

National Foster Care Month Webinar Series: Building Blocks Toward Permanent Families

Part 2

Real Talk: Myths and Challenges in Permanency Work

Tuesday, May 20, 2014, 2:00-3:30 PM EDT

www.nrcpfc.org




NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
FOR PERMANENCY AND
FAMILY CONNECTIONS
at the Hunter College
Silberman School of Social Work




a service of the Children's
Bureau – ACF/DHHS and
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Troubleshooting Tips

- Call in using your phone. (Select “Phone Only” for audio.)
- Recommended web browsers: Google Chrome or Firefox.
- Access the PowerPoint at: <http://www.nrcpfc.org/teleconferences/may/Webinar-2-PPT.pdf>



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National Foster Care Month 2014

Building Blocks Toward
Permanent Families

[www.childwelfare.gov/
fostercaremonth](http://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth)



Welcome and Introductions

Dr. Gerald Mallon, Executive Director, NRCPPFC



Webinar Agenda

- **Welcome, Introductions, and Opening Remarks**
 - Dr. Gerald Mallon, Executive Director, NRCPCFC
 - Benjamin Muhammad, Information Services Assistant, NRCPCFC and Foster Care Alumnus
- **Permanency Myths and Challenges – Virtual Panel**
 - 1. Building Positive Relationships between Biological Family Members and Resource Families*
 - Branden Murray, Regional Placement Supervisor, NM
 - Kristi Cullers, Foster Parent Liaison and Certified Trainer, NM



Webinar Agenda (continued)

2. Infant Mental Health and Attachment in Foster Care

- Joaniko Kohchi, Supervising Clinician, Early Childhood Center at Albert Einstein College of Medicine

3. Permanency for Older Youth – Legal Perspective

- Cynthia J. Billey, Director, Foster Children's Adoption Program, Alliance for Children's Rights

4. Permanency for Older Youth – Practice Perspective; Working with Kin

- Chauncey Strong, Foster Care Supervisor and Foster Care Alumnus



Webinar Agenda (continued)

- **Q&A via online chat**
- **Resources and Closing Event Details**
 - Dr. Gerald Mallon, Executive Director, NRCPPFC
- **Closing Remarks**
 - Benjamin Muhammad, Information Services Assistant, NRCPPFC and Foster Care Alumnus



**Opening Remarks --
Reflections on Permanency
*My Perspective While in Care***

**Benjamin Muhammad
Information Services Assistant,
NRCPFC and
Foster Care Alumnus**



Myth/Challenge #1: Building Positive Relationships between Birth and Resource Families

Foster parents, birth parents, and child welfare workers may have fears about foster families and biological families coming together.

- *Branden Murray, Regional Placement Supervisor, NM*
- *Kristi Cullers, Foster Parent Liaison and Certified Trainer, NM*

Ice Breakers

**Striving to build positive relationships
between biological family members and
foster care resource parents**

Core Concepts:

- * Icebreakers address children's needs for well-being, safety and permanency in foster care by encouraging healthy communication and a partnership between foster parents and birth parents.
 - * Icebreakers encourage significant information exchange that assists with continuity of care for the children to reduce trauma from the move.
-

Process:

An Icebreaker meeting is scheduled

- At the Initial Family Centered Meeting
- Within 10 days of a child coming into custody
- When a child moves from one foster home to another

In NM, a neutral party (the Foster Parent Liaison) facilitates the meeting between the foster parents and the birth parents to try to reduce any tension or conflict that sometimes surfaces between birth parents and the agency staff.

Process:

Through a scripted list of questions, members discuss the child's/children's needs. This process helps establish a healthy way to communicate about the ongoing needs of the children.

