

MODULE 6

AGENDA

- I. Vocabulary
- II. Values Clarification
- III. Connections
- IV. Benefits of Connections
- V. Visits - Going a Little Deeper
- VI. Life Books



MODULE 6

VOCABULARY

Bonding: The provision of nurturing care during infancy that is consistent, predictable, and continuous that facilitates the development of attachment between infant and caregiver (Ashford, et al, 2001).

Connectedness: The relative strength or cohesiveness of a given relationship, as in the case of two individuals, or sets of relationships, as in a family. Connections last over a period of time.

Family reunification: Family reunification is the planned process of reconnecting children in out-of-home care with their primary families by means of a variety of services and supports to the children, their families, their resource parents, or other service providers. It aims to help each child and family to achieve and maintain, at any given time, their highest level of reconnection - from full reentry of the child into the family system to other forms of contact (i.e., visiting) - to affirm the child's membership in the family.

Modeling: The act of demonstrating effective and acceptable parenting behaviors by the resource parent for the benefit of the primary parent.

Primary Family: The family of primary identification for the child in care. Also known as the family of origin or birth family, the primary family may include parents, stepparents, siblings, cousins, and other related and non-related people.

Sibling Visitation: Interactions occurring between brothers and sisters outside the parent/child visitation.

Supervised Visits: Interactions occurring between the child in care and the primary family which are monitored by a third party for safety reasons.

Unsupervised Visits: Interactions occurring between the child in care and the primary family that need **not** be monitored by a third party.

Life Books

Life Books

An often-used tool in the preparation of children for adoptive placement is the Life Book. A Life Book depicts major events in a child's life in writing, pictures, and drawings.

The Life Book can be used with children from pre-school through adolescence. It is a visible, concrete tool and provides each child with a permanent visual record of his/her life in care and those who shared it with the child.

It can be used equally with those children who are returning to birth parents, those children who are joining adoptive parents, and those who are leaving foster care due to their becoming an adult. All children in care outside their own family should have access to their own history.



Benefits

- The process of creating a chronicle of the child's life not only connects his or her past and presents their life experience, but also helps develop a more positive self-image.
- Making a Life Book can promote a sense of history for a child, facilitate a developing sense of identity, and provide an arena for reviewing past events.
- In addition to providing factual information, it offers children the opportunity to remember how they felt when certain events were occurring.

Preparation of the Life Book

The process of preparing the book can take a long time, perhaps months, and should proceed at a pace that is comfortable for the child.



The book should be accurate in its explanation of events that have transpired. Any misconceptions can be corrected in the process.

Phrase things as objectively as possible. For example, the book could state the child's mother's age when the child was born, and not directed toward the fact that the mother may have been too young.

Information about Birth Parents

The book should incorporate information about parents that is neutral and positive. For children who are not returning home, a physical description of the parents should be included, with pictures if possible. The interests, talents, and occupations of parents can be listed and children can be encouraged to take pride in the positive attributes of their parents.

Life Books (Cont'd)

Information about Placements

When children have lived in many places, each one can be identified with a date and related pictures of houses, schools, foster parents, significant child caretakers, acquaintances, and important neighborhood places. All of this assists the child in understanding what the past has been.

Child(ren)'s Participation

When photographs of significant people are not available, children can be invited to draw people as they remember them, or write or dictate a description. Their active participation in making the book is important by facilitating a child's perception of the past so that a sense of continuity is established, and the present can be better understood and accepted.

The Life Book Points to Ponder

The following are some of the major points in the process:

- Find a binder (photo album or journal). Other materials may include crayons, drawing paper, felt-tip pens and glue.
- The book records the events of a child's life. The process of creating the book explores the child's perceptions and feelings regarding the events. Ask for assistance from the case manager to clear up any erroneous views of past separations including primary family and foster family separations. No matter how painful, information is to be presented simply and factually, without value judgments.
- Gather pictures of birth parents, former foster parents and the children in their home, current foster parents and children in their home, former caretakers, siblings, all of whom can contribute to the child's sense of self. If pictures are not available, the child might be asked to draw pictures. Talk to the child's case manager about contact with previous caretakers if necessary to obtain photographs and mementos such as report cards and examples of school work.
- The Life Book process affords the child the opportunity to be part of the planning process, understand what adoption means or to maintain a sense of continuity if returning home or to a relative, encourage the child to ask questions and allows the child to express their fears about moving to a new placement (whether it be adoption, birth family or residential).

Note: *The Life Book goes with the child when he/she moves. Resource families may wish to keep a separate collective Life Book for themselves on children they've fostered.*