification

Rosie and **Lillie** first came into foster care when Lillie was 13 and Rosie was 2. Child Protective Services became involved when John, the girl's dad, became angry and hit Lillie. During the investigation process, John was jailed in a DWI incident and Mary, the girls' mom, hit Lillie and broke Lillie's nose. While in the first foster home, Lillie sexted her boyfriend, using her foster sister's phone. She then disclosed that she had been sexually abused by her Uncle Bill, when he lived with her family. The foster family asked that Lillie be moved from their home, although they wanted Rosie to stay. The caseworker moved both girls into a second foster home, the Baker family. Both girls remained in that home for the rest of the placement.

Lillie had a lot of anger about the abuse, and shame and sadness at leaving the first foster home. She had frequent temper tantrums and several incidents of attempting to initiate inappropriate touching with her foster dad. Her foster dad had training which helped him respond to Lillie's behavior by giving her alternative appropriate behaviors to show caring between an adult and a child. Lillie is in a support group for girls who have been sexually abused and the Bakers follow the recommendations of her therapist. When home visits started, Lillie was frequently anxious and tearful, asking if Uncle Bill would be there. Rosie appears to have adjusted well to the placement and is a happy and curious preschooler. She says that she has two mommies, and cries both before and after visits with "mommy who doesn't live here."

Mary and John visited weekly, at first separately and then together.

John got out of jail and has been regularly attending AA Meetings. He is now working and together he and Mary have found an apartment big enough for the entire family. Both John and Mary attended the mandated parenting classes and used the visits to practice safe ways to discipline the girls. Lillie's temper tantrums are less frequent. They still make both parents a little uneasy, but there has been no physical punishment since Lillie got hurt. Both parents agree that Uncle Bill cannot be allowed around the girls.

Supporting the Transition

Lillie is now 14 and Rosie is 3. There are several messages that need to be conveyed to both girls to help them move permanently back home. The left column of the chart lists some of these messages. In the right column is a space to create specific strategies, things to say and do, to convey these messages. Although the message is conveyed to the girls, things the foster parents can say or do may involve teamwork with the parents, caseworker, and other important adults in the children's life.

Messages to be Conveyed	Things a foster parent can <u>say</u> Things a foster parent can <u>do</u>
<p>1. Parents admitted there was a problem and were willing to work for a change.</p>	<p>Say:</p> <p>Do:</p>
<p>2. Lillie and Rosie's return home will be planned and orderly.</p>	<p>Say:</p> <p>Do:</p>
<p>3. John and Mary are good people.</p>	<p>Say:</p> <p>Do:</p>
<p>4. Lillie is a good person. It is not her fault that she and Rosie came into care.</p>	<p>Say:</p> <p>Do:</p>

Messages to be Conveyed	Things a foster parent can <u>say</u> Things a foster parent can <u>do</u>
5. Lillie is safe. What happened with Uncle Bill was not her fault and it will not happen again.	Say: Do:
6. The Bakers like John and Mary; they want Rosie and Lillie to feel good about going home to their parents.	Say: Do:
7. Lillie can deal with her feelings and behaviors at home as well as she does at the Bakers.	Say: Do:
8. Lillie and Rosie can continue to know the Bakers after they return home.	Say: Do:

Planning a Move: Adoption

History

Jason has been in care for a year. He hasn't seen his mother since he was a toddler. His father, who physically abused him, is serving a ten-year prison sentence for drug-related charges. The agency is seeking to terminate his parental rights. Jason was living with his paternal grandmother until last year, when she died. No other family members can provide a home for him so Jason was placed in foster care.

While in care, he disclosed to his foster mother that he is gay. He said that he has known that he is gay for as long as he can remember. He said he is not sexually active and that no one else knows he is gay. Jason gets along well with his classmates, but he has no close friends. Jason does well in school and is affectionate in the family. He becomes very sad at times, but is able to talk about his feelings, especially about his grandmother, father, and mother. His foster mother has always been willing to adopt him but Jason didn't want to think about being adopted when he first came into care.

Update on Jason

Jason is sixteen now and in the process of being legally freed for adoption. Jason's dad, still in prison, has voluntarily terminated his rights with the stipulation that he have continued contact with Jason. Jason's mom, who is remarried and living out of state, was contacted by the agency and she initiated the termination of her parental rights. She refused all contact with her son, which hurt Jason deeply. Jason's foster mom was loving and supportive during those especially difficult months. He began calling her "ma" and, for the first time, expressed an interest in being adopted. He still has some very real fears about the adoption. He is interested in a young man he met in his gay youth support group and wants to start dating. He needs to know his sexual orientation will be respected by ma now that it's "real." He believes in his heart that his sexual orientation is the reason his mother wanted no contact with him. Jason is also worried that maybe he's too old to be adopted. Who will he be? How will things change? What happens when his dad gets out of jail?

Supporting the Transition

There are several messages that need to be conveyed to Jason to help him move into an adoptive family. The left column of the chart lists some of these messages. In the right column is a space to create specific strategies to convey these messages. Although the message is conveyed to Jason, things the foster mom can say or do may involve teamwork with the parents, caseworker, and other important adults in Jason's life.