Biological parents share information such as:

- nicknames
- likes and dislikes
- special needs the child may have
- school information, (books that need to be returned, favorite teacher or subject, difficulty in school i.e. behaviors or curriculum.)
- important friends or family members
- comfort items that the child is used to having
- clothing sizes, special items they must wear
- dental/medical history
- sleep patterns, favorite foods

Foster parents discuss their home:

- basic structure
- rules in the home
- what brought them to foster parenting

Benefits of Icebreakers:

- Families are better able to communicate with one another regarding the needs of the children in care.
 - Positive relationships are formed which ultimately creates a sense of trust between the parties.
 - Better outcomes (i.e. foster family helps transition the child home in a more effective manner, or if reunification is not possible, parents are more apt to trust the family to adopt should that plan proceed.)
-

Challenges:

- Keeping the foster/biological parents focused on sharing only information regarding the needs of the children and not on the case.
 - Being aware of one's own personal characteristics (biases and values; how those projections might impact the people at the meeting).
 - Understanding what the other person's ideas and feelings are; to put yourself in another's shoes—no doubt the situation must be difficult, but the children need on-going support from all that are involved.....
-

Challenges:

- Establishing a positive rapport; developing a positive connection for the purpose of having productive activity meetings showing members you are there to listen, be attentive, and document the information.
 - Triggers; be aware that verbal and body language may create a negative response and interfere with the activity product.
-

Safety

Be able to set forth a set of guidelines to establish a safe and supportive environment to discuss the needs of the children.

- Always choose a safe location- the facilitator should always be settled in the middle with bio parents on one side and the foster parents on the other side.
 - If at any time you feel safety is at risk you should not proceed with the activity.
 - Demonstrate the values of acceptance and respect for the individuals.
 - Develop awareness and sensitivity to the feelings and emotions family members and foster care providers may have.
-

Set Activity Guidelines

- Be sensitive to cultural diversity.
 - Explain the purpose of the ice breaker.
 - Cultivate and maintain an atmosphere of respect.
 - Keep activity members focused; one person speaks at one time, no putting anyone down, cell phones on silent.
 - Collaborating, assisting with working together, and working respectfully together.
 - Honor the time frame of 30 minutes to 1 hour.
 - Clarify, clear up confusion, obtain a clear, accurate picture of the spoken words.
 - Document the information and pass along to key stakeholders.
-

Conclusion:

- The relationship enhanced during the Icebreaker meeting can contribute to the overall stability of the child's placement by reducing conflicts, sharing vital information about the child's needs and care, and reducing tension between all parties involved.
 - When a child is experiencing permanency through reunification, relative placement, or adoption, he/she is more likely to feel less stress, free to establish new relationships, and better able to focus on important developmental tasks which in turn will enhance their overall well-being while in a foster care placement.
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Myth/Challenge #2: ***Infant Mental Health and Attachment***

Myths:

- ✓ Don't let children get attached when they go into temporary foster care placements because it will hurt them when they leave.
- ✓ Because babies and young children do not speak and do not know what is best for themselves, they have nothing to add to permanency planning.

Joaniko Kohchi, Supervising Clinician, Early Childhood Center at Albert Einstein College of Medicine

What Is Infant Mental Health?

- **Infant Mental Health** is defined as the ability to develop physically, cognitively, and socially in a manner which allows [infants] to master the primary emotional tasks of early childhood without serious disruption caused by harmful life events. Because infants grow in a context of nurturing environments, infant mental health involves the psychological balance of the infant-family system.
 - WAIMH Handbook of Infant Mental Health, 1999, vol 1, p. 25;
www.waimh.org

Infant Mental Health Is...

- Rooted in the premise that there is no such thing as a baby without a caregiver.
- Based on the fact that every infant or young child needs at least one responsive caregiver.
- The view that the caregiving relationship is the medium in which babies and young children learn about themselves and the world.
- Urgently important because the period from birth to three contains more concentrated brain growth than will ever occur again throughout the lifespan.
- How we assess, support and intervene to improve the nurturing environment of the primary attachment relationship – psychologically, emotionally and physically.

Why Is Infant Mental Health Highly Significant in Child Welfare?

- Young children between birth and age five represent the largest percentage of children in foster care.
 - 38% of children in foster care are under 5.
 - 32% are between the ages of 1 and 5, and 6% are infants.
 - A stay of between one and two years in care is most frequent.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/index.htm> - See more at: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=foster-care#sthash.4ooIS4dk.dpuf>

Time

- Many infants have established a secure attachment to a primary caregiver by the time they are **six to nine months** old.
- If there is a disruption at any point in a child's life, restoring the sense of security in a parent or parent-like figure is necessary for optimal growth.
- If the child is under the age of three, the secure caregiving relationship is necessary for optimal growth and development in *all domains*.

Old Myth

- Myth: “Don’t let children get attached when they go into foster care (or residential care) because it will hurt them when they move / go back home.”
 - Prioritized institutionalization and multiple caregivers over home care.
 - Disrupted children’s placements when they began to show attachment to a caregiver.
 - For children under the age of three, obstacles to a primary attachment relationship will affect their ability to find comfort, to self-regulate, to grow, to learn, to speak and listen, to achieve as children and adults.

Repairing the Old Myth

- Infants and young children need to establish secure relationships with at least one primary caregiver as soon as possible.
- Infants and young children can attach to more than one person (primary, secondary, etc.).
- A secure attachment, once established, can transfer to a new caregiver, but if an infant does not have this security, establishing one later will be very much harder.
- Adults should work together to bridge transitions from one caregiver to another.
- Babies cannot wait for permanency.

New Myth

- Myth: “Because babies and young children do not speak and do not know what is best for themselves, they have nothing to add to permanency planning.”
 - May result in either omitting the child’s input or pursuing an immature preference because young children have contradictory and changeable preferences.
 - Older children with developmental or psychological challenges that prevent them from articulating age-appropriate preferences may also be overlooked.

Repairing the Myth

- Infant mental health clinicians are trained to assess the quality of attachment relationships, which can inform the team's understanding of the child's stated or apparent preferences.
- Parent-infant relationships can be assessed during the first year of life; it is not necessary to wait for mobility or speech.
- Evidence-based interventions, such as Child-Parent Psychotherapy, can support the foundation of a nurturing and secure attachment.

Myth Busters!

Babies cannot wait for secure attachments. They need them immediately in order to grow optimally.

Babies thrive in nurturing relationships. Secure attachments mitigate many challenges that may be present in the child's environment.

Relationships can be assessed and improved in order to promote healthy development – of the child, the parent and the family.



Myth/Challenge #3: Permanency for Older Youth – Legal Perspective

- ✓ Myth: It's better for youth to stay in foster care, rather than exit to permanency, so they can continue to access benefits.
- ✓ Myth: Work with older youth/young adults should focus on Independent Living Skills instead of permanency (rather than in addition to permanency).
- ✓ Myth: It's too late to achieve permanency for older youth.

Cynthia J. Billey, Director, Foster Children's Adoption Program, Alliance for Children's Rights

Myth: It's better not to leave foster care to permanency so you can continue to have access to benefits.

- Fact: Youth adopted at age 16 or older do **not lose** benefits through adoption.
- At least 15 states including California (AB12) provide for an extension of adoption assistance program benefits (AAP) to age 21 if the youth is adopted at age 16 or older.
- In addition, youth adopted at age 16 or older qualify for the Independent Living Skills Program (ILP) so they do not lose any of those benefits by being adopted, either.

Myth: Child welfare work with older youth can focus exclusively on independent living skills, not permanency planning.

- Fact: Social workers must focus on *both* developing youth's independent living skills and finding a permanent connection, even an adoptive family.
- Example: California AB 12 and AB 1712 – Social workers *are required* to continue to provide permanency planning services for youth in the Extended Foster Care program after age 18.
 - Agency responsible for *finding permanent connections* for non-minor dependents; and *implementing plan of adoption* where a prospective adoptive parent has been identified and assessed as appropriate for the non-minor dependent.
- Fact: Independent living skills are important but permanency should also be a goal for older youth/young adults. Family or other permanent connections are important at every age and stage of life.

Myth: It's too late to focus on finding an adoptive family for an older youth.

- Fact: It's *never* too late to find a permanent legal family for a youth/young adult. Adoption is a permanency option that is worth considering for youth that are transitioning out of care or who are remaining in extended foster care at/after age 18.
- Youth still express a *desire to be adopted* well into their teens and even after turning age 18.
- Many youth express that no one ever asked them if they wanted to be adopted, and they didn't believe it was possible.
- New California Law (AB1712) makes it *legally possible* for youth ages 18-20 to be adopted in the juvenile court.

Two new California laws make it legally possible for youth to be adopted at age 18 and older.