Messages to be Conveyed	Things the foster/adoptive mom can <u>say</u> Things the foster/adoptive mom can <u>do</u>
1. This is an orderly and planned step toward permanency.	Say: Do:
2. Jason's sexual orientation is an important part of his identity and will be respected.	Say: Do:
3. The people in Jason's past are okay.	Say: Do:
4. Jason is to have continued contact with his dad.	Say: Do:

Messages to be Conveyed	Things the foster/adoptive mom can <u>say</u> Things the foster/adoptive mom can <u>do</u>
5. What will change between Jason and his foster mom when she becomes his adoptive mom.	Say: Do:
6. It's not Jason's fault that his mom did not want continued contact with him.	Say: Do:
7. Jason will be a valued and loved member of this family.	Say: Do:



Preparing your child for respite

Suggestions for full time foster parents

Before the respite begins

- Explain to the child what respite means i.e. that all adults need to spend time together and it is normal for children to go and stay with other families that they know are safe and fun, like an aunty or uncle's house.
- Reassure the child that you will be there when they come home.
- Provide the child with photographs of the respite family, the house, any pets, the bedroom they are going to sleep in. This provides a family profile.
- Encourage the child to talk about any fears or worries they may have. (Do I get a night light? Do I flush the toilet at night? What if I get hungry?)
- Have a conversation with child to prepare them for first sleep over, i.e. "you might miss me", "I will miss you", "Remember you can think of me with (transitional item)" "When you are away I will be thinking of you" and "I will look forward to seeing you when you get back."
- Explain to child that each family has different rules and it might be hard for them to remember the new rules. Practise with the child as to how they would ask the respite carer if they needed something or if they were not sure of what was going to happen.
- Let the child know what activities they will be doing with the respite family.

Planning the transition

- Plan the transition with your respite support worker, field officer and respite carer:
 - Dates of introductions, day visits, first sleepover, etc.
 - How respite is presented to child, all parties on the same page
 - How will information be shared

- Roles of all involved
- Consistent parenting strategies – any special needs
- Taking into consideration:
 - Child's emotional age and understanding (<6yrs hard to process idea of multiple carers)
 - Distances
 - Siblings
 - Timing
 - Holidays and other commitments.
- Respite carer and full time carer meet (without child) or at least chat on the phone about details of child's needs such as child's food likes and dislikes, bed and bath routine at night, enjoyable activities, fears and special needs.
- Dates of visits and sleepovers shared and put on calendar for child to see. School holidays may be an ideal time.
- Child first meets the respite carers with their full time carer at the child's home.
- Second meeting at the new respite family home with full time carers present (for at least some of the time).
- Child to play a role in sharing information about themselves to the respite carer. This may be sharing a photo album or making a list together of likes and dislikes. Child could come up with own ideas.
- Carer provides transitional object for child for first overnight stay (and subsequent stays if required), such a piece of carer's clothing they can wear so they can smell the carer or a pillow, blanket, necklace etc.
- Respite carers to explain family rules and what activities they have planned.
- Clarify roles for the child – ensure child has a sense of the supportive partnership between carers.

During the respite

- Primary carer to leave little notes for child to find in their bag with positive messages. This is good for all ages of children.
- Child to have the option of a night light (even older children).
- Suggest that the respite carers not introduce new people to the child too soon – give the child time to negotiate their new respite relationships first.
- Encourage the respite carer to be empathetic to the child about how hard it is for them to learn new family rules. However, boundaries and rules should be established from the very beginning.
- For some children you may suggest to the respite carer to have all the children's routines on the fridge - i.e. bath time, bed time routine etc. Suggest to the respite carer to explain why they have put the routine on the fridge (because they know how hard it is for children to learn different house rules and they might get them mixed up and find it hard to ask questions). Explain that they can always check the fridge together.
- Suggest the respite carer ask the child if they have any rules for them, e.g. child may not want to be tickled or hugged. It is also important to have fun rules e.g. we have a family rule of saying nice things to each other at the dinner table or sharing "What was the best part of your day?"

After the respite

- Check in with the child after each stay – "What did you do?", "What was fun, what wasn't?" Check to see if they had any worries.
- Include the respite family in the child's *My Life Story Book* (if they wish).
- Again clarify roles for the child. Reinforce that the full time carer is just that and respite is for occasional weekends. This avoids the child 'splitting' the two carers (emotionally playing one off against the other).
- Reinforce that you will always be there when the child comes home.
- Let the child know what you did while they were away and how much they were missed.
- Share relevant information with the field officer, respite program support worker and respite carer.
- Ask the respite carer to provide feedback on how the placement went.
- Resolve any differences or concerns the child had as soon as possible.

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Department for Child Protection

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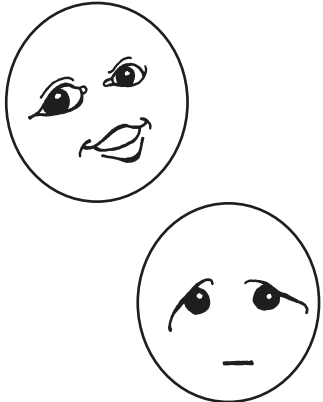
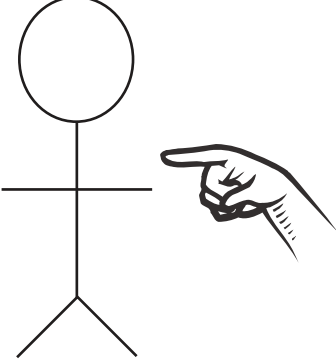

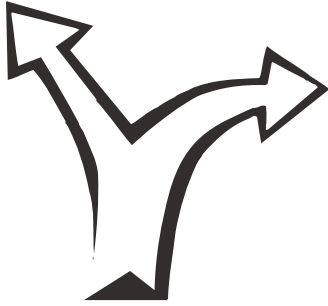
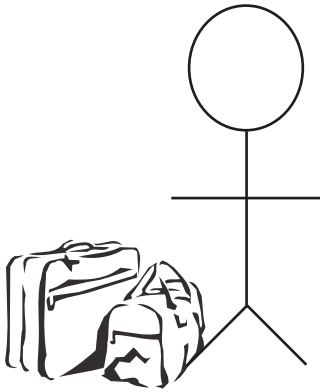
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Definitions – Disruption and Dissolution in Foster Care and Adoption

Disruption: an unplanned move from one foster or adoptive home to another out-of-home situation.

Dissolution: the legal act of ending an adoption, much like a divorce ends a marriage.