- **California Family Code 8601.5 – effective January 1, 2012**
 - For dependent minors whose adoption could not be finalized before age 18.
 - *Nunc pro tunc* order; adoption effective as of date prior to child's 18th birthday.
 - Circumstances where it will serve public policy and the best interests of the child, such as cases where adoption finalization has been delayed beyond the child's 18th birthday due to factors beyond the control of the prospective adoptive family.

Two new California laws make it legally possible for youth to be adopted at age 18 and older. (cont'd)

- **California Welfare & Institutions Code 366.31(f) – AB 1712 – Effective January 1, 2013**
 - Allows young adults ages 18-20 that remain in Extended Foster Care and under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court (“non-minor dependents”) to be adopted in the juvenile court *and* receive AAP benefits and medical coverage, provided all other EFC eligibility criteria are met (*i.e.*, the five AB 12 participation criteria).
 - Legally, non-minor dependent adoption similar to traditional adult adoption under many states’ family code laws, *e.g.*, *mutual consent* between adults; changes legal relationship and rights of the parties and the biological parents, including inheritance rights. Difference: no AAP benefits with traditional adult adoption.

AB 1712 – Non-Minor Dependent Adoption (cont'd)

- AB 1712 primary goals are to support youth who are in care to achieve permanency, including adoption, as well as to assist them in preparing for successful adulthood.
- **Case planning** for non-minor dependent adoptions should include at least:
 - Assisting the non-minor dependent in **identifying permanent connections**, including facilitating contact with a relative;
 - **Documenting** the non-minor dependent's **desire to be adopted** by an adult who has been established as the non-minor dependent's permanent connection.

AB1712 – Non-minor dependent adoption (cont'd)

- At six-month review hearings, the juvenile court shall inquire about the progress being made by the agency to provide **permanent connections** for the non-minor dependent; and determine whether a prospective adoptive parent has been **identified and assessed** as appropriate for the non-minor dependent's adoption.
- At a review hearing, at the **request** of a non-minor dependent who has an **established relationship** with an adult determined to be the non-minor dependent's **permanent connection**, the court may order non-minor dependent adoption as the permanent plan; and set hearing for finalization of adoption within 60 days.

AB1712 – Non-minor dependent adoption (cont'd)

- Social worker is responsible for:
 - Preparing an **assessment** of the potential adoptive family, that is youth-focused, and that includes: evaluating the length and nature of the relationship, and motivation to adopt; criminal background clearances; and recommendation whether adoption is in the best interests of the non-minor dependent and prospective adoptive parent(s).
 - **Disclosure** of non-minor dependent's medical, psychosocial and historical background **information** as determined by non-minor dependent.
 - Preparing **court report** for the adoption hearing that describes: the length and nature of the relationship; criminal background clearances completed; best interests of the non-minor dependent; and mutual consent of the non-minor dependent adoption and the prospective adoptive parent(s).

AB 1712 – Non-minor dependent adoption (cont'd)

- Judicial Council of California developed legal forms – Agreement of Adoption, Order of Adoption, Consent of Spouse
 - Based on mutual consent of two adults
 - Termination of parental rights is not required
- At finalization hearing, juvenile court approves the Agreement of Adoption and declares/orders:
 - Legal relationship of parent and child, with all the rights and responsibilities of that relationship
 - Birth parents relieved of all parental duties toward, and responsibility for, the non-minor dependent and have no rights over the adopted non-minor dependent

Case Examples of non-minor dependent adoptions

Athena

- Adopted at age 20 by her foster parent; Found in her adoptive home the stability and peace of mind she has long desired.
- Abused in an early foster home placement, she then lived in a number of group homes over the years.
- Always wanted to be adopted, but was never asked by any of her social workers. Because she was never asked and she never mentioned it, it was assumed that she did not want to be adopted.

Michelle

- Adopted at age 20 by her foster parent.
- Severe developmental disabilities and medically fragile; Guardian Ad Litem appointed to provide Michelle's consent.
- Her adoptive mother was her teacher at her special education school and developed a close bond. She approached DCFS social worker shortly before Michelle's 18th birthday stating her desire to adopt Michelle.



Myth/Challenge #4: Permanency for Older Youth – Practice Perspective and Working with Kin

- ✓ Myth: It's better for youth to stay in foster care, rather than exit to permanency, so they can continue to access benefits.
- ✓ Myth: Work with older youth/young adults should focus on Independent Living Skills instead of permanency (rather than in addition to permanency).
- ✓ Myth: "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

*Chauncey Strong, Foster Care Supervisor
and Foster Care Alumnus*

Myths about Permanency for Older Youth:

- ✓ *It is better to stay in foster care, rather than leave foster care to permanency, so that a youth can continue to have access to benefits.*
- ✓ *It is important to focus on independent living skills for older youth, rather than permanency.*

Practice Approaches to Address these Myths:

1. Social Workers can talk to youth about the distinction between having benefits that will eventually run out/expire versus having a connection with people who can be with you for a lifetime.
I.e. “When you are 25 there will no longer be an IL stipend, but you can have family and other important people that care about you and who will support you.”
2. Workers can use the Permanency Pact from Foster Club to help youth identify people in their lives that can provide tangible supports and life-long connections.

Practice Approaches to Address these Myths (continued):

3. Workers can connect the youth to other youth/alumni who have successfully achieved permanency and have them talk to the youth about the importance of having permanent connections. This can be done by connecting youth with local and national organizations (i.e. youth advisory boards, Foster Care Alumni of America, Foster Club. etc.).
4. Permanency Driven Supervision is equally important when helping to address this myth. This type of supervision includes consistent provision of supportive supervision that provides the worker with the tools needed to move forward at a steady pace to achieve permanency and holds staff accountable to achieving permanence outcomes for youth in care.

Practice Approaches to Address these Myths (continued):

4. Permanency Driven Supervision (continued)

Some specific strategies supervisors can employ in supporting staff include:

- strategizing how to remove barriers to doing the work
- providing positive feedback and expressing appreciation
- encouraging work/life balance
- watching for signs of secondary trauma and for burnout
- Active role play during supervision to ensure that workers have the information and language to talk to a teen in foster care.

Myth about Working with Kin:

“The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

Practice Approaches to Address this Myth:

1. What message does this give to the youth and families?
2. Studies have found that relatives are likely to take good care of a child who has been removed from an abusive home.
3. There may be family members not known to the department who are raising children well. Agencies must be willing to engage in Family Finding/Family Search and Engagement to find family members and bring them to the table to be a part of planning for a youth in foster care.

Myth about Working with Kin:

“The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

Practice Approaches to Address this Myth (cont’d.):

4. To help address this myth, Social Workers must believe that all families have strengths. Re-consider a family member who may not have been the best placement or connection for a youth when the child first came into care – over time, their situation may have changed.
5. Supervisors can help address this myth by coaching their workers and reinforcing the idea that that all families have strengths. Help workers see the benefits of kinship care (i.e., placements are more stable; subsequent reports of abuse and neglect are less likely; relative care encourages families to cultivate and rely on their own resources and strengths).



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Questions ?????????

*Type a question using the
chat function on your
computer.*

Resources

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2014: Building Blocks Toward
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<https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth/>

Materials for this event are
currently posted on the NRC-PFC
website at:

<http://nrcpfc.org/teleconferences/may/part-2.htm>



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Webinar Series

www.nrcpfc.org/teleconferences/may/

**Webinar 1 will be archived 5/21/14.*

Webinar 3

Federal Supports to Improving Permanency Outcomes in Child Welfare

Thursday, May 29, 2014

2:00-3:30 PM EDT

Registration for Webinar 3 is open:

<http://www.nrcpfc.org/teleconferences/may/part-3.htm>



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After the Event

- A feedback survey will be emailed to all participants. We appreciate your feedback!

- This event will be archived on Wednesday 5/28/14 at:
<http://www.nrcpfc.org/teleconferences/archives.html>

- Sign up for Weekly Update, NRCPFC's weekly e-newsletter, to receive updates and announcements about future events.

- www.nrcpfc.org



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**Closing Remarks --
Reflections on Permanency**
My Perspective Today

Benjamin Muhammad
Information Services Assistant,
NRC-PFC and
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