Stages of a Disruption or Dissolution

<p>Diminishing Pleasure</p>  <p>Illustration of two faces. The top face is smiling, and the bottom face is sad with a straight line for a mouth.</p>	<p>Child is seen as blame for all</p>  <p>Illustration of a stick figure with a hand pointing towards it from the right.</p>	<p>Going Public</p>  <p>Illustration of a hand holding a mobile phone. A speech bubble above the phone says "Hello Mom".</p>
<p>Turning Point</p>  <p>Illustration of a large Y-shaped arrow pointing in two opposite directions, symbolizing a turning point or choice.</p>	<p>Ultimatum</p> <div data-bbox="652 1066 966 1495"><p>You will...</p><hr/><hr/><hr/><hr/><hr/><hr/></div> <div data-bbox="652 1302 966 1495"><p>You won't...</p><hr/><hr/><hr/><hr/><hr/><hr/></div>	<p>Decision to Disrupt</p>  <p>Illustration of a stick figure standing next to a suitcase and a bag, symbolizing a decision to leave or disrupt.</p>

Stage	Description
1. Diminishing Pleasure	Where in the early months of placement the negatives begin to outweigh the positives.
2. Child is Seen as the Problem for Everything	When anxiety creates a time of child's "acting out," and the child is seen as the cause of all problems.
3. Going Public	When talking about the problem to family and friends increases the bad feelings.
4. Turning Point	When a bad or critical incident or crisis occurs that almost is "the last straw."
5. The Deadline or Ultimatum	When parents set a timeframe for improvement, or give the threat, "One more time..."
6. The Decision to Disrupt	When the child fails to meet the expectations for the deadline, violates the conditions established and has to go.

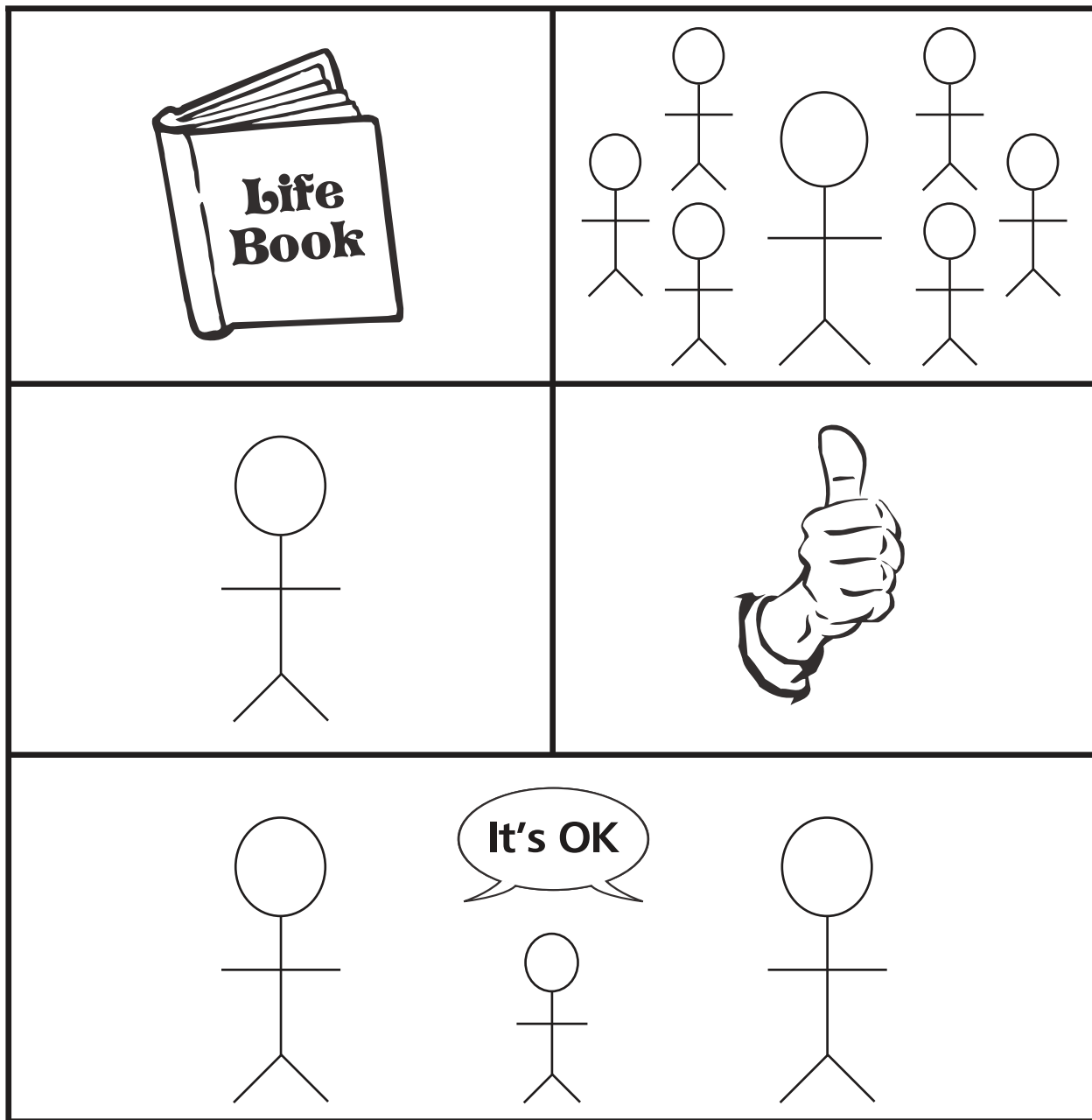
* Adapted from Patridge, S., Hornby, H., McDonald, T. (1986). **Learning from Adoption Disruption: Insights for Practice**. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, p. 61-68.

Disruptions: Preventions and Interventions*

Causes	Preventions	Interventions
<p>3. <i>Parents are discouraged by child's slow progress in attaching to them or in other areas of needed behavior change.</i></p> <p><u>Case Example:</u></p> <p>Jenny is now seven-years-old and has been physically abused in the past (by her mother's boyfriend).</p> <p>Sometimes Jenny is adorable and compliant. Other times Jenny disobeys deliberately and doesn't want to be touched. She hits and kicks the family dog when she thinks no one is looking.</p> <p>Jenny has been with the family for a year and still does not seem to trust them. They are disappointed in their parenting abilities and regret their decision to parent Jenny.</p>	<p>Foster or adoptive parent:</p>	<p>Foster or adoptive parent:</p>
	<p>Caseworker:</p>	<p>Caseworker:</p>
<p>4. <i>Other</i></p>	<p>Foster or adoptive parent:</p>	<p>Foster or adoptive parent:</p>
	<p>Caseworker:</p>	<p>Caseworker:</p>

* Adapted from "Providing Services to Children in Care" by Eileen Mayers Pasztor, (1982) **Inservice Child Welfare Training Curriculum**. Washington, D.C.: P.D. Press, Creative Associates, p. 123

Giving Permission: The Steps of Integration



Giving Permission: The Steps of Integration

In the following spaces, identify specific things foster and adoptive parents, and/or child welfare workers can do to help clarify a child's permission to be in care, to live with new parents, to be loved by them, and to love them.

Integration Steps	What the Foster and Adoptive Parents Can Do	What the Child Welfare Worker Can Do
Step 1: Accurately reconstruct the child's entire placement history.		
Step 2: Identify the important attachment figures in the child's life.		
Step 3: Gain the cooperation of the most significant of the attachment figures available.		
Step 4: Clarify the permission message.		
Step 5: Communicate the permission message to the child		

* Adapted from Kathryn S. Donley, "Disengagement Work: Helping Placed Children Make New Attachments," **From Foster Parent to Adoptive Parent**, (1988) Atlanta, GA: Child Welfare Institute.

Openness in Adoption

In child welfare, “openness” is a term to describe the degree to which a child who has been adopted continues to be connected to his or her family of origin.

The level of openness is a parental decision, based upon the needs of the child. Levels of openness fall along a continuum, from lower levels of openness to higher levels of openness. Adoptive parents consider the child’s identity, cultural, well-being, and safety needs in order to determine the level of openness most appropriate for the child. Levels of openness can change with circumstances, age of the child and other considerations.

Examples of levels of openness include:

- ◆ Providing children with information about their family of origin.
- ◆ Letters and photos exchanged between parents and adoptive parents through the child placing agency.
- ◆ Giving children photos and letters from their parents and/or extended family members.
- ◆ Letters between children and their parents and/or extended family members.
- ◆ Sharing holidays with parents and/or extended family members.
- ◆ Regular visits with parents and/or extended family members.
- ◆ Ongoing shared parenting with parents and/or extended family members, much as other extended family members share parenting responsibilities.

Strengths/Needs Worksheet – Meetings 6 and 7

Now that you have completed Meetings 6 and 7, we would like you to think about your strengths and your needs, personal as well as family. For each bolded skill, please write an example of your strength and/or your need. You can provide as many examples as you'd like but please provide at least 3 strengths and 3 needs on this worksheet.

Skill	Activities	This is a strength for my family because....	This is a need for my family because....
1. Know your own family.	Meeting 7 Assessing Your Family to Identify Stressors and Prevent Disruptions		
2. Communicate effectively.			
3. Know the children.			

Skill	Activities	This is a strength for my family because....	This is a need for my family because....
4. Build strengths; meet needs.	<p><u>Meeting 7</u> Merilee Case Scenario Planning the Return Home Video Helping Children Transition Out of Foster Care-Case Examples</p>		
5. Work in partnership.	<p><u>Meeting 6</u> Positive Parental Alliance Shared Parenting and Visits Managing Problems with Visits: "I Don't Want You to Go!" Competition: Strategies for Sharing Parenting <u>Meeting 7</u> Planning to Prevent a Disruption</p>		
6. Be loss and attachment experts.	<p><u>Meeting 6</u> Managing Problems with Visits: "I Don't Want You to Go!" <u>Meeting 7</u> Giving Children Permission—Stages of Integration</p>		

Skill	Activities	This is a strength for my family because....	This is a need for my family because...
7. Manage behaviors.			
8. Build connections.	<u>Meeting 6</u> Five Connections Activity <u>Meeting 7</u> Openness in Adoption		
9. Build self-esteem.	<u>Meeting 6</u> Triangle Family <u>Meeting 7</u> Openness in Adoption		
10. Assure health and safety.			
11. Assess impact.			
12. Make an informed decision.			

Abilities Developed During Meetings 6 and 7

Following are the abilities developed or enhanced during Meetings 6 and 7 of the GPSII/MAPP program:

GPSII/MAPP Meeting 6 Abilities

By participating in Meeting 6, prospective foster and adoptive parents should be able to:

- ◆ Describe personal or family strengths and needs related to the Twelve Skills for Successful Fostering and Adopting.
- ◆ Describe how culture, race, and ethnicity are tied to identity.
- ◆ Define culture in terms of identity, self-concept, and connections.
- ◆ Explain how a child's cultural identity is important to well-being.
- ◆ Describe how the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) affects the well-being of children and youth who are Native American.
- ◆ Explain the requirements and intent of ICWA.
- ◆ State the responsibilities of foster families relative to ICWA.
- ◆ Determine the risks for a Native American child whose cultural identity is not maintained.
- ◆ Describe how the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA) and its amendment of 1996 (IEP) can affect the well-being of children and youth placed transracially.
- ◆ Explain the requirements and intent of MEPA/IEP.
- ◆ State a prospective foster family's responsibility relative to implementation of MEPA/IEP.
- ◆ Determine the risks for a child whose cultural identity is not maintained in foster care or adoption.
- ◆ Nurture a child's cultural connections.
- ◆ Demonstrate the skill of asking critical questions to understand a child's cultural needs.
- ◆ Demonstrate how they can support a child's need to be connected to cultural roots.
- ◆ Support shared parenting.
- ◆ State the purpose of sharing parenting.
- ◆ State the purpose of visits for children and youth in foster care.

- ◆ Determine benefits of shared parenting, including the effective use of visits.
- ◆ State the agency's expectations about foster parents' roles in shared parenting, including the foster parents' role in assuring successful visits.
- ◆ Describe at least ten shared parenting strategies for making visits work well for children and their parents.
- ◆ Describe potential problems of shared parenting, including problems with visits between children and their parents.
- ◆ Describe their role during visits.
- ◆ In case examples, select shared parenting strategies.
- ◆ Demonstrate support of the alliance model through visits.
- ◆ List ways to share parenting of a child in foster care.
- ◆ Describe at least ten shared parenting strategies not related to visits.
- ◆ Make an informed decision about attending Meeting 7.

GPSII/MAPP Meeting 7 Abilities

By participating in this meeting, prospective foster and adoptive parents should be able to:

- ◆ Describe personal or family strengths and needs related to the Twelve Skills for Successful Fostering and Adopting.
- ◆ Explain the ways children and youth transition from foster care including return home, into an adoptive home, into a new role in the foster family that adopts, and into interdependent living.
- ◆ Help children and youth transition from foster care.
- ◆ Apply the concepts of permanency planning and concurrent planning in case examples of children and youth leaving foster care.
- ◆ Define disruption and dissolution in foster care and adoption.
- ◆ Explain how disruption and dissolution can affect a child's sense of well-being.
- ◆ Explain the stages of disruption.
- ◆ Describe possible sources of stress in families which may cause disruptions.
- ◆ Describe situations which might trigger anxiety in the family.
- ◆ Demonstrate ways to prevent disruptions or dissolutions of foster care placements or adoptions.
- ◆ Apply strategies for intervening with a child's behavior during a family crisis or preventing a crisis.
- ◆ Demonstrate ways to manage their own reactions to the first two stages of disruption.
- ◆ Make an informed decision about attending Meeting 8.

Resource Guide for Post-Adoption Finalization Services

Do Not Copy!

(To be developed and added by local agency)

Post-adoption services vary greatly from agency to agency. Please develop a handout that will describe in detail the services available to adoptive parents after legalization of the adoption.

A Youngster's Story*

Joyce, age 15, was first placed with an adoptive family when she was ten-years-old. This placement lasted for about a year until disruption and Joyce's move to her present adoptive family. The following information was gathered during a recent interview with Joyce.

Joyce remembers most of the families with whom she has lived during her life and is able to talk easily about her experiences now. Joyce says that discussing past placements, especially the adoption that disrupted, would have been very difficult for her until recently. As she puts it, "Now I'm attached; it would have bothered me at first to talk about it."

Prior to her first adoptive placement with the Browns, Joyce had met and visited with a prospective family with whom placement was never accomplished. She recalls feeling really happy during her meeting and visits with them and was pleased that she was going to be placed with her birth brother. Joyce was excited about being adopted and was very disappointed when things didn't work out. Sometimes Joyce still thinks about what might have happened had she gone to live with that family.

But mostly Joyce thinks about the Browns. At first Joyce was extremely happy at the idea of being adopted. Having been told that "adoption was forever," Joyce was thrilled that she was going to have a home and a family of her own. But she was scared, too. Despite what she had been told, Joyce had thoughts that the placement might not work. Her biggest fear was that the Browns' son, Tommy, might get more attention, love, etc., than she would. Joyce was afraid that the Browns would not love her as much as they loved Tommy because she was adopted. After about a month, she began to relax and to lose some of her fearfulness. The Browns were not treating her any differently than they did Tommy, and Joyce was happy.

Joyce recalls that the problems began very early on in the placement. Tommy and Joyce quarreled a lot, and Joyce had a hard time getting along with either of her parents, even though she liked them both. Little disagreements resulted in big arguments. Joyce did not like the idea of having a baby-sitter (she thought she was too old for that), and resented some of the punishments she received when she misbehaved. At one point, the Browns told Joyce she could go back to the "orphanage" if she was so unhappy, but she definitely did not want that and told the Browns so. Looking back on what happened, Joyce feels that this placement disrupted because she didn't always know what her parents expected of her and because everyone was always arguing. She says she "sort of knew all along that it wasn't working" but was still somewhat surprised when the end came.

When Joyce left the Browns and moved to her present family, she was told that it would be for only a couple of weeks, but she "kind of knew this was for good." She was upset and didn't want to leave the Browns but at that point she had no choice.

* Adapted from **A Look at Disrupted Adoptions**, Chelsea, MI: Spaulding for Children, n.d.

Joyce knew immediately that things were going to be different in her new family. The other child already in the home had been adopted also, which made a big difference to Joyce. People in this family didn't argue nearly as much, the family did lots of things together, and Joyce had more friends. Sometimes she was homesick and missed the Browns and she frequently looked at the pictures she had of them. She did not want to go back to the Browns, however, and refused even to see them to tell them good-bye. She felt she couldn't face them because of the questions she thought they would ask, like, "Why do you like it there?" and, "Why don't you want to live with us?"

At that time in her life, Joyce would have appreciated having someone to reassure her that things were going to be all right. She especially wanted reassurance from the two sets of parents involved, but would have accepted it from her social worker. Joyce says, "It helps to have people listen." She feels fortunate to now have "a mom who listens good." Not long after it was decided that Joyce would remain with her new family and not go back to the Browns, her dad took her to a park she had often gone to with the Browns. Joyce began feeling very sad and almost started crying. Her dad was not very understanding of these feelings, but she was able to talk with her mom later.

Joyce occasionally thinks about the Browns even now and wonders what her life would have been like if the placement had worked. Although Joyce is quite happy in her present family, she still feels badly that her first adoption disrupted. She remembers feeling very angry at herself when the placement was disrupting because she "couldn't get it together with them (the Browns)." At the time, she felt that the placement didn't work because she had done something wrong. She still feels that way sometimes.

Reflecting on Joyce's Story

Joyce's experiences and feelings are common to most children experiencing a disruption, although not all children can express how they feel. For those who can, their behavior often speaks more loudly than their words. The responsible adults in a child's life must be aware of the emotions the child is experiencing and be prepared to help the child deal with them; however, the most disconcerting situation for social workers to deal with is the child who expresses nothing verbally or behaviorally. The child is frequently using the only semblance of power they have left, the power to cover it all up. This is difficult for the child, who must exert tremendous amounts of energy to keep anything from being revealed. This expended energy could have been put to better use recognizing and dealing with the child's feelings. With this type of child, the social worker has the additional responsibility of helping the child acknowledge personal feelings. As Joyce points out, the child needs someone to reassure and to listen to them. Often the social worker is the only person who is able to fulfill that function.

Many times the social worker is also the target for all of the child's angry and hostile feelings. A boy may be angry at himself for allowing himself to feel so deeply about the parents he is losing. He may be angry because, like Joyce, he believes he caused or could somehow have prevented the disruption. A girl who has experienced numerous moves might be angry because she believed this placement would be different (i.e., permanent). The child is angry with her adoptive parents for not loving her enough to keep her.

She is also angry with her birth parents who, in her mind, are to blame for everything because they gave her up originally. She is angry with the social worker for placing her with this family, for making a mistake and for not fulfilling a "promise" for permanence.

Disruptions reactivate and/or intensify children's feelings of worthlessness, "badness" and powerlessness. Once again, they must move, whether they want to or not, because the adults involved make that decision for them. They are frightened. No matter how bad the present situation is, it is preferable to that unknown future with strange people in a strange place. Children fear never having a home and family of their own and spending the rest of their lives moving from one place to another. Shock, grief, depression and guilt also come into play at some point, as losing adoptive parents generates feelings similar to those resulting from death. Social workers must help children with all of these feelings, and children must hear the reassurances and verbalizations of their feelings more than once. Repetition is mandatory if the child is to ever understand and learn to cope with what has happened to him.

Joyce, like most children, wanted to be adopted, liked her adoptive parents and was upset when the adoption disrupted. For a very few children, however, a disrupted adoption is not a tragic event but a familiar happening. Leaving a family is something they know and are comfortable with; the idea of permanence, an unknown entity, is too frightening. Some children manipulate their own rejection in order to terminate the adoption. Much more work needs to be done with these children in preparing them for re-placement.

Fortunately, most children experiencing a disruption are able to move into another adoptive family successfully. But their memories and feelings about the disruption will, to a great extent, depend upon the sensitivity of the adults involved before, during and after the disruption. The adult who is usually involved in all three phases is the placement worker.

Joyce's Worker's Comments

There are some significant facts about Joyce's disruption experience that may have special lessons for other placement workers. Her recalled versions of events that occurred five years ago differ from actual events in several crucial areas. I am satisfied that this is not due to fabrication on her part, but rather by memories reshaped by the passage of time and a deeply emotional experience.

The move from the Browns was, in fact, a planned, two-week vacation break; a "time-out" for Joyce and her adoptive family to use in sorting out their commitments to one another. Several days after the visit began, Joyce decided she could not return to the Browns and asked to stay on with the temporary family on a permanent basis. The Browns made the similar decision that she should not return to them. Despite Joyce's opposition, I pressed her to return to the Browns with me to collect her belongings and bid them good-bye. She apparently has no recollection of these events. Instead, she describes her feelings during that time as if they were the factual events of the period. Her observation that she would have appreciated having someone reassure her that things were going to be all right makes me very aware of how youngsters going through emotional trauma perceive the efforts of the social workers. I thought I had offered her that reassurance. She remembers that either I did not or that what I did offer was not sufficient — and I must accept her judgment as the more valid.

Joyce was a child who was adopted that I have been able to follow over several years. She has become a lovely, delightful, responsible young lady and, though her re-placement has not been without problems, I am satisfied that she is remarkably better placed with her current family. In the summer of 1975, Joyce accompanied me to Washington, D.C., to testify about her foster care/adoption experiences before a Senate subcommittee considering new national legislation to assist more older and handicapped children in being adopted. She was pleased to see the White House and the U.S. Capitol but was ecstatic over her very first plane ride.

Disruption: A Foster Mother's Point of View*

What is it like to be the foster parent during a placement disruption? For me, the disruption experience was devastating. Even now, 18 months later, the memories are excruciatingly vivid; but I am slowly recovering my self-respect and confidence.

After we decided we couldn't continue with the placement, I was still torn between loving Christine, keeping her and knowing that for everyone's survival she had to live elsewhere. I felt that I had failed as a mother. The guilt over giving up — not following through with something I had promised to do — was devastating. Our worker helped to intensify my feelings by not listening or understanding what we were going through. She accused us of giving up when the going got a "little rough," of not caring about the child. To her, it seemed like we were selfish failures not only as parents but as people. Then she told us Christine would be moved as soon as she found another foster home. We didn't hear from the worker again for about three weeks. (When I called her, she wasn't in.) Late one afternoon, she called and said to bring Christine to the office the next morning at 9:00 a.m. and to bring all her clothes. When we arrived at the office, someone immediately took Christine away. We were told to wait for our worker to complete the paperwork. I never saw Christine again; there was no chance to say good-bye. She died for me that instant.

Later I called the worker to ask about Christine. She would give me no information about her; Christine was no longer my concern. It was made very clear that no one would ever give me any information about her. Part of me knew that she was alive, but it seemed as if she had died and that I had killed her. All kinds of feelings raged through my head. I was angry and hurt by the insensitive way we were treated. The whole scene was unfair and humiliating. No one cared how we felt; no one listened when we needed to talk. My husband and I were alone, isolated in our grief and pain. That had to be the loneliest time ever, I thought.

* Adapted from **A Look at Disrupted Adoptions**, Chelsea, MI: Spaulding for Children, n.d.

Disruption: Another Foster Mother's Point of View*

It was about two years ago in January that Kenny entered our lives. His recent recovery from chicken pox had delayed our meeting. Nervous and excited, Jay, my husband, and I and our two boys went to the social services agency to meet Kenny and talk to his social worker.

We learned Ken would turn 6 in a month and was halfway through kindergarten. We noticed he was not too well coordinated, but he had no apparent serious physical or emotional problems; however, one report said he was possibly below normal, mentally. The social worker told us that Ken had lived with his parents until he was a year and a half old and spent the next year moving between his mother and a foster home. By the age of 4, he became a permanent ward of the state and was placed in another foster home. Apparently, Ken's mom had serious mental problems and just could not cope with raising kids and keeping herself together. As a result, Ken had a difficult time. Things were going pretty well at kindergarten but there were some discipline problems. One foster family had talked of adopting him, but after two years they would not and requested his removal. The agency placed Ken with us with the expectation we would help him move to an adoptive home.

Jay and I had moved into a large farmhouse. We had two boys of our own — 10 and 8. Of course, we had plenty of room and love in our hearts for one more. We determined from the start that we couldn't make any major exceptions in our usual rules in order to make Ken's visit realistic. It would be no use to treat him as a guest and later expect him to become a family member and not have any idea of what it was all about. The bed and dresser were all set in Ken's room; we planned to buy him a new shirt and pants for church Sunday.

Our first real conflict was at the grocery store the next morning. Ken was determined that he would have a candy bar at the checkout counter — and I was determined that I wasn't going to start anything! It ended up with me carrying Ken out to the car with him yelling, "I hate you! I hate you!" The storm passed and, I figured, one step had also passed in Ken's learning that I meant what I said. Was I ever embarrassed! It was frustrating, but Jay and I considered that it was just part of the huge adjustments we all had to make. Things would go better as we grew to know each other.

At least when you come home from the hospital with a baby boy, he doesn't have too much of an idea of what you are supposed to be doing, so you have the advantage of learning as you grow together. What a different picture bringing home a 6 year-old, with all his experiences: different families, food habits and a personality well-formed.

I enrolled Ken in kindergarten. There were no more problems than you would expect for the situation. Jay and I expected Ken, at 6, to dress himself, and encouraged his independence in washing himself and brushing his teeth. He learned to feed the dog and liked to help me set the table.

* Adapted from *A Look at Disrupted Adoptions*, Chelsea, MI: Spaulding for Children, n.d.

We quickly learned that Kenny backed off if you moved to put your arm around him; he didn't like to be touched. For me, that was hard. I'm naturally affectionate toward children. It wasn't too long after Ken's arrival that he needed his toenails clipped after his bath. He would shake and scream. It was a trauma for him to have his nails trimmed or even a cut washed for a Band-Aid to be put on. In spite of this, he was good-natured and anxious to please. Each day it was as though it was Ken's first day in our family routine. For example, most mornings we had oatmeal for breakfast — it was one of the boys' favorites. We had talked from the first day of Ken's arrival that the cereal is really hot in the middle and you have to start at the outside edge. Ken just plain could not remember where to start.

Again, we found that Ken could do only the most routine job when it came to chores. His job was to feed the chickens. If the hens had lots of table scraps, they wouldn't eat all their grain. Ken would give them grain religiously every time, even if their pan was still full from the last feeding. In contrast to this, Ken was champion wood-getter for the fire, expert at sweeping the kitchen floor and loved to vacuum.

It was one thing after another. Ken talked out loud to himself continuously at school, at home and everywhere. We talked about how to act every place we went. Ken could not seem to remember from one time to the next how to act, whether it was at the store, at church or just visiting. Day after day, there was no significant change. We became so disheartened, guilty and frustrated. When our social worker came, I told her things were not going well, but she had confidence in us and encouraged us to stay with it until an adoptive home could be found. We made so little progress. My life became a seesaw of hope and despair. We would have an awful week, and I would get so angry and frustrated. The next week things would go better, and I would be full of hope. In spite of all of this Ken tried so hard to please us and was so afraid that it was continuously heartbreaking. I was heartsick and would try anything.

Time, time and more time, we knew it would take time. We knew Ken needed time: time to grow, time to heal and time to learn to trust. We made two decisions. First, we would only expect Ken to do what we knew would give him success. And second, Ken would repeat kindergarten since he was adjusting to us, school and everything in general. We began that fall with hopes high but hearts a little heavy — the time Ken had been with us was not all we had hoped or expected.

School began and Ken was disappointed that he was not with the friends he had made from last spring. On the other hand, he was familiar with the school routines, his teacher and knew the ropes. By the October conference, we learned that Ken demanded his teacher's attention regardless of what she was doing, interacted mainly with her, and during the play period wandered from activity to activity. He was still talking to himself continuously.

From our conference, we learned that Ken would not begin any new activity. In this situation, if he was pressured, Ken would shake and flatly refuse to attempt the puzzle or whatever. Working through the school, their diagnostician and social worker, it was recommended that Ken be placed in a classroom for the emotionally disturbed.

Right from the start, I knew in my mind it was the only hope for Ken. After Christmas vacation, Ken started in the new classroom with Mr. Jones. We noticed some immediate changes: Ken loved to go to school and didn't want to miss it for anything. He loved numbers, and Mr. Jones planned his program so that he progressed as fast as he could. There were problems, too: times when Ken would throw his book around — or himself, yell at Mr. Jones — but they backed up a little and began again. We all did that during those weeks. We hoped that we could live with each other. We hoped that stability and positive relationships would finally emerge.

For those first weeks, Ken and I talked about many things for the first time and were able to work together easily, but it didn't last long. At Mr. Jones' suggestion, we began a point system at home. Ken could earn points by making his bed in the morning and getting dressed in time for breakfast, etc. Eight points could be earned at home in a week, and on Friday these were sent to a class store. At school, points were given for beginning work, finishing work and acting like a student while doing it. Ken came home with many treasures and worked hard to earn points. He bought me a ring at the store. I was touched by his thoughtfulness and so proud of him. He began to feel more positive about himself and began to open up more. After a couple of months, he could even say how he felt about something. He finally told us that he was afraid of the chickens — we never had any realization of that before!

Even with this new openness, a resentment and bitterness sprouted in both Ken and me that scared me. It took all I had just to exist. I worked hard to keep a normal household together. I began to realize that the uncertainty of Ken's behavior was more than I could cope with. I knew he needed time, but I had invested so much of my life and self in trying to help us make it so far, I had no further resources left to give him. This handsome, kind child whom we loved was so confused and fearful within himself.

Never in my life had such a difficult decision faced me. I was sick — guilty and frustrated. What kind of a foster mother gives up a child? What a failure! We had reassured Ken that he would be part of our family until his adoptive family was located. I began to think that if I left Jay and the other two boys, I could make a go of it with Ken on our own some place; or maybe there was another family who would really accept Ken, knowing his problems from the start. The agony of those deciding days! Jay felt the same way I did. Our own children were suffering because it took so much energy just to keep Ken on an even keel. With the conflict of feelings and resentment inside me, I certainly wasn't much of a wife.

Finally, we met with our social worker who helped us to see where we were. Once I could see that a future positive placement for Ken was possible, I knew that was the best move to make. Although not the easiest route, I knew that Ken would have a new opportunity ahead of him. It would not be so easy for Ken with his difficulties, but to have a family where the problems were known and he was accepted would be a step in the right direction. As for me, the possibility began to take hold that I could put myself back together again as a mother and wife.

A Letter to Some Friends*

Dear Marty,

We hope the first quarter of the year is going well for you and bringing you much happiness and good health.

We have had to make difficult decisions over the last few months. It all actually began over a year ago when we adopted Michael and Stephen. As we got to know each other, it became apparent that the boys were both severely emotionally disturbed. When they moved in, they had been seeing a psychiatrist and we continued seeing him for 15 months. While he was and still is a great comfort to us, neither he nor we were able to make the kinds of changes necessary to make our foursome a real family.

In August, we decided that separating the boys for a while might alleviate the strain on all of us. Stephen went to a children's psychiatric ward in a local hospital for evaluation and we kept Michael at home. After four months of evaluation, the results were that Stephen needed long-term residential care and was not ready for a family situation. With great sadness and reluctance, we agreed and signed termination papers in January.

While Stephen was gone, Michael made some progress, but there was still continual strain and conflict for the three of us. His seven earlier years of emotional trauma were making it difficult for him to try new ways of thinking and behaving. For our part, we were running out of strength and endurance to cope with what was obviously going to be a long-term struggle.

In the best interest of all three of us, we made another painful decision that we should terminate with Michael, too. The decision was based on our own agonized debate and on the psychiatrist's recommendation, which was that Michael was very disturbed and our lives were liable to be troubled for a long, long time. We just could not meet each other's needs. So we terminated with Michael at the end of February.

We are now in the process of picking ourselves up and expect to spend some time relaxing and getting a fresh perspective on our lives. Our future plans still rest in limbo for the present.

We feel good about the help and love we were able to give the boys while they were with us, yet we deeply feel their loss and regret that our original family intentions could not be realized. We hope that good things will happen for the boys in the future and will always think of them.

We are also hopeful that we may look forward to a more peaceful time.

Love,
Susie

* Adapted from **A Look at Disrupted Adoptions**, Chelsea, MI: Spaulding for Children, n.d.

Questions for Family Discussion

After reading Handouts 12-16, please consider the following questions with your family. You may write down some answers or use the questions to guide your family's discussions about disruption and dissolution.

1. What feelings were common to the people involved in these stories?

2. What were the causes of the disruptions?

3. What, if anything, could have prevented the disruptions?

4. Had you been the foster or adoptive parents, would you have done anything differently?

Concurrent Planning Readiness Assessment Worksheet

1. Define concurrent planning in your own words.

2. What do you think your primary role in the concurrent planning for a child in your care would be?

3. (a) What effect do you think that the caseworker's responsibility for discussing concurrent planning options with the birth parent(s) (and your possibly being asked to be an adoption resource for the child in your care) would have on your efforts to work in partnership with the child's birth parent(s)?

(b) What could you do to demonstrate your willingness and ability to continue to work in partnership with the child's parent(s) toward family reunification after the caseworker has held such discussions with the birth parent(s)?

4. If the caseworker asks you if you are willing to be an adoptive resource for a child if family reunification is impossible, what would be your next steps?

5. What would be your role in concurrent planning if you agree to be a possible adoptive resource for a child placed in your home?

6. How would your partnership role in working with the birth parents be affected by your decision to be a possible adoptive resource for a child in your care?

7. What are some ways that you could continue to demonstrate your willingness to work toward family reunification after you decide to be an adoptive resource for a child in your care?

8. What would be the emotional impact on you and your family members if you agree to be an adoptive resource for a child in your care while you continue to work in partnership with the birth parent(s) to reunify the child with his/her parents?

9. Do you feel capable at this point of being an adoptive resource for a child while simultaneously helping that child and the child's parents be reunited?

Yes If yes, what are your strengths regarding concurrent planning?

No If no, what are your needs regarding concurrent planning?

Assessing Your Own Families

A stressful situation that could lead to a disruption in your home	A strategy for prevention <i>(What you could do in advance to stop the problem from occurring)</i>	A strategy for intervention <i>(If the problem is already present, what you could do to minimize the impact of the problem in your family)</i>
1.		
2.		
3.